

Live Out Loud: How to Be Like God

Ephesians 5:1-14

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On this Mother's Day I want to share a few things MY MOTHER TAUGHT ME...

My mother taught me RELIGION: When I spilled my cherry coke on the carpet, she instructed, "You better pray the stain comes out of the carpet."

My mother taught me LOGIC: From her decisive words, "Because I said so, that's why."

My mother taught me FORESIGHT: "Make sure you wear clean underwear, in case you're in an accident."

My mother taught me IRONY: "Keep laughing, and I'll give you something to cry about."

My mother taught me about STAMINA: "You'll sit there 'til all those brussel sprouts are gone."

My mother taught me about WEATHER: "It looks as if a tornado swept through your room."

My mother taught me THE CIRCLE OF LIFE: "I brought you into this world, and I can take you out."

My mother taught me about BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION: "Stop acting like your father!"

And finally my mother taught me about ENVY: "There are millions of less fortunate children in this world who don't have a wonderful Mom like you do!" THANKS, MOM!

But there's something else our mothers really taught us and modeled for us was – LOVE! That kind of love that was selfless, consistent, sacrificial and unconditional. Even when I screwed up, which was often, my mother's love for me never stopped.

We hear of that kind of sacrificial love as the fifth chapter of Ephesians begins. Paul recognizes that we have been adopted into God's family as "beloved or dearly loved children." However, to be a child of God means that we are to become like God. "Be imitators of God, as beloved children ..." (5:1)

But, before we can discover how to be like God, it is important to know what actions and behaviors are NOT God-like. Paul spends a lot of time in these last few chapters contrasting a life lived in the darkness of sin, and the life lived as a child of light, the light of Christ.

Paul lists some of those behaviors which characterize a life lived in darkness and sin, those behaviors which children of light are no longer to practice but rather avoid. We find these in verses 3-5: sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talk, crude joking... Paul even goes so far to say these things should not even be talked about among the children of light. He also warns not to be deceived by anyone or a society or culture that says that these things are ok. What a culture claims and what God says are often two very different things.

Paul also lists the dire consequence for heading down this path of darkness or destruction. In verse 5 Paul warns: "For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolator), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." Paul then states in verse 7, "Therefore do not become partners with them" (or the children of darkness).

So how then can we be more like God? How can we live in the example and light of Christ?

1. Live a sacrificial life of love.

"And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (5:2). Since Paul's readers belong to God's family and, as his children, have received God's unconditional and eternal love, they should be like him and show love to Him and others. Love is not an option in the Christian community. It is part of our DNA.

Yet, the way in which we are called to love is not the fickle, self-serving love of our time. The love that we are to extend to others has nothing to do with what do we get out of it. The standard by which Christian love is shaped and energized is the self-giving love of Christ on the cross. Christ's death is presented here as an example for our lives. The self-sacrificing love that he demonstrated in loving us; the same sacrificial love that we are called to imitate. This pattern of sacrifice describes God's taking away his own anger. Our God is not a God who is removed from us, but a God who cares and who identifies with us. We have violated his commands and all he is, but he responds with self-giving love.

We are like God when we live a sacrificial life of love. We are also like God when we ...

2. Reject an immoral life of disobedience.

We have become far too accustomed to sin. We have become far too comfortable with its presence in our lives. We have allowed our moral standards to become so infested and infected that our actions prove we no longer believe that sin is all that God has made it to be.

The Christian community needs to be self-reflective, name the idolatries, confess the sins, repent of the greed and selfishness, and reorder life with all its good things under God's control.

We are like God when we live a sacrificial life of love. We are like God when we reject an immoral life of disobedience. Lastly, we are like God when we ...

3. Help transform others from a life of darkness to a life of light.

Paul calls for us to separate from the darkness. However, it is not so much a withdrawal as a confrontation. Contact with non-Christians is required if the light is to accomplish its purpose.

And what is that purpose ... to expose the darkness. We as Christians are to have a transforming influence on the world around us. Through our lives, the light of Christ is supposed to penetrate the darkness and transform those who are in darkness into the light. Through the words that we speak, and the choices that we make ... through the way that we love those who are outside of God's family and treat those who are in ... through our choosing to live right when it is so easy to live wrong ... we shine a light that penetrates into the darkness ... a light that shows that Christianity is indeed different.

Max Lucado tells a story about some candles who refuse to be taken from a storage closet to provide light during an electrical storm. They all have excuses why they should not give off light. When the husband tells his wife that the candles don't work, she explains, 'Oh, they're church candles.' Ouch! That the story even works creates pain.

Instead, God gives us another way in our Gospel today (John 15:12-13)...

The task of Christians is to live in love and leave the light on. We are light in the Lord and are to live as people of light. Yet, too often the light shines only a few hours, and then it is life as usual. We may be light in the Lord, but we keep our reservations on the train to darkness. We truly transform the darkness by leaving the light on always and everywhere and with everyone.

The light is the place where people find the grace to face the truth and be transformed by the light. Being the light is being the person with the flashlight lighting the way for those on the darkened path ... allowing them to see Jesus, allowing them to see and experience love. May Christ help us and God grant it. In Jesus. Amen.