

*Psalm 92:12–15 (CEB)*

<sup>12</sup>The righteous will spring up  
like a palm tree.

They will grow strong  
like a cedar of Lebanon.

<sup>13</sup>Those who have been replanted  
in the LORD's house  
will spring up  
in the courtyards of our God.

<sup>14</sup>They will bear fruit  
even when old and gray;  
they will remain lush and fresh

<sup>15</sup>in order to proclaim:

"The LORD is righteous.

He's my rock.

There's nothing unrighteous in him."

*Proverbs 3:5–6 (CEB)*

<sup>5</sup>Trust in the LORD with all your heart;  
don't rely on your own intelligence.

<sup>6</sup>Know him in all your paths,  
and he will keep your ways straight.

*Mark 4:30–32 (CEB)*

<sup>30</sup>He [Jesus] continued, "What's a good image for God's kingdom? What parable can I use to explain it? <sup>31</sup>Consider a mustard seed. When scattered on the ground, it's the smallest of all the seeds on the earth; <sup>32</sup>but when it's planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all vegetable plants. It produces such large branches that the birds in the sky are able to nest in its shade."

*1 Corinthians 10:33b–11:1 (CEB)*

Follow my example, just like I follow Christ's.

*1 Thessalonians 1:6–8 (CEB)*

<sup>6</sup>You became imitators of us and of the Lord when you accepted the message that came from the Holy Spirit with joy in spite of great suffering. <sup>7</sup>As a result you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. <sup>8</sup>The message about the Lord rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia but in every place. The news about your faithfulness to God has spread so that we don't even need to mention it.

*Simple really . . . just be like Jesus.*

I've learned that it is one thing to ask people to do what Jesus did, that WWJD thing, but it is something else to suggest that they are called to be like Jesus, to be Christ-like. Granted, *doing* and *being* are not the same, but no one suggests that we *be* Jesus. Jesus' was fully God and fully human; we are merely fully human. Jesus' vocation is not our vocation. If anything, our vocation has much more in common with Paul's.

But still, striving to be like Jesus, to imitate him and his love as best we can has long been the Christian way. It is the way to which Lady Wisdom calls us. It is what Paul taught the churches he founded. One of the most enduring and beloved Christian writings is *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis:

These are the words of Christ: "If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness" (John 8:12). They teach us how thoroughly we must imitate his life and character if we desire true understanding and freedom from our own deceptive hearts and minds. And so, may we earnestly study and meditate on the life of Jesus Christ. Christ's teachings surpass all of the great holy writers of the past. If we have his Spirit, we find spiritual nourishment. Unfortunately, there are many people who frequently hear the words of Christ but have little desire to follow them and so do not have the mind of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Watkins, James. *The Imitation of Christ: Classic Devotions in Today's Language* (pp. 7-8). Worthy Publishing. Kindle Edition. This is a recently published paraphrase that organizes *The Imitation of Christ* into ninety devotionals. Many straight translations are available. This passage is from Book 1, Chapter 1.

The mind of Christ? That seems pretty daunting. Perhaps, but Thomas is echoing the apostle Paul, “Let the same mind be in you, that was in Christ Jesus,” (Philippians 2:5). We see this also in Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians. When Paul gives his thanks that the Thessalonians have become “imitators of us (Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, see 1:1) and the Lord” it can strike us as a bit odd or off. After all, aren’t imitations mere copies of the original, even phony at that? And is Paul really so bold (arrogant?) as to expect that these Christians will remake themselves into his image, much less be like Jesus?

In our world, we get pretty shy about being role models. But the language of imitation was prevalent in Paul’s day. If Paul had not been willing to hold himself up as worthy of imitation, he would have been seen as an unworthy teacher. Paul means that we can look to Jesus and even to himself as we seek to learn the shape of an authentically Christian life. It is not a call for us all to do and say the same things, nor to be cheap knock-offs of the real thing. I must live my life, not Jesus’ life and not Paul’s. But from them, I can learn much about what it means to live each day in right relationship with God and with other persons. It is a call for us to imitate the selflessness of Jesus so that, like the Thessalonians, we might, in turn, be an example to others (v. 7).

Having turned from idols, these Thessalonian Christians had become imitators of Paul and of Christ and, in so doing, had become an example to all. The power of God that had worked within them and their community was quickly directed outward. We shouldn’t imagine that they had developed lots of ministries and new programs. There had been no time for any of that! Yet, nonetheless, others saw in the Thessalonians a transformation that reached every part of their lives – their work of faith, and their labor of love, and their steadfastness of hope. This transformation revealed that, by God’s grace, the Thessalonian Christians understood that they were to be the light to the world (Matt. 5:14). Others wanted what the Thessalonians had. It was true then, it is true now – *so long as others see Christ in us*. And for that to be the case we must become ever more like Jesus, i.e., Christlike. In this project, lies the heart of discipleship.

### *Disciples*

The word “disciple” has a specific meaning. It doesn’t mean those who love Jesus. You can love Jesus and not be a disciple. Rather, a disciple of Jesus or of anyone else is someone who is learning to be like the master. More so than “student” or “learner,” the word “apprentice” gets us closest to the true meaning of “disciple.” Apprentices, in any vocation, are those who are consciously striving, learning, and practicing to be like the master to whom they are apprenticed. For example, an apprentice carpenter is striving to be like the master carpenter who is their mentor, teacher, and guide. This apprenticeship encompasses every part of the apprentice’s being: her head, her heart, and her hands.

Certainly, disciples of Jesus love their Master and have faith in their Master, but they also share the desire to be Christlike. Making the decision to believe in Jesus, as we often put it, is not the same as making a decision to emulate Jesus. Every genuine disciple of Jesus has not only made the first decision but the second as well.

Pews in churches across America, large and small, of all denominations or no denomination at all, are filled with people who have experienced the first decision, but have not made the second. They are hardly even aware that there is a second decision to be made. To reiterate, accepting Jesus as one’s savior is not the same as making a conscious decision to begin the path of discipleship, what Dallas Willard has aptly called, the “curriculum of Christlikeness.” Willard writes:

“A mind cluttered by excuses may make a mystery of discipleship, or it may see it as something to be dreaded. But there is no mystery about desiring and intending to be like someone—that is a very common thing. And if we really do intend to be like Christ, that will be obvious to every thoughtful person around us, as well as to ourselves. Of course, attitudes that define the disciple cannot be realized today by

leaving family and business to accompany Jesus on his travels about the countryside. But discipleship can be made concrete by actively learning how to love our enemies, bless those who curse us, walk the second mile with an oppressor—in general, living out the gracious inward transformations of faith, hope, and love. Such acts—carried out by the disciplined person with manifest grace, peace, and joy—make discipleship no less tangible and shocking today than were those desertions of long ago. Anyone who will enter into the Way can verify this, and he or she will at the same time prove that discipleship is far from dreadful.”<sup>2</sup>

For Willard, there are a few basics that undergird the path of a disciple. They can be summed up in a few bullet points.<sup>3</sup>

What are *not* our objectives, as we walk the path?

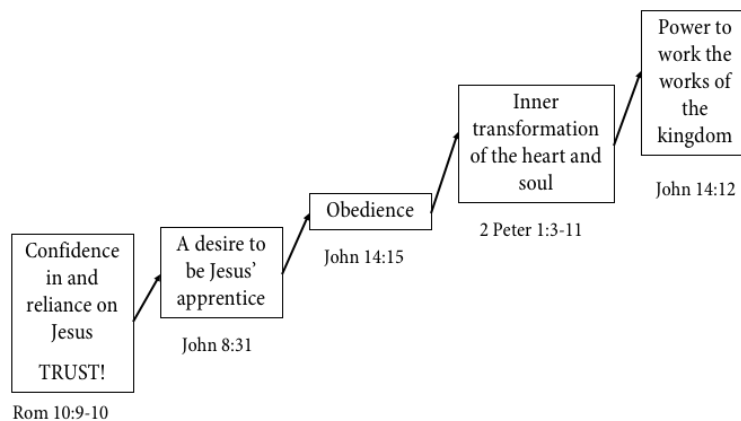
- Following sets of externally-visible rules
- Profession of perfectly correct doctrine
- Being active at church for the sake of activity or recognition
- Assorted super-spiritual states or experiences

What are our objectives?

- “. . . to bring apprentices to the point where [1] they dearly love and constantly delight in that ‘heavenly father’ made real to earth in Jesus and [2] they are certain that there is no ‘catch’ to it all.”
- To gain a trusting mind and heart filled with “the great and beautiful God.”
- To remove our automatic responses against the Kingdom of God (“Yeah . . . I hear all that Sermon-on-the-Mount stuff, but I have to live in the real world!”)

If these are our objectives, then what is the path we follow? What process do we undergo to become truer disciples of Jesus, to be more like Jesus? There are no shortcuts; it takes time and discipline, cultivating habits of love, kindness, generosity, compassion, joy, grace, mercy, and more. Most importantly, we consciously work with the Holy Spirit in this transformation. Dallas Willard gets it about as right as I’ve seen, summarized in the diagram below. Our path begins with faith and trust, moving on to genuine obedience, for only then is true transformation and possible. Trust and obey, for there’s no other way.

## A Curriculum for Christlikeness



*For the sake of others*

Why be like Christ? Merely for ourselves and, perhaps, families. No, we are called to be like Jesus for the sake of the whole world. That is the point of Jesus’ parable about the mustard seed (Mark 4:30-32). As PHEME PERKINS writes, “We must give away what we

<sup>2</sup> This selection is taken from Renovare’s *Living the Mission* spiritual formation guide.

<sup>3</sup> These are from Willard’s book, *The Divine Conspiracy*. A very worthwhile, though challenging read. John Ortberg has described his teaching ministry to be bringing Willard to a larger audience.

have received. This evangelical emphasis counters a common modern tendency to think of religion as a matter of private preference that is best worn lightly in the presence of others. These proverbs and parables suggest that God does not give the gift of faith (or secret of the kingdom) to individuals as their private possession. Rather, the gift provides light for others and shelter for the birds of the field.”<sup>4</sup>

## Questions for Discussion and Reflection

The discussion questions for this study are drawn from the curriculum for our Connection Groups, which will be meeting throughout the series. The questions were written by Rev. Allison Jean.

1. List some role models in your life right now. Why are these men and women important to you? What characteristics do you look for in a role model? How do these men and women compare to the values and actions we see in the life of Jesus?
2. Share about a time in your life when you have truly asked the question, What Would Jesus Do? How did you find the answer to your question? How did asking this question impact the situation you were experiencing? How did you grow in your faith because of this question?
3. Are you intimidated by the idea that we are called to be like Jesus? Why or why not? Share about a time in your life when you felt like you did act like Jesus would have. What was this experience like? How did your faith change because of it?

## Daily Bible Readings

*This week: More on Christlikeness*

**Monday, Matthew 4:23 – 7:28** The entire Sermon on the Mount. Please read it in one sitting.

**Tuesday, Luke 6:20-49** Jesus’ “Great Sermon” from Luke; see esp. v. 46-49 on obedience.

**Wednesday, Romans 10:5-15** Confidence in and reliance on Jesus – trusting him!

**Thursday, James 1** James, Jesus’ half-brother, writes about practical discipleship – love as action and obedience to the word.

**Friday, 2 Peter 1:3-11** The inner transformation of the heart and soul

**Saturday, 1 John 2:1-11** John writes about obedience to Jesus.

## Scott Engle’s Bible Classes

### Monday Evening Class

We are studying the gospel of John.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

### Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the book of Samuel.

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

*About the weekday classes:*

Join us whenever you can. Each week’s lesson stands on its own. This is very “drop-in.” Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org) to make sure the class is meeting.

### Scott’s 10:50 Sunday Class in Smith Worship Center

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Our current series: *Jewish History*, a six-week series with faculty from UTD’s Ackerman Center for Holocaust Studies.

Beginning May 20: *Razing Hell??*

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<sup>4</sup> Perkins, P. (1994–2004). *The Gospel of Mark*. In L. E. Keck (Ed.), *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Vol. 8, pp. 578–579). Nashville: Abingdon Press.