

Cookie Jar Syndrome: A little boy's mother had just baked a fresh batch of cookies and placed them in the cookie jar, giving instructions that no one touch them until after dinner. But it was not long until she heard the lid of the cookie jar move, and she called out, "Son, what are you doing?" To which a meek voice called back, "My hand is in the cookie jar resisting temptation!" The fact is no one can resist temptation with his or her hand in the cookie jar.

There are open cookie jars all around us. The two most open jars of cookies in our culture would be the internet and the television and movie industry and they dwell in the heart of nearly every house in America. You could turn them off (recommended) and find opportunities elsewhere. There are even living cookie jars everywhere inviting and calling for the passerby to partake. But when these wares are removed from the jar something happens. Their sweetness soon turns to rot; the decay is shared by the hand that plucked them which results in gangrene of the soul.

There are certain aspects of being a disciple of Jesus Christ that should be simply understood. They are not negotiable nor are they optional. A true disciple is either all in or not in at all. Found in Ephesians 5 are some very direct and specific teachings about following Christ and living like an authentic disciple.

Discipleship is a word you are going to hear over and over in the coming months and even years. Our church is making a not so subtle shift into putting a lot of time and effort into disciple making. So what is it? What does it mean to be a disciple? Is every Christian a disciple?

Most believers have never been intentionally disciplined and most believers have no clue how to go about discipling a new believer. The problem is that people don't have a good understanding of what discipleship is. Here's a definition for you: **Discipleship is truth transferred through relationship.**

So what kinds of things need to be shared with others to disciple one another? Today we are going to walk through a scripture passage that points us toward the answers regarding what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

I want to go back to a scripture that I used on the first Sunday of this year.

Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are His dear children. ² Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered Himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.

³ *Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God's people. ⁴ Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God. ⁵ You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world.*

⁶ *Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey Him. ⁷ Don't participate in the things these people do. ⁸ For once you were full of*

darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light! ⁹ For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true.

¹⁰ Carefully determine what pleases the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, expose them. ¹² It is shameful even to talk about the things that ungodly people do in secret. ¹³ But their evil intentions will be exposed when the light shines on them, ¹⁴ for the light makes everything visible. This is why it is said,

“Awake, O sleeper, rise up from the dead, and Christ will give you light.” Ephesians 5:1-14
NLT

Imitate God . . .

We all know what it means to imitate someone else or to be imitated. Included in the sacred writing of the Apostle Paul we find the admonition for the church and Christians to be imitators of Christ. I alluded to this last week in the sermon with a quote from the devotional by Dr. Dennis Kinlaw. It’s not imitating God’s attributes because in many ways that would be impossible, but we are called with no uncertainty to emulate and imitate the behavior of Jesus Christ.

“Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with Him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn’t love in order to get something from us but to give everything of Himself to us. Love like that.”
Eph. 5:1-2 The Message Bible

So what do we do with this command to imitate Christ? The beautiful thing about this scripture is that it is laid out for us in very practical steps. Let’s unpack this scripture and see what God has to say to us individually. Here are four ways to keep your hand out of the cookie jar. There are four ways to live your life as an authentic disciple of Jesus Christ.

1. Love like He loves:

Relationships

Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered Himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God. Ephesians 5:2 NLT

Disciples are naturally partakers of God’s divine nature. (2 Peter 1:4) And God’s nature is the ultimate form of love. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus exhorted His disciples to “be perfect even as your Heavenly Father is perfect.” There is not much debate about our ability to be perfect except in one area and that is God’s love being shed abroad in our hearts. The more we know God the more our lives will emulate and imitate His amazing love. It is relative perfection when compared to God’s love but our motives and mission can be centered by the love of God in our hearts.

Filled with love! *Live a life filled with love*

Follow Him!

Following the example of Christ

No greater demonstration of love has ever been given than was given us by Christ willingness to come to this earth as a human, suffer and then die. This should be a major focus in our life. We should strive to be full of God's love for others, especially the unlovable and those that don't love us back. This may be where some of us will pull back.

It is hard to love those that don't love us back or love us the way we think we deserve or desire. Yet for the disciple of Jesus Christ this level of love is not an option that you just add on if you want to be a super Christian. There is no such thing.

2. Leave sin out of your life

Righteousness

This one is almost too much information to deal with in a thirty minute sermon so I hope that you can read it on your own, study it and accept it into your life. Let me give you a little context for what we are about to read. Paul was warning them against recontamination of their bodies, spirits and lives by the pagan views with which they were surrounded. These early disciples of Christ were living in the port city of Ephesus. In that wicked metropolis the dominant religion was the worship of Diana and ritual prostitution was a way of life. Sexual perversion was considered as a valid, and even promoted, way of life. Does that sound familiar to anyone? Do you really need for me to point out specifically the places in our culture that have inundated our lives and our kid's lives? Listen to these words:

³ Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God's people. ⁴ Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God. ⁵ You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshipping the things of this world.

The idea of sexual morality was totally foreign to the culture of this day. Christianity introduced the idea and notion of purity and chastity to the heathen world. The writer, speaking as a shepherd and pastor, pleads with these new Christians/disciples to avoid the accepted and common practices of the day.

It is interesting that the Apostle Paul also includes the word greed in this list of things to avoid. While sexual immorality and impurity are given sins the word greed in this context refers to covetousness.

Let's dive in here for a few moments. What are you filling your mind with? What music? What lyrics? What books? What language? What morals? What images?

As if the first three aren't enough he also tackles obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes. Let me ask you something? Are you willing to apply these Biblical standards to your life, recreations, and personal interest?

Understand that both humor and merriment are encouraged by the scriptures. Proverbs 17:22 says, “A cheerful heart is good medicine.” Another place it says, “There is a time to laugh.” (Ecclesiastes 3:4)

The bottom line here is nobody should think that Christians should walk around with a pickle-faced sourness. Nobody should think that Christians shouldn't laugh or have fun. The principle that disciples of Jesus will be concerned about is if it is God-honoring and going to be helpful to your Christian walk.

Let me give you some practical advice and ways to think about this subject:

1. Humor that flirts with the boundaries of what is proper can degenerate quickly and easily in the wrong direction.
2. Humor can make us vulnerable to degrading moral change in what we believe. Sometimes somebody will say something in a humorous way that makes light of a crime against others or even about seduction and adultery and if you laugh at it enough times it will break down your own inhibitions about the matter. This is why much of the media that is offered in our world is so horribly wrong and damaging to the professing Christian.

It's not what goes into your body that defiles you; you are defiled by what comes from your heart.”¹⁷ Then Jesus went into a house to get away from the crowd, and His disciples asked Him what He meant by the parable He had just used.¹⁸ “Don't you understand either?” He asked. “Can't you see that the food you put into your body cannot defile you?¹⁹ Food doesn't go into your heart, but only passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer.” (By saying this, He declared that every kind of food is acceptable in God's eyes.)

²⁰ And then He added, “It is what comes from inside that defiles you.²¹ For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder,²² adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness.²³ All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you.” Mark 7:15-23 NLT

You see it is of utmost importance that you care about what you are filling your heart and mind with. You can say it doesn't matter and that you are bigger than all that but in the end you are arguing against the words of Jesus Himself.

In Matthew 12 we find a very sobering thought. “*For whatever is in your heart determines what you say.³⁵ A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart.³⁶ And I tell you this, you must give an account on judgment day for every idle word you speak.³⁷ The words you say will either acquit you or condemn you.” Matthew 12:34-37 NLT*

Want to know why Paul is so adamant about this subject? Check out these next two verses.

⁶ Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey Him.⁷ Don't participate in the things these people do. Ephesians 5:3-7 NLT

It's a clear message that we should hear and listen to. If you want to know more about things that God doesn't find acceptable read and study Galatians 5:19-21 and 1 John 3:7-10.

3. Learn what pleases the Lord

¹⁰ *Carefully determine what pleases the Lord.* Ephesians 5:10 NLT

I can't think of anything better to do with your time than "carefully determining what pleases the Lord."

Fred Craddock, who taught at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, once said: "To give my life for Christ appears glorious. To pour myself out for others ... to pay the ultimate price of martyrdom — I'll do it. I'm ready, Lord, to go out in a blaze of glory. We think giving our all to the Lord is like taking a \$1,000 bill and laying it on the table — 'Here's my life, Lord. I'm giving it all.' But the reality for most of us is that he sends us to the bank and has us cash in the \$1,000 for quarters. We go through life putting out 25 cents here and 50 cents there. Listen to the neighbor kid's troubles instead of saying, 'Get lost.' Go to a committee meeting. Give a cup of water to a shaky old man in a nursing home. Usually giving our life to Christ isn't glorious. It's done in all those little acts of love, 25 cents at a time. It would be easy to go out in a flash of glory; it's harder to live the Christian life little by little over the long haul."

That's radical conversion. It is being faithful when no one cares and no one notices. It is spending our 25 cents doing the right thing when no one is watching — when we could have easily given into the wrong thing. It is being faithful in the mundane and ordinariness of everyday life, when it may have been more exciting to do something else, or give in to laziness by doing nothing at all. It is being faithful to God when it doesn't seem to matter. It is doing the right thing even in the small things. It is being a person of character when everyone else is simply pleasing themselves. It is being willing to stand out when everyone else conforms. This is the proof that we have encountered the living Christ. It is the proof that there has been a radical change in our lives and that we will never be the same again. It is the radical conversion that marks us as disciples of Jesus.

The true disciple of Jesus Christ will not only imitate Him but will seek earnestly to know God's will. You and I will carefully determine what please the Lord and then do it.

4. Light the world with love

⁷ *Don't participate in the things these people do.* ⁸ *For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light!* ⁹ *For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true.* Ephesians 5:7-9 NLT

Jesus referred to Himself more than once as the "light of the world." He also ties this light into the lives of those who follow Him. In John 8:12 He says, "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.*"

In verse 8 of our text that I just read it says, “For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. . .” We are to be people of light that light the world around us with God’s love.

Our light comes from God. We just studied a few of God’s attributes and the Apostle Peter wrote that we “participate in the divine nature.” (2 Peter 1:4)

So how does this work? How can we become the light of the world for people that they will come to Christ because of our lives? That’s an important question to answer because that’s what Christians are supposed to do is bring people to the Light of the world. We are to be sharing our faith in a way that others will come to know Jesus Christ. Now how are you going to do that?

So live as people of light! ⁹ For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true.

The writer says that God’s light within us will produce three things: goodness, righteousness (justice) and truth. These three things produce a love not comprehended by this world that we live in. It is foreign for people to think about living with others in mind.

During the Nazi uprising in Germany a young girl watched her devoutly Christian father who was a watch maker barely make enough to support the family. One day he was dealing with a wealthy customer that had decided to purchase an expensive timepiece with cash which would have met their current needs. The man related that he was buying the new watch because the young competitor watch maker down the street could not fix his very expensive old watch.

This Christian gentleman watchmaker asked to see it and opened the back of the watch. As his daughter watched he made a slight adjustment and handed it back saying, “Sir, I trust the young watchmaker. Someday he will be just as good as his father. So if you ever have a problem with one of his watches, come to me. I’ll help you out. Now I shall give you back your money and you return my watch.”

The young teenage girl watched her old father open the door for the man and bow deeply in is old fashioned way. She flew to her father’s side and began to tell him all the ways he was wrong and how bad they had needed that money. Then he responded with these words, “What do you think that young man would have said when he heard that one of his good customers had come to me? Do you think the name of the Lord would be honored? As for the money, trust the Lord for He owns the cattle on a thousand hills and He will take care of us.”

How beautiful character is! It is full of goodness and justice and truth. When we practice our faith in this way the world becomes a little less dark. We find out carefully what pleases the Lord and we do it. We live it. We shine His love into the darkness around us.

In Matthew 5:14, Jesus says to us, “you are the light of the world.” The more luminous our integrity – our goodness, righteousness and truth – the brighter the light of Jesus will shine. A man bought his wife a box of matches that was supposed to glow in the dark so you could always find them. He turned out the lights but the box didn’t glow or show up. He was convinced he had

been cheated when his wife noticed these words on the side of the box. "If you want me to shine in night, keep me in the light." The more time you and I spend with the Light of the world the brighter we will shine in the darkness.

Imitate Christ. Those are the words we started with today.

A young boy looked up at his grandfather and wondered aloud, "Grandpa, how do you live for Jesus?"

The respected grandfather stooped down and quietly told the boy, "Just watch."

As the years went by the grandfather was an example to the boy of how to follow Jesus. He stayed rock-steady in living for Him. Yet the grandson often lived in a way that was not pleasing to God.

One day the young man visited his grandfather for what both knew would be the last time. As the older man lay dying, his grandson leaned over the bed and heard his grandpa whisper, "Did you watch?"

That was the turning point in the boy's life. He understood that when his grandpa had said, "Just watch," he meant, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ." He vowed that from then on he would live as his grandfather did - striving to please Jesus. He had watched, and now he knew how to live.

Listen I know that you and I may not have had an earthly father worth watching or imitating but we have a Heavenly Father that says to us, just watch!

There is an astonishing sentence in the New Testament written by the same Apostle Paul that wrote these words we have looked today in Ephesians. He was just a man that loved God 100 percent. He served Him faithfully and because of that he wrote these words,

"And you should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ."

Can you and I say that today to anyone around us? That's basic Christianity. That's why the Bible calls us to a depth of discipleship ignored by most professing Christians. It seems too tough, too hard, too unreasonable, too demanding but behind it all is Jesus saying to you and me, "You are the light of the world."

Don't you want to be that light today? Don't you want to live with nothing between your soul and the Savior? You can do it. You can press in much closer to Jesus and the things of this earth will turn strangely dim in light of His glory and grace.

Invitation and prayer.