

How Should I Live In This World?

Today we'll look at the question of how am I supposed to live in this world? Once I have a Christian worldview how do I turn creeds into deeds? How do my beliefs change my behavior? What am I going to do about what I know?

Fortunately God sent us a model on how to live in this world. 1 John 2:6 says, *"Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did."* Well, you might say, isn't that kind of obvious? But the thing is... we don't do it! We call ourselves followers of Jesus - Christians - but we don't seem to feel we need to live the way Jesus did.

So, what does it mean to live as Jesus did? We're meant to embody him, stand for him in the world. Colossians 3:17 says, *"...whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus..."* We're going to look at things Jesus did and said in his life that are essential for us to do and say. It's amazing how opposite they are from what the world says.

Jesus is the only worthy model for living and he not only showed us how to do it, he gave specific instructions on the way he intends for us to live. This is important stuff! It's central to being a believer. We're not talking side issues! We're going to be evaluated on this: 1 John 4:17 says, *"...as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world"*

So how do you learn to live like Jesus Christ? You have to build certain values into your life and here they are:

To live like Jesus means to **1. Live Attentively and Faithfully**. We need to live with our eyes open - evaluating; testing. Don't just automatically accept what someone tells you - check it out. Don't just accept the world's values. Just because it's mentioned on a talk show or it's on the cover of some magazine or people think it's cool doesn't matter. Ask, Does this square with God's worldview?

In John 7, Jesus says, *"Look beneath the surface so you can judge correctly."* He doesn't say be a cynic or a nitpicker, criticizing everything and everyone, but you are meant to use your brain. Be discerning and reflect on what you experience.

The problem is we're bombarded by voices; messages all around us: print media, radio, TV, computers, tablets, smart-phones and on and on. It's all around us all the time. After a while you get so used to it and hear things so many times that it becomes easy to let your guard down and start letting stuff in your mind that, if you really studied it, you wouldn't accept.

For instance, have you ever found yourself singing a song with words that really don't go along with your values? It's got catchy tune but it's not a positive message. Someone's putting their worldview in your mind.

A lot of entertainment today is watching people do stuff you know is wrong. Sleep with someone. Get drunk. Hurt people. We watch stuff all the time that we know we should never do ourselves and we call it entertainment. We need to be discerning and know what we're allowing in our minds.

We call ourselves followers of Jesus who believe the Bible. So here's the question. Why do we spend more time listening, watching and reading things we don't believe than something we do? Luke 11:35 says, *"Make sure that the light you think you have is not really darkness."* We have to live attentively - with our eyes wide open.

But along with discernment about what is right to believe, say and do, has to come a willingness to follow through and live it out in faith. The Bible says things like, *"The just shall live by faith."* *"Without faith it is impossible to please God."* *"Whatever is not of faith is sin."* *"According to your faith it will be done unto you."* In Christ, our possibilities expand in enormous ways! In Matthew 19:26 Jesus says, *"Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible."* Mark 9:23 says, *"Anything is possible if a person believes."* That's an amazing statement!

Of all the people on planet earth, followers of Jesus should be the most innovative and creative because we serve a God who says all things are possible. People who don't believe in God really limit their possibilities. When I put my faith in God it expands my horizon because so much is possible that wouldn't be otherwise.

The greatest limitation; the greatest obstacle in life is unbelief - not trusting the God who made you and everything in the universe. You owe everything to God. Trust God. The more you trust God the more limitless the possibilities for your life, your family, your community for our church become.

So let me ask you three very personal questions.

1st: In what area or areas of your life are you limiting God by your lack of belief? In finances? In relationships? In your career? In relationships? In what you do as your mission for God? Every time you doubt God, you limit yourself.

2nd: What needs changing in your life? What needs to change in your family; yours; in the world? There are giant problems in the world. But with God all things are possible.

3rd: What are you waiting for? We live in an unbelievable time to be alive - a time when we can really make a difference in our community and world. In your entire life, there hasn't been as great an opportunity as there is right now and God has put you in a church. Why? Not so you can sit and watch, but so you can be a part of making a difference. This is no time for discouragement. It's time to get going.

Some people spend so much time worrying about what MIGHT happen that nothing much ever happens! Jesus said in Luke 12 *"Only people who don't know God are always worrying... Your Father knows what you need. But put God's work first, and these other things will be yours as well."* When we worry too much, we end up acting like atheists. It's saying I don't really believe God can take care of things. If you're a Christian, God comes first. Everything else is second place at best. Unless we're willing to live that way we'll never get what we really need in life. Jesus said, *"If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it."*

Then, next, to live like Jesus means to **2. Live Humbly and Simply**. Humility isn't false modesty or being quiet and reserved. It's not denying your strengths. Humility is dependence on God. The more humble you are the more you depend on God and the less you depend on yourself.

Jesus said, *"God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him."* What we have and who we are just isn't enough. We say, "God, I admit I don't have it on my own. I'll never accomplish what you want me to accomplish. I'll never be the woman or man you want me to be unless you help me." That's being humble. Admitting I can't do it on my own.

The number one cause of stress is trying to control things that you can't control. The truth is most of life is out of your control. Most circumstances are beyond your control. The more you need to control, the more stressed you get.

The cure for that isn't to control things more, because you'll never be able to control enough to make a real difference. The cure is trusting God. Whenever you don't trust God stress, worry and anxiety goes up and peace of mind declines. The cure is humility. In Matthew Jesus says, *"Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls"* The purpose of a yoke is for two to share a burden. So the purpose is to make the load lighter. God never meant for you to go all through life pulling the burden by yourself. And Jesus has much more strength than you.

And as you trust in God, living with humility, keep it simple. Today life has gotten complex and it is getting more so. And people have more stuff than we've ever had before. The more stuff you have the more you have to care for it, clean it, protect it, insure it, repair it. The more you've got the more it dominates life. We need to live with simplicity.

Today we have an entire industry that we didn't even have forty years ago. Self Storage Units. There's a place down on route 30, their sign right now says, "Don't Sell It, Store It." People don't have enough room in the house any more so they get a storage unit and pay rent to keep stuff.

Jesus certainly lived with simplicity and he said in Luke 12:15 *"Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own."* This is an anti-American culture message in many ways. Let's face it, we obsess about stuff; getting more; about the acquisition of things. What Jesus said is the exact opposite of what our culture does.

In America we're possessed by our possessions. Many people use most of their time, energy, talents just to get more things. They over extend themselves or work themselves to death to have things and give up time for things, which is dumb because life isn't about things, it's mainly about time. When you waste time to get things you never get time back.

Everything in society says the purpose of life is to work hard so you can get more and more and more things. And I'm certainly not against hard work - if it's meaningful! But not if it's to have a lifestyle full of things that won't keep

you happy. Because you're going to get a car or whatever, then you're going to get bored with it or it will get to be old hat or a new one will come out and you're going to want another new one.

Never sacrifice life for things. Your life is far more important than any possessions. Jesus said in Matthew 16 *"...what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?"* Is any possession worth more than your soul? Of course not. But beyond that, is there any possession worth more than your health; worth more than your family? No! There is no *thing* worth more than your relationships.

Then, next, to live like Jesus means to **3. Live Sincerely and Respectfully**. If you're going to live like Jesus you've got to learn to live with sincerity. To be sincere means free from pretense or deceit; operating from genuine feelings. It means having integrity. Most people don't really understand the concept of integrity. If you asked them to define it they'd say it means being honest - telling the truth, and yes, that's part of it. But integrity means a whole lot more than being honest. Integrity means wholeness. It comes from the word "integral." Integrated. It's the opposite of compartmentalizing your life.

You don't act one way with one group – at work or at church, and another with buddies or when you're someplace no one knows you. That's a lack of integrity; a segmented life. You can be honest in some areas of life and have other areas of your life hidden, in denial.

But what you do in any part of life affects every part of life and the people around you. If we were in a rowboat and I took a drill and start drilling a hole in my end and you said, "What are you doing putting a hole in the boat?" And I say, "It's my end of the boat. I'm just doing it over here in my own space." Even if you conceal it from the other person and they don't see you drilling, it will still affect them.

It's not easy to live a life of integrity today because our culture encourages us to segment our lives. People manage to separate out their financial life, their business life, their work life, from the rest of their life.

Integrity is not perfection. If you have to be perfect to have integrity nobody would have it! Nothing's perfect on earth, so you don't have to be perfect to have integrity. You just have to be what you appear to be. The way I talk with you is the way I talk with my kids. The way I talk to my kids is the way I talk to my friends. And the way I talk to my friends is the way I talk to strangers. What I talk about may be different, but I don't act in different ways with different groups of people. What you see is what you get.

Jesus said, *"If you're filled with light, with no dark corners, then your whole life will be radiant, as though a floodlight were filling you with light."* Integrity creates illumination. When you have integrity you shine in a dark world.

Jesus said, *"You are the world's salt to make it tolerable. If you lose your flavor, what will happen to the world?"* God says Christians are to be salt in the world. There are two primary purposes of salt. One is as a preservative. It keeps things from rotting. That's why they put it on meat – it keeps the meat from rotting. The other is for seasoning. It makes it taste better. Why does God leave Christians in the world once they become saved? Why doesn't He just take them onto heaven? God leaves us here on this planet so the world doesn't go completely rotten. And God leaves us here for seasoning, to make it better. The only way you can do that is if you have integrity. If you live out what God has made you to be, to be light in this world, to be salt you have to live with sincerity. That sincerity is how God wants you to act toward everyone, including the people who disagree with you.

Sadly, civility is becoming rarer and rarer. I don't know if you've noticed how uncivil our culture is - just flat out rude. If you've watched any of the political scene this election cycle, I don't see how you could have not noticed that. They're just bickering and bad mouthing each other - demonizing each other. It's all name-calling and character assassination.

The media loves this. They like a fight. Have you noticed that? They want people to yell at each other and call each other names and give barbs and one liners. That's good theater so the media just keeps whipping it up. Attacks sell better than presenting good arguments in an actual debate.

Rick Warren tells of a time he was in the home of one of our political leaders. That person told him, "The quickest way to raise money is get an enemy. You can raise ten times the money *against* something as you can *for* something." It's pathetic that we live in that kind of uncivil society.

All this is so against what Jesus taught us. In what may be the most familiar Biblical quote Jesus said, *"Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets"* It's the essence; the central teaching; the point of everything God has taught us. It's a matter of treating

others with the sort of respect we would want for ourselves. If we don't do that, we've abandoned the whole of the teachings because that's the essence; it's essential! We need to live respectfully. Respect is just treating other people the way you'd like to be treated, even if you disagree with them.

Jesus said, *"God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God."* Not the people who create conflict and division. But those who work for peace, the bridge builders, the mediators.

Then, next, to live like Jesus means to **4. Live Generously and Warmly**. If you want to be a Christian, if you want to live like Jesus, you want to live his lifestyle, you must learn to live with generosity.

Generosity encompasses a lot more than being generous financially - it includes that, but it also means a lot of other things like forgiveness, mercy, kindness, graciousness, compassion, showing love to people. Because you've been shown grace by God, God want you to be gracious to other people. Don't beat them over the head with stuff. God gives me the freedom to choose or reject God. To love God or not. If God gives me free choice I need to give it to others, even if they make the wrong choice. I don't believe in a culture where you force everybody to believe exactly the same thing. That's not real belief anyway. God gives me a free choice and I ought to give it to everyone else; to show generosity.

We live in a culture that says fight your enemies and love your friends. Yet we know Jesus says in Matthew 5 *"...I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!"* Let me be honest about this. I don't know about you but I don't want to do that. I don't want to love my enemies. It's just being honest. I don't want to love my enemies. But Jesus tells me if I'm going to call myself a Christian I've got to love them. You've got to love your enemies as well. If they put you down for being a Christian, pray for them. Do you do this? Are you generous when others are unpleasant? When someone irritates you or ticks you off; when you're out shopping and someone's a jerk. Do they bring out the best in you or the worst in you? Do you do the right thing or do you want to do the wrong thing? Show them some charity. Give them a little forgiveness. Cut them a little slack. Apply a little grace. You don't know what they've been going through.

Jesus said very clearly, *"Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven."* It's time for Christians to stop judging and start loving. *"God so loved the world."* God wants you to love. Yes, we are in a battle of ideas and a cultural battle over the values we believe in. But the people who disagree with us aren't the enemy. They're the mission field. They're people Jesus died for and he wants them to know his love as much as he wants you to know it. Any people you don't like because of what they do or say, Jesus loves them and expects you to love them.

God want us to learn generosity because God is generous. Every time I give it makes me more like Jesus Christ. Every time I'm generous my heart grows bigger. One of the easiest places to see that is in being generous with our resources. Every time I give financially I break the grip of materialism in my life. I become less materialistic because materialism is all about getting, so when I give I win a spiritual victory and I take Jesus' teaching seriously.

Certainly the generosity our church showed in our Christmas Miracle offering made an impact on our lives, on our church, on our community and on our world. There's even talk of other churches following our example and trying to do something together, big time, to benefit our community. Jesus said, *"Use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. Then, when your earthly possessions are gone, they will welcome you to an eternal home."* Some people don't get this verse. It looks like God's saying buy yourself some friends. But what it's telling us to do is some of your resources and use them to help people learn about Jesus and hear the good news. When you get there they'll see you as friends and be thankful. You'll be friends forever.

Notice it says *"Use your worldly resources"*. The resources we have here are tools. The Bible doesn't say money is the root of all evil, it says, *"The love of money is the root of all evil."* We should use money and love people. When you get that reversed you're in trouble. The world is a place where loving money and using people is common. Only evil comes from that. God wants you to learn to be generous.

Jesus says, *"Give, and it will be given to you...For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."* God wants to bless what we do and bless our church and God gives us some choice in this - the more generous we are, the more God will multiply the effectiveness of that generosity.

That generosity also extends into the warmth we extend to people; the hospitality we show to others. We are meant to welcome warmly, and care about people warmly and treat others with real, warmth as believers.

Hospitality is just love in action. It's practical love; love you can see in action. Jesus showed hospitality over and over again and expects his followers to do the same.

The problem is, we're not great at it. We're OK with one another, but we're not great with others. Hospitality is a lost art in modern culture. In ancient times people went to extremes to make even strangers welcome. People today aren't even great at this when they know the other person.

One of the reasons we teach that everyone needs a small group is that's a place where you can practice treating one another warmly and together learn to be better at hospitality, getting to know people up close and inviting others in.

In Matthew 10 Jesus says this *"Whoever meets a prophet and accepts him will receive the reward of a prophet. And whoever accepts a good person because that person is good will receive the reward of a good person. Those who give one of these little ones a cup of cold water because they are my followers will truly get their reward"* The word "accept" can also be translated as "welcome" and means both. Every act of acceptance and welcome - even a cup of cold water to one of the least of God's people will be rewarded. It all counts.

Jesus said *"Whatever you did for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me...and when you failed to help any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you failed to do it for me."* The warmth and generosity we show aren't side issues they're central to our relationship with God and lives as believers.

Everything in our culture says it's all about you. All of the advertisements say it's all about you. It all teaches self-centeredness. Yet God says the only way you're ever going to find yourself is by forgetting yourself and start focusing on God. Then you'll not only figure out God, you'll figure out you. That's what it means to live like Jesus. Let's pray.