

Are You a Likeable Christian?

Before you get angry and upset about the title of this article, please hear me out. I am not trying to tear down anyone's character, nor am I trying to tell you how to live your life as a follower of Jesus Christ.

It's simply the question I came up with—about myself no less—after reading *The Likeable Christian* by Justin Lathrop, a friend of mine and a pastor in Red Oak, Texas. As he does with most everything I read from him, Justin challenged me to stop and think about this. As a disciple of Christ, am I really demonstrating likeability at all times?

When I take a good, hard look at myself, the answer to that question is an unequivocal “no.” But what does it mean when I say “likeability?”

I believe Justin defined it well when he said, “Likeability requires nothing more than living like Christ, actually doing what He did, and loving people the way He loved them. When we live like that, we can be free because the rest is up to Him.”

In that regard, I would say my life and my character have vastly improved over the past year. I hope that the people around me would say the same.

However, I can honestly say that I never lived up to my end of the bargain for the better part of the first 48 years of my life. I've not been an unlikeable person by any stretch of the imagination, but I also wouldn't label myself as very likeable, either. I would say I was somewhere in between, sort of lukewarm. And we know what Jesus said about that: “So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spit you out of My mouth” (Rev. 3:16, MEV).

Like many people I know and those I see comment on social media, I played the part of what Rick Warren refers to as an

“angry Christian.” If injustice reared its ugly head in any form, you can bet that I had something to say about it. And no, I didn’t say it in a very Christ-like manner. I didn’t say what needed to be said in love. And yes, the Holy Spirit reminded me in a not-so-gentle manner of my inconsistent “Christian” behavior.

A great example of my struggles came Sunday during a family gathering. A member of my wife’s family, whom I thought was solid in her faith, stunned me when she informed me that “everything in the Bible isn’t true.” She also told me that, in essence, you didn’t have to be “born again” to reach heaven. I could elaborate, but that’s for another post. I didn’t handle it well and said some things I shouldn’t have. Lord, forgive me, and I will ask her forgiveness as well.

But why was I angry? Was I angry about her flippant attitude toward the Bible, or was I angry at the fact that I thought she knew Jesus better and that I was potentially looking at another lost soul? I would like to believe it was the latter.

As Justin points out in the book, “We can’t bully someone into changing. We can’t spout truth in love when we call out sin left and right. None of those responses to sin will gain us likeability; none will convince people of God’s love. The only way we can bring about change and share the message of Jesus that has changed us is through love—no matter the sin, no matter the circumstance—just love.”

Because of our self-centered human nature and the desire to be right (again, that was all me), that type of love simply isn’t easy to produce. Jesus spent a lot of time around sinners, but he didn’t shame them into his way of thinking. He simply loved them, and His love changed them.

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Again, that's likeability.

As Justin says, “Our job is not to tear people down—neither the people nor their sin. We can't do anything to change someone's behavior, and this isn't our responsibility. Our responsibility is to love and care for people and to treat them how Jesus did.”

That doesn't mean that we should compromise the Word of God or keep quiet about sinful lifestyles or habits. When people did things contrary to the Word, Jesus let them know about it. He told the adulterous woman to leave her life of sin. But he also defended and protected her, too.

When culture counteracts the Word of God, we must tell the truth. But, we must say it in love.

So, how do we know if we are a likeable Christian? 1 John 2:5-6 tell us, “But whoever keeps His Word truly has the love of God perfected in him. By this we know we are in Him. Whoever says he remains in Him ought to walk as He walked” (MEV).

Are we walking just as He walked? True Christian faith results in loving behavior, and that's why John said the way we act can give us assurance that we belong to Christ.

And as I always like to say, “there is that.” God bless.

Shawn A. Akers *is the online managing editor at Charisma Media. He is a published poet and published a story about Dale Earnhardt in NASCAR Chicken Soup For the Soul. You can read his blog [here](#).*