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LifeWay Family Bible Series for June 8

Indicators of a growing disciple of Christ

Luke 9:23-24; Ephesians 4:29-5:10

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Following Peter's confessions of Christ at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus foretold his own death and resurrection. He then set forth the requirements of discipleship: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it" (Luke 9:23).

In Ephesians 4:29-5:10, Paul contrasts the new life in Christ to the old way of life without Christ. Taken together, these two passages of Scripture address the questions, "What does it mean to be a mature disciple of Jesus Christ?" and, "What does it look like when a Christian is truly following Christ in all areas of life?"



God's grace does not allow his people to live any way they want to live. Rather, God's grace empowers his people to live with the attitudes and actions of Christ. What are some of the signs of a growing disciple?

Deny self (Luke 9:23-24)

Christian discipleship begins with a personal commitment to pursue the life and the mission of Christ above everything else. Christians who live as Christ lived will every day put their own interests and desires into the background and accept wholeheartedly the sacrifice and suffering that may have to be endured in his service. The “cross” is not the ordinary, human troubles such as disappointments, physical illness, emotional stress, financial or vocational loss, etc. The “cross” would include anything that has to be suffered, endured or lost in the service of Christ. This might be persecution, self-sacrifice, suffering, even death as a result of obeying Jesus Christ.

Jesus made it clear that Christians who try selfishly to secure for themselves pleasure and happiness in life will in fact never find real joy or purpose in life. However, those who lay their lives on the altar in service to Christ, who strive for his glory and for the extension of his kingdom, will spontaneously find true joy and purpose in life. Both here on earth and forever in heaven.

Imitate God (Ephesians 4:29-5:2)

The apostle Paul is eager to explain in very tangible terms what it means to follow Jesus Christ. He cautions believers to recognize the power of the spoken language. He commands them to avoid dishonest, unkind, destructive and vulgar speech. William Penn said, “If thou think twice before thou speak once, thou will speak twice the better for it.”

In Ephesians 4:30, Paul is asking, “Why would anyone, who was sealed by the ownership of the Spirit, do anything to live contrary to him, offend him

or hurt him?” Believers receive the seal of the Holy Spirit when they first surrender their lives to Jesus Christ. Believers are sealed at the moment of conversion until the day of redemption. In the in-between time, Paul commands us not to grieve the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit hates sin, falsehood and language that tears people down. If Christians are going to follow Christ, they must also hate these things.

The call to Christian discipleship is to be kind, compassionate and forgiving toward others. Refusing to forgive is hazardous to one's Christian health. Forgiveness is a refusal to let a past wrong destroy a present relationship. Forgiveness is a rejection of bitterness, malice and revenge. Forgiveness is when Christians do unto others as Christ has done to them.

Avoid wrong (Ephesians 5:3-7)

The life of Christian discipleship is one of high standards. There is not any higher standard than Ephesians 5:1: “Be imitators of God”-imitate his kindness, his forgiveness, his unconditional love and his holiness. Believers are children of God. As such, they should take upon themselves the characteristics of the family to which they belong. Paul is calling believers to holy living in an unholy, godless age.

Holiness is not something that just happens. Rather, Christians are to take holiness upon themselves with intentionality. Read Ephesians 5:3-7 with the conviction that believers have the power to put off the old life of immorality and put on the new life of purity and morality. There should not even be a hint of these things in the minds, words and actions of Christians.

Paul was writing in an age in which believers were tempted to imbibe the sexual mores of the culture in which they lived. The same thing happens today! But through the power of God's Spirit, the believer can follow Christ in such a way that there is not even a hint of immorality, impurity or greed.

Do right (Ephesians 5:8-10)

Ephesians 5:8 is radical. Paul writes, "You are light in the Lord." He does not say believers belong to the light or that they are in the light. He says strikingly: "You are light. Therefore, live as children of light." Paul echoes the words of Christ: "You the light of the world. ... Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16).

Question for discussion

- ◆ If you were measuring your growth, are you growing or have you tapered off?

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