

Christlike

The Everyday Disciple: Following Jesus One Step at a Time Sermon 5

Luke 6:37-45

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³⁷ “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.” ³⁹ He also told them a parable: “Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? ⁴⁰ A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. ⁴¹ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴² How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye. ⁴³ “For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, ⁴⁴ for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵ The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. (Luke 6:37-45, ESV)

In Luke 6, as Jesus teaches His disciples, He brings together the learning of content with the formation of character. When a disciple “is fully trained,” Jesus explains, he “will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40).

Jesus is after more than the sharing of information. He wants to transform men and women, down to their constitution and character. His plans for a disciple do not culminate at conversion, but, rather, they *begin* there. Those who have been born anew are new, but, like newborn babies, they have much growing and maturing to do. Jesus wants us to become *different* than we were when He found us. He wants to transform us into His own image, so we are “like our teacher.” Jesus calls His disciple to be like Him... to be *Christlike*. This is the fifth mark of a disciple, Christlike.

A disciple, as they are trained, not only grows in knowledge, but undergoes a transformation of heart and character to more and more resemble their Lord.

A lot of momentum stands behind Jesus’ plan to shape us into His likeness. We were created in God’s image (Genesis 1:26-27). This does not mean we are like God in every way. But in holiness, relationality, and careful dominion over creation, we are made to reflect God’s character. As one sees someone’s reflection in a mirror, a human being was made to reflect to the world something of who God is.

Rebellion and sin, however, send ten thousand splintery cracks throughout the mirror. Glimmers of glory remain when we see a human being, but we are nothing of what we were made to be. God's plan for salvation involves remaking people so they once again reflect His image—He *rehumanizes* us.

What would a perfected human being look like? Pharaoh Ramses II in all his authority? Achilles in his physical prowess? Caesar Augustus in all his splendor? Each one of these men was seen by many as godlike. The biblical answer is Jesus Christ. There in the dusty streets of first-century Israel, Jesus stands as “the image of the invisible God,” (Colossians 1:15), and it is an image both surprising and breathtaking: Authority exercised in servanthood. Prowess displayed as love. Power wielded in mercy. Justice and forgiveness intertwined. He is the perfect man, the image of God.

God's plan for a disciple is to refashion them into His image by refashioning them into the image of Jesus Christ. God is, as Paul writes, “conforming us to the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29).

This raises some specific questions for us: *What exactly would we look like if we looked like Jesus? How much change into Christlikeness should we expect in this life? How does this transformation happen? What role do we play in bringing it about? How should we understand the disciple's call unto Christlikeness?*

We'll address these questions by noting three things about transformation into Christlikeness: The Pattern; The Principles; The Practice.

I. The Pattern: *What exactly does Christlikeness look like?*

What would we look like if we looked like Christ? Here we must get specific. It won't do to say we'll be exactly like Him, because we won't: We don't need to be 33-year-old Jewish men to be like Jesus; and we certainly can never imitate Him by dying for sins of others on the cross. It also won't do to speak of Christlikeness in vague generalities, such as saying to be like Christ means we are loving. Love is an overused term, and too often we aren't clear what we mean by it.

If twelve months from now you were more Christlike, *what, specifically, would be the mark of this?* From Jesus' teaching here in Luke 6 and the example of His life, let me suggest two specific ways we should look like Christ: merciful and servant hearted.

1. Merciful

Mercy is compassion, tenderness, and kindness. To be merciful is to act towards another with tenderness and kindness, whether or not they merit it. This is a driving theme in Jesus' teaching in Luke 6, and why He cautions His disciples away from being overly judgmental: "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned" (Luke 6:37). This command does not imply turning a blind eye to evil and sin, or that a disciple should not be discerning when it comes to right and wrong. Rather, it means the more a person is aware of standards of justice, the more they must avoid two pitfalls:

First, they must avoid being a hypocrite, pointing out the wrongs of the world while ignoring their own shortcomings: "How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite" (Luke 6:42). Second, passion for justice and righteousness cannot harden one's heart so they lose the ability to show grace to the flawed. Jesus doesn't want His disciples to be like the Pharisees, utterly certain about the moral standards of the law and increasingly incapable of showing sinners mercy.¹ *If all the world had was white-hot justice, then who could stand?*²

Jesus' way with people did not leave unrighteousness unnoticed—doing so would be like a doctor ignoring a patient's illness. But Jesus never lost sight of the humanity in a person. And His deeper desire was not judgment, but that they would turn and be healed. In His mercifulness, Jesus could even pray for the man driving a nail into His palm. If a disciple is Christlike, she will be less critical and judgmental, and more merciful.

2. Servanthood

Another quality of Jesus that disciples should imitate is servanthood. When His disciples are vying for positions of power, Jesus exposes the incongruity between who we are and who He is: "For the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve...." (Mark 10:45). The disciples had signed up to follow a messiah—one they envisioned would soon become a great earthly king. They assumed following Him meant glory and power for themselves. They never expected that servanthood would be a distinguishing mark of His rule.³

Servanthood is not weakness

Most cultures equate the position of servant with weakness and inferiority. Servanthood isn't something you choose; it's something forced upon you. Not so with the Son of God. In an exultant passage, Paul says of Jesus:

“though he was in the form of God, [He] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:6-7).

Servanthood is integral to how Jesus models being human. He is always focused on how He can help and uplift others. He is not passive but takes responsibility for the deepest needs around Him. Jesus shows that serving is true strength. It is the strength to lay one's ego aside in order to be about the other. It is the strength to entrust your future life to God, so you can lay down your present life for another. English churchmen, William Law, captures the essence of servanthood beautifully:

Condescend to all the weaknesses and infirmities of your fellow-creatures, cover their frailties, love their excellencies, encourage their virtues, relieve their wants, rejoice in their prosperities, [be] compassionate [in] their distress, receive their friendship, overlook their unkindness, forgive their malice, be a servant of servants, and condescend to do the lowest offices to the lowest of mankind.⁴

In your daydreams, are you the rockstar onstage, the athlete winning the game, the hostess most admired, the parent whose kids are the envy of others? Is this your heart's inclination? Or could you feign to be the servant of others? Could you be the custodian at the concert, delighting to serve the audience as they focus all their attention on the real star onstage, while you go unnoticed?

“The son of man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45). If a disciple is Christlike, He will increasingly be serving others rather than seeking to be served by them. Here are two qualities of Christ a disciple should imitate: we must be merciful and servant hearted. Let's now turn to the question of how this transformation happens.

II. Principles: *What should we expect about the process of transformation?*

First, we should remember a few principles about a disciple's transformation.

1. Not salvation but sanctification

Firstly, becoming like Christ is not about your salvation, but your *sanctification*. This means our motivation in becoming like Christ is *not* to earn His favor. If you are a disciple, you already have His favor. The Gospel says we are saved by grace, not saved by becoming like Christ. Our motivation for striving to become like Christ is the motive of a child who delights in pleasing their father and is grateful for all their father has done for them. Strive to be like Jesus not out of fear you need to earn His favor, but out of delight and gratitude that you already and always have it.

2. Progress not perfection

Secondly, we are aiming at progress, not perfection. Until Christ returns, none of us will be free from the temptation to sin, nor have the perfection of will to never sin. This abiding struggle with sin can be confusing for a disciple. *Doesn't Paul say that if we are in Christ we are "a new creation, the old is gone the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17)? If we are new creatures, why the remaining struggle?*

All analogies are imperfect but think of a disciple as a newborn baby. At the time of birth, the baby is fully human, a new creation. However, a baby still has to grow—physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually. And a baby growing up in this world is still living in a fallen world, where temptations to sin are many. So too, when a disciple is born again, they are a new creation, but still have so much growing up to do.

In the same letter where Paul says we are "a new creation," he also says, "we are being transformed into the ... image [of Christ] from one degree of glory to another." (2 Corinthians 3:18). At conversion, a disciple has become a new creation—he or she truly is born again and a child of God. But there is much growing up to do, and this happens in a challenging world. Aim at progress, not perfection.

3. God's work ultimately

The third principle is that our transformation is something we work at, but its success lies ultimately in God's hands. One of the greatest dignities God affords a disciple is to say that our sanctification requires our effort—we have something to offer, we aren't purposeless. However, it would be a mistake to think the burden was on our shoulders. Paul talks about this relationship between our efforts and God's efforts in 1 Corinthians:

“By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10)⁵

Paul recognizes that every effort to be faithful to God rests first on God’s faithfulness to us. This relationship between God’s sovereign power and human effort is a mystery. Perhaps we are like a little sailboat that’s had the wherewithal to tun our sail into the wind, though we rely entirely on the ocean of God’s grace to uphold us and the wind of God’s Spirit to move us.

And while we can never forget that our sanctification will involve discipline and work on our part, it is also fundamental that a disciple rests in the power and promises of God. As Paul reminded the Philippians, “he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).⁶ Aware of these principles of Christian transformation, let us now turn to the question, *what practices should a disciple learn to become more like Christ?*

III. Practices: *What are some techniques for growing in Christlikeness?*

Becoming like Christ requires learning practices and disciplines. In Luke 6:40, Jesus speaks of a disciple as undergoing “training.” In Philippians 2:12-13, Paul says “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure”. The word we translated “work out” in Philippians 2 is commonly used in Greek writing during the time of the New Testament to describe the cultivation of land by farmers.⁷ We might think of the practices of our sanctification as cultivating and working in the garden of God’s grace.

The most important practice is a regular rhythm where you connect with God in prayer and Scripture reading. Without this, it is unlikely you will see steady and progressive change in your life. There are other practices that encourage change, however, and I’d like briefly to highlight four:

1. Self-examination

A first practice is self-examination, or asking God to help us accurately see ourselves. The tendency in our world is to look for the problems around us; but notice that in Jesus’ parable about the speck and log, we must start with the problems in us:⁸

How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye (Luke 6:42).

To truly see ourselves is not easy. It's easier to notice the problem in others than to stop and notice the sinfulness within us. It can also be the case that our deeper problem—our log-in-the-eye—, lies hidden beneath other symptoms. We quickly notice that we have a problem with being irritable and critical at work; but it will take more time and prayer to see that the real issue may be a deep-seated resentment we harbor towards a parent or friend. This deeper darkness is what gives rise to our general negative attitude and irritability. Outside of removing that, we will not see deep change.

2. Confession

A second practice is confession. Here we are talking about bringing those things that hide in the darkness into the light. Jesus uses the image of a tree and fruit in vv. 43-45 to note that our health on the inside—"the good treasure of our heart" (Luke 6:45)—is the source to the fruit we see on the outside. *So, what type of things lie hidden in your heart?* Sin hates the light. It dies in the light. But it grows and infests when left in the dark. There is a Christian technique for dealing with the darkness of the heart that's as old as the Bible: confession. James teaches, "confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed." (James 5:16). Find a trusted Christian friend and commit to being total honest with God, and with them.

3. Aim at specific good fruit

A disciple should not only aim at removing the darkness of sin from their life, but, even more so, begin to aim at nurturing good fruit. It helps to be specific here. For example, say you struggle with being a bit self-obsessed, always pitying yourself or looking to make things about you. This is not only sinful, but also exhausting. Rather than just trying to not be self-absorbed, start to practice servanthood. Pick someone specific who you will see during the day, and prayerfully decide how you will serve them: could be by emptying the dishwasher, or by an encouraging word, or by sitting with them at lunch, or by listening instead of talking back.⁹

4. Embrace God's unwritten curriculum

Fourthly, embrace God’s unwritten curriculum. When Jesus talks about us being “fully trained,” we should not assume that God’s training only involves Bible reading and churchgoing. God’s curriculum is your life—the pressures, pains, relationships, ups and downs, that are your life.¹⁰

God will use whatever circumstance He puts you in to fashion you into a unique image of His Son. And never forget that what God has designed you to be is far larger, deeper, and grander, than any plans you’ve made for yourself.

As C. S. Lewis so eloquently puts it:

The “You” God will fashioning is different and bigger than the “you” you would fashion: Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of – throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.¹¹

Come to see and engage the circumstances of your life as a boxer engages a gym, or student a library: God is forming you through these things! Ask Him to show you the lessons He’s teaching you; journal about them, share with friends about them, and thank God for them.

God has a plan for your life. He will make you into a person whose character and actions and dreams are fit to stand in the shadow of His Son. God is making you into a person that you will be proud to be—He is calling forth the person who you most deeply are.

A disciple is marked by increasing Christlikeness—“beholding the glory of the Lord, [we] are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Endnotes

1. As an example, the Pharisees are so obsessed with the “letter of the law” about the Sabbath, they cannot allow that Jesus might heal a man on the Sabbath: “I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it? And after looking around at [the Pharisees

and scribes, 6:7] he said to him, 'Stretch out your hand.' And he did so, and his hand was restored. But [the Pharisees and scribes] were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus" (Luke 6:9-11).

2. Jesus says in Luke 6:35 that God "is kind to the ungrateful and the evil," and this includes all of us.
3. Michael Wilkins draws attention to how significant servanthood is for discipleship, writing, "By comprehending the essence of Jesus' Ministry as servanthood, the disciples will comprehend the essence of discipleship as servanthood, including their motivation, position, ambition, expectations, and example." See Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 197.
4. William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*.
5. Paul says something similar in Philippians 2, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling**,¹³ for **it is God who works in you**, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil 2:12-13).
6. One author explains how God's work makes possible our work this way: "God's working in us is not suspended because we work, nor our working suspended because God works. Neither is the relation strictly one of cooperation as if God did his part and we did ours.... God works in us and we also work. But the relation is that because God works, we work" (Stanley N. Gundry, *Sanctification: Five Views*) 72.
7. The Greek term is **κατεργάζομαι** and is commonly used in the papyri (short Greek manuscripts from 200 BC to 200 AD) to describe the cultivation of land by farmers. Paul's words in Phil 2.12 could be phrased: "Keep on cultivating the salvation God has given you." See Stanley Gundry, ed., *Five Views of Sanctification*, 71.
8. Leo Tolstoy once quipped, "Everyone wants to change humanity, but no one is willing to change themselves."
9. Along these lines of cultivating the good fruit of servanthood, Dietrich Bonhoeffer speaks of the ministry of helpfulness: The "service that one should perform for another in a Christian community is that of active helpfulness. This means, initially, simple assistance in trifling, external matters. There is a multitude of these things wherever people live together. Nobody is too good for the meanest service. One who worries about the loss of time that such petty, outward acts of helpfulness entail is usually taking the importance of his own career too solemnly." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 99.
10. At times the Bible refers to the way God uses circumstance to shape us as God's "discipline." For example, in Hebrews we read, "Our fathers disciplined (**ἐπαίδευον**) us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness" (Heb 12:10).

The verb used here is **παιδεύω**, meaning, to provide instruction for informed and responsible living, educate; to assist in the development of a person's ability to make appropriate choices, practice discipline.

11. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*; In this work Lewis elaborates on this idea: "Of course we never wanted, and never asked, to be made into the sort of creatures He is going to make us into.... But He is the inventor, we are only the machine. He is the painter; we are only the picture. How should we know what He means us to be like? You see, he has already made us something very different from what we were. Long ago, before we were born, when we were inside our mothers' bodies, we passed through various stages. We were once rather like vegetables, and once rather like fish; it was only at a later stage that we became like human babies. And if we had been conscious at those earlier stages, I daresay we should have been quite contented to stay as vegetables or fish--should not have wanted to be made into babies. But all the time He knew His plan for us and was determined to carry it out. Something the same is now happening at a higher level. We may be content to remain what we call "ordinary people": but he is determined to carry out a quite different plan. To shrink back from that plan is not humility; it is laziness and cowardice. To submit to it is not conceit or megalomania; it is obedience. The command, "be ye perfect" is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. If we let Him... He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what He said. No power in the whole universe, except you yourself, can prevent Him from taking you to that goal. It is not like teaching a horse to jump better and better but like turning a horse into a winged creature. Of course, once it has got its wings, it will soar over fences which could never have been jumped and thus beat the natural horse at its own game. But there may be a period, while the wings are just beginning to grow, when it cannot do so: and at that stage the lumps on the shoulders--no one could tell that by looking at them that they are going to be wings--may even give it an awkward appearance" (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 172-5). Tim Keller also notes the connection between your formation and your God-ordained circumstance, "If you are a child of God, God will bring the external brokenness of the world into a relationship with the internal brokenness of your life just in the right way, just at the right times, and in the right proportions, to make you someone great."