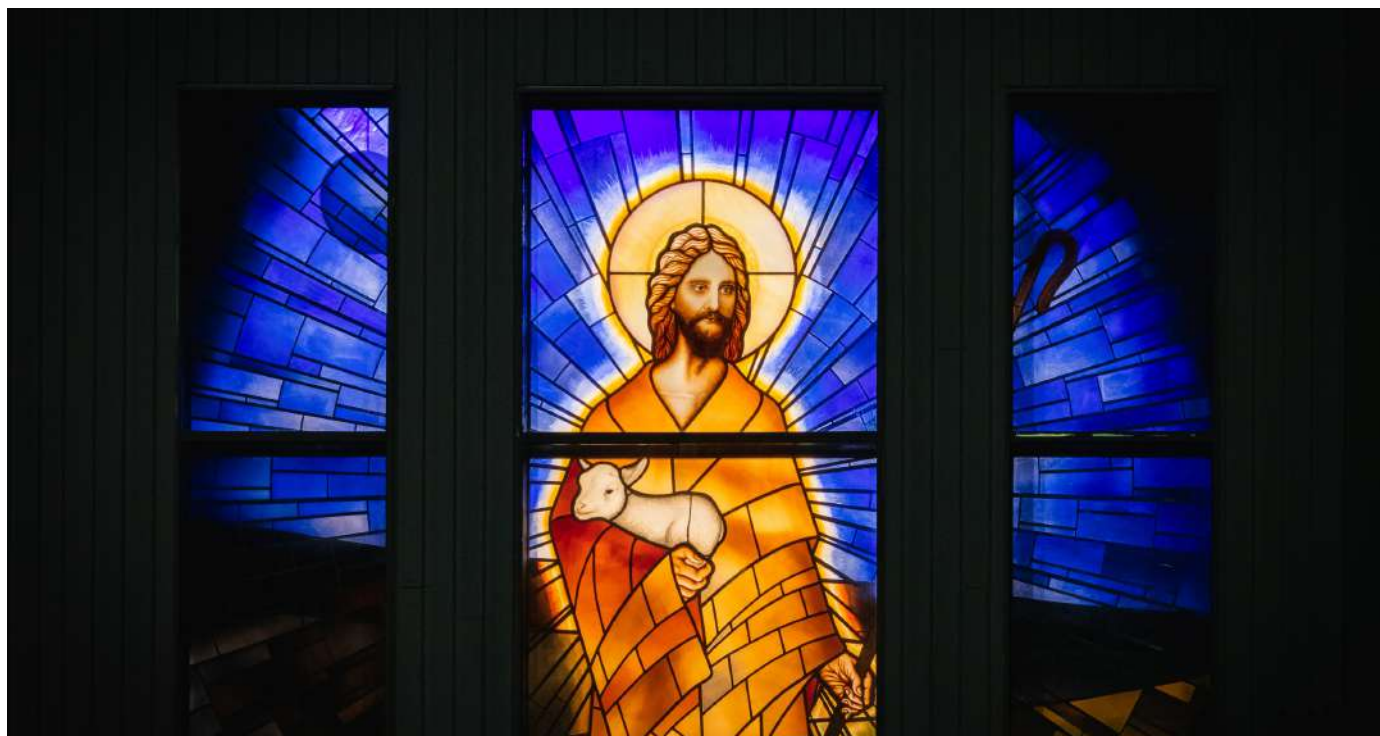


WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP: BECOMING LIKE CHRIST



Session 1: Jesus - His life

Why do disciples aim to “become like Christ”?
Why is knowing Jesus central to knowing God better?
Do we become like Christ just because He is a good example?
Is “becoming like Christ” really part of discipleship and in what ways might we expect this to happen?
How do we know about Him?
What is the background to Jesus’ life?
What did Jesus show about the Kingdom of God and what does that reveal about becoming like Him?
What was Jesus’ favourite title for Himself and how does this affect discipleship?
How can a human being be God?
How does this help us in becoming like Christ?
How did Jesus demonstrate a spiritually healthy life?

Why do disciples aim to 'become like Christ'?



The aims of this module are to grow in our understanding of who Christ is and what He has done (the focus of the first two sessions) and then to explore and practise the habits and attitudes through which we are changed to become more like Him as we follow Him (the focus of sessions 3 to 6).

We will focus on how we grow to be like Him in our character and choices – in relationships, dealing with temptations, the way we relate to the culture around us, and in how we face life's difficulties in a Christlike manner. (Module three, 'Joining in with the Spirit' is about how we can be like Christ in our calling. We look more specifically at how in our everyday lives we get to join in with what God is doing in the world).

As we begin this module on becoming like Christ it is good to start by asking why Jesus matters, why He is at the heart of discipleship, and why disciples aim to become like Him.

Over these next two sessions we will explore this by looking at three good reasons which come from who He claimed to be. We will flesh out our understanding (and questions which arise such as, How can a human being be God?) by looking in particular at four titles given to, or used by Jesus, which describe His nature and purpose

Three good reasons for becoming like Christ (which we affirm at our baptism) are:

We can know God through Him: Christ is the fullest specific way in which we can know the character and self-giving love of God. (Do you come to Christ?)

We can offer Him what He deserves: Christ is God acting in the world to bring His healing, and so is the one to whom we give our greatest allegiance. (Do you submit to Christ as Lord?)

We can be freed to come to God through Him:

Christ is the one whose death and resurrection defeat sin and evil and open the way for us to know a holy God. (Do you come to Christ as Saviour?)

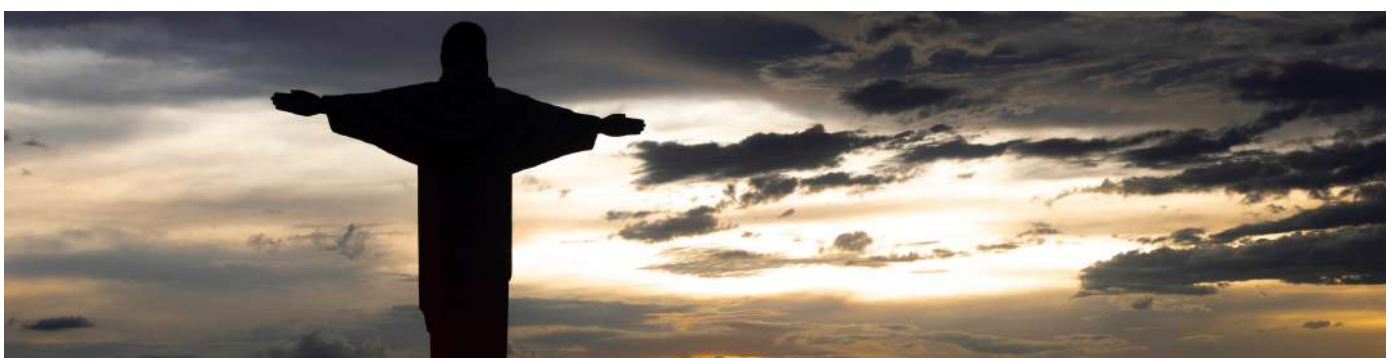
While there are a lot of titles given to Jesus throughout the Bible, we will focus on the meaning of four to unpack these reasons:

Messiah/Lord – Jesus as the one who fulfils God's purposes.

Emmanuel/God the Son – Jesus as the one who is "God with us".

Son of Man – Jesus as the one who reveals who we can be.

Jesus – meaning "God saves" – Jesus as the one who restores human beings and creation



Why is knowing Jesus central to knowing God better?



The American writer Donald Miller tells this story, “A guy we know named Alan went around the country asking ministry leaders questions. He went to successful churches and asked the pastors what they were doing, why what they were doing was working.

It sounded very boring except for one visit he made to a man named Bill Bright, the President of [Campus Crusade for Christ]. Alan said he was a big man, full of life, who listened without shifting his eyes. Alan asked a few questions. I don’t know what they were, but the final question he asked Dr. Bright was what Jesus meant to him.

Alan said Dr. Bright could not answer the question. He said Dr. Bright just started to cry. He sat there in his big chair behind his big desk and wept. When Alan told that story I wondered what it was like to love Jesus that way. I wondered, quite honestly, if that Bill Bright guy was just nuts, or if he really knew Jesus in a personal way, so well that he would cry at the very mention of His name.

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I knew that I would like to know Jesus like that, with my heart, not just with my head. I felt that would be the key to something.”



Many people may sense God’s reality through things like the creation, the night sky, the qualities of love, truth, beauty and justice. We may even sense a need for God in the world when we experience its brokenness and injustice. (We explored this general revelation in module 1). 80% of the world’s population belong to a religion (32% are Christian).

In the book of Romans Paul writes how, “... since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.” We can gain some sense of God’s attributes through this general wisdom and experience.

But the reason Christ is at the centre of discipleship is simple. It is through Him that God has revealed the specific nature of the **truth** of God’s character, His purpose for **life** and the **way** it is possible for us to be in relationship with Him.

Jesus said of Himself, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Christ is the one through whom we love God in the fullest way possible. Christ is the one we follow, because in doing so we follow God in the closest way possible. Martin Luther King looked for Christians to have, “zeal for Christ” and “zest for His kingdom”.



As we saw in the previous module, Pope Benedict 16th put it like this, "...faith is above all a personal, intimate encounter with Jesus, and to experience his closeness, his friendship, his love; only in this way does one learn to know him even more, and to love and follow him ever more. May this happen to each one of us."

As the first Christians pieced together who Jesus was, they looked at His actions, death and resurrection and the experience of His disciples. In addition, we have the benefit of the teaching of the New Testament and the early church Fathers in being able to understand how He reveals God and enables us to know Him.

They came to the amazing conclusion that Jesus was God made human. God in His love had emptied Himself to become one of us, so that we could see and know Him in a way we could understand.

After telling His disciples that a relationship with Him is "the way, the truth and the life", Jesus said, "If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:7-9)

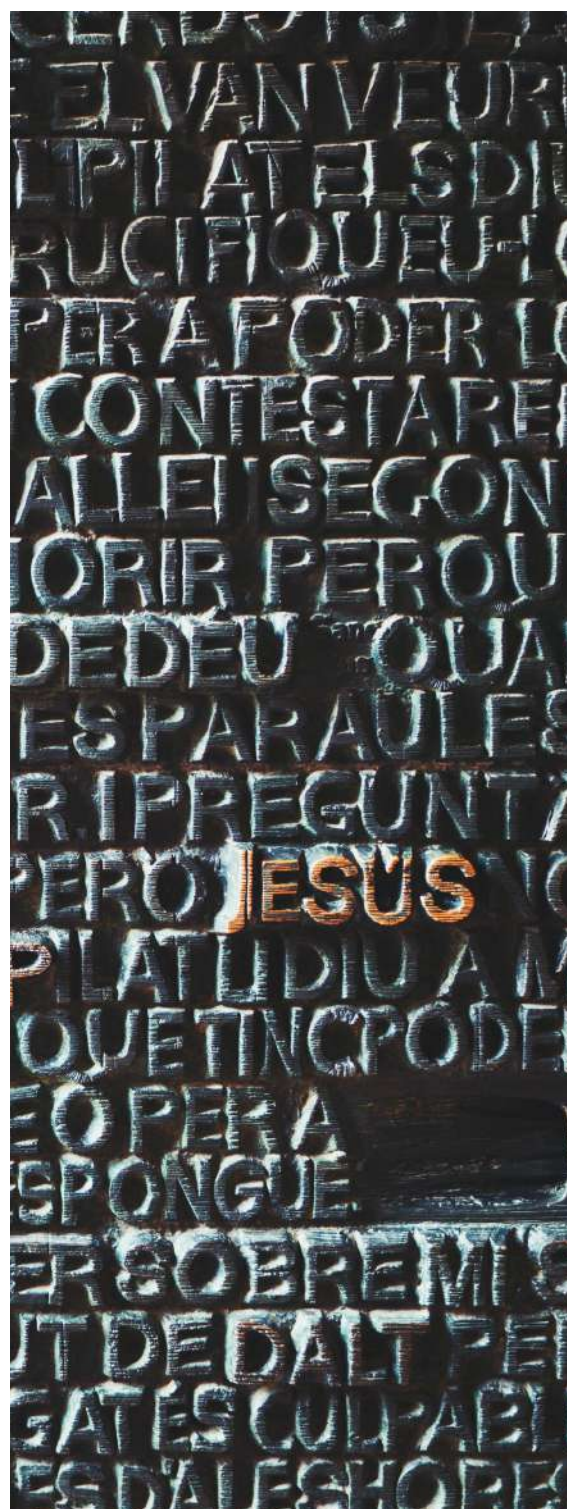
In other words, if we want to know God's character, God's heart, or God's purposes, the fullest possible way of seeing that is by looking at Jesus, by "coming to Christ".

The mystic St John of the Cross argued that, compared to looking at Christ, only knowing God through common wisdom seems foolish. He wrote, "...anyone today who wants to ask God questions, or desires some further vision or revelation, is not only acting foolishly but offending God by not fixing his eyes entirely on Christ, and instead wanting something new or something in addition to Christ .

To such a person God might give this answer: "This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased: Listen to him. I have already told you all things in my word. Fix your eyes on him alone, because in him I have spoken and revealed all. Moreover, in him you will find more than you ask or desire." Irenaeus put it like this:

“

In Jesus Christ, God allows himself to be seen, and in seeing God we come alive.”



Do we become like Christ just because He is a good example?



As we have said, a further two reasons for becoming like Christ are because **He is God** and so deserves our greatest allegiance, and because through His death and resurrection **He opens the way for us to know God.**

Christ as God:

A good motive for wanting to become like Christ is not only that He reveals God's character through being "the image of the invisible God", but that He is God. As might be expected, Jesus' first disciples only came to understand this in a gradual way, though soon after Jesus' resurrection John was writing that He "was with God and...was God." (John 1:1).

Matthew wrote that Jesus was the "Emmanuel" – prophesied many centuries before – meaning "God with us". Similarly, the apostle Paul wrote of Jesus as the ultimate source of all things: "For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth...all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." (Colossians 1:16-17)

The ultimate end of all things: "...God placed all things under his feet." And the most definitive statement about God we will ever have: "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him..." (1 Corinthians 15: 1-4)

The first Christians had to wait several centuries (largely because of persecution) until they had the opportunity to express their continued faith that Jesus was God in 325 AD. They agreed on a statement of belief called the Nicene Creed, still used regularly today, which included the phrase that Jesus was "true God from true God" and "one in being with the Father". We will look at some of the evidence for this in these two sessions.

Christ the Way to God:

St Augustine wrote, "It was not enough for God to make his Son our guide to the way; He made him the way itself that we might travel with him as leader, and by Him as the way."

In session two we will explore more fully how by dying and rising again, Jesus not only put God's character fully on display, but made it possible for everyone, and everything, to be brought back to God in total forgiveness.

In an act of complete self-offering, He defeated the power of death and every spiritual force of evil, becoming the way through whom the universe, and every human being, can ultimately be restored.

It's no wonder that St Ambrose said, "Let your door stand open to receive Jesus, unlock your soul to him, offer him a welcome in your mind, and then you will see the riches of simplicity, the treasures of peace, the joy of grace. Throw wide the gate of your heart."





Is 'becoming like Christ' really part of discipleship? In what ways might we expect this to happen?

As human beings, we are all being formed by something or someone, whether on purpose or not.

We all long to know the particular story and shape of our lives. Jesus' invitation to His disciples was to be apprentices, who would intentionally become like Him.

He called His disciples to "follow Him" by "taking up their cross" and "losing their lives" in the same way that He did – the closest possible way of identifying with Him.

He provided the pattern for their relationships. "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." (John 13:34) He told the Pharisees that, "The student (disciple) is not above the teacher but will be like the teacher." (Luke 6:39). Becoming like Him was an assumed aim of discipleship.

Peter and Paul spell this out in their letters, with Peter writing that we become like Him in what we do: Christ was "leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps." (1 Peter 2:21). Paul writes, "Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us." (Ephesians 5:1-2)

Paul also wrote that God is changing us to become like Him in who we are: "We all who contemplate Him are being transformed into His image with ever increasing glory." (2 Corinthians 3:18). God's aim for those who love Him is to be "...conformed to the image of his Son..." (Romans 8:29)

So early Christians, such as Augustine, saw becoming like Christ as the goal of life. An early Christian book is called 'The Imitation of Christ' (Thomas a Kempis) The more contemporary writer, C.S. Lewis, famously wrote that Jesus, "came to this world and became a man in order to spread to other people the kind of life He has – by what I call 'good infection'.

“

Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else.” (Mere Christianity)

To become like Christ is obviously not to take on the literal pattern of His life (e.g. by moving to the Holy Land!) but to be increasingly "possessed by the character traits of Jesus...Discipleship is being with another person, under appropriate conditions, in order to become capable of doing what that person does or to become like that what that person is. An 'apprentice' of Jesus is learning from him how to lead their life as he would lead their life if he were they." (Dallas Willard)



How do we know about Him?



The four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John give us our main portraits of Jesus.

(There is a four-page handout from the book 'Living Faith' that gives a summary of each of them, and there are also links to Bible Project posters which outline each gospel.)

Each of them unpacks two things -

Jesus' public life and ministry,

and His more private teachings with His disciples, leading up to His death and resurrection.

They each provide different lenses or emphases for us with, for example,

Matthew focussing on the way Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies,

Mark writing to strengthen people being persecuted,

Luke emphasising that Jesus came for all people, and

John exploring how God became human, how the "Word became flesh."

We regularly read from the gospels when we gather together (standing up to show their importance) and there are parts of the gospels that are used regularly in some churches - there are three prayers from Luke known as the Annunciation, the Benedictus, and the Nunc Dimittis, which unpack who Jesus is



What is the background to Jesus' life?



Looking at the story Jesus saw Himself as part of, as well as some of the names He used to describe Himself, helps us to see what He understood His purpose to be, and what discipleship is.

It will help us to become disciples for whom following Him is more than just about our own personal story – we will want to become like Him because we are more interested in joining in with God's story.

Jesus didn't think that He was starting something completely new, but instead that He was fulfilling God's story for the world and His people – we can only fully appreciate His significance by looking at what leads up to His life, death and resurrection.

The story of the Old Testament is a story much like the experience of human beings today. God's story has always been to have a (covenant) relationship of love with people and the world in which there is peace and wholeness.

God creates human beings to be a blessing in His name to the whole creation – He gives human beings a royal calling. But human beings distort that calling by going their own way – and the result is death and chaos.

In our time we can sense this double reality – we long for justice, truth and beauty, and yet consistently struggle with selfishness, greed and brokenness.

However, the story shows that God does not give up on His people, wanting them to be restored (saved) to their original calling. Starting with Abraham, He makes a covenant-people (Israel) who will bring His healing and be a blessing to the whole world, calling them back to God.

The Israelites long for God, and God keeps reaching out to His people, but they keep wandering away, forgetting Him, replacing Him, ignoring Him. Eventually, their wandering leads them to be enslaved by others, their place of worship destroyed.

As the story develops, a new hope emerges. The people look forward to a time when God will fully rule over His people as King and they will be restored. It will be a time anointed with God's presence (the Hebrew word to describe this anointing is 'messianic'). This hope emerges under the time when they are most blessed – King David's reign – when God promises: "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever." (2 Samuel 7:16).

Israel's prophets started to look for a particular anointed individual (Messiah) who would bring in this restoration, a king/priest who would finally bring God's 'kingdom' to His people again.

It was into this atmosphere of longing that Jesus came, while His people were under Roman occupation. (We look at this story in more detail in module 4, but there is a handout on Old Testament Messianic expectation.)



How does this make sense of who Jesus thought He was?



Knowing this background makes sense of the first words Jesus used to describe His purpose. Jesus began His ministry by saying, "The time has come...The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the gospel (good news)!" (Mark 1:15)

The word 'gospel' means 'good news', but originally in quite a specific way. It is normally good news connected to how rulers and their kingdoms are now victorious. You might spread a 'good news' announcement when someone had won a battle, or when a new king was in charge.

But by saying that this was a "gospel" about the coming of God's kingdom, Jesus was not only saying that He was bringing "God's rule" to His people at last, but that He was Israel's true King, the fulfilment of the entire story of the Old Testament. (There is a study handout from the Bible Project about how and when this word is used.)

Therefore, to be a disciple was (and still is) to be someone who will respond to this announcement by letting Him be King and live under His rule (kingdom).

The kingdom is where God is reigning - wherever what God wants done is done.

It also makes sense of what it means to call Jesus "Christ".

In three of the gospels we read the same story. "Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, 'Who do the crowds say I am?' They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.'



'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'God's Messiah.'" (Luke 9:18-20)

Peter recognised that Jesus was the Messiah, the anointed royal Saviour who had come to save the world from death and evil, restoring God's healing rule once again. (Christ is the Greek translation of Messiah).

The Gospel of Mark even begins with the words, "The good news about Jesus the Messiah, the son of God."





What did Jesus show about the Kingdom of God and what does that reveal about becoming like Him?

Disciples who are seeking to 'become like Him' will desire the Kingdom of God above everything else (it is named over 100 times in the gospels).

But in teaching and showing what the Kingdom looked like, Jesus needed to deal with some false expectations.

For example, the kingdom was not one earthly location or country. So, the kingdom was not about getting rid of your enemies to establish this or about bringing about earthly political power.

In fact, God's kingdom operates in an entirely different way from many human understandings of power. For this reason, He resisted His disciples using the title "Messiah", and did not use it for Himself, to avoid being interpreted as a political/military leader.

Yet in His three years of public ministry, Jesus reveals to us the heart of God's reign in several ways:

He clearly establishes that He is the true King and that God's Kingdom is only worth complete loyalty and commitment.

Jesus acts in ways which signalled that, in Him, God's king had arrived. For example, God's people of Israel were made up of twelve tribes. By gathering twelve disciples around Him, He is now deliberately reshaping God's people around Himself.

By going into the temple in Jerusalem and throwing out those who had corrupted its worship, He is cleansing God's throne room as only a King could do.

He is clear that the Kingdom of God was precious enough to be worth everything - painting a picture of its value as being like a pearl or treasure worth selling everything for (Matthew 13:44-46), but also challenging those who wanted to follow Him to complete obedience. (Matthew 8:18-22)

Disciples who are becoming like Him will be growing in giving Him their ultimate allegiance.





He teaches and shows in His life the nature of God's kingdom and the character of those who seek it.

Jesus reveals God's kingdom as upsetting the way the world operates and the ways people expect God to act.

As God rules the last become first, the poor and sinners are included ("For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Matthew 9:13) and, shockingly for His disciples, those who were previously not part of God's people of Israel are now included ("People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God." Luke 13:29) (The one-page handout 'Conversations Jesus had in the gospels' shows how Jesus focussed on individuals from all backgrounds.)

People who live under God's rule will be expressing in their lives the covenant partnership of love God always desires for human beings. This is why the two big themes of the whole Bible - covenant and kingdom - are so closely linked.

The Kingdom of God is the community of those who have accepted God's covenant. Jesus' life and teaching reveals how the character of God's covenant people will be beautifully and radically different - most specifically in the Sermon on the Mount.

Its opening statements show that God's covenant people will be humble, not self-seeking, thirsty for justice, peacemakers... because these characteristics will threaten worldly power they will also often be persecuted. (Matthew 5: 3-10)

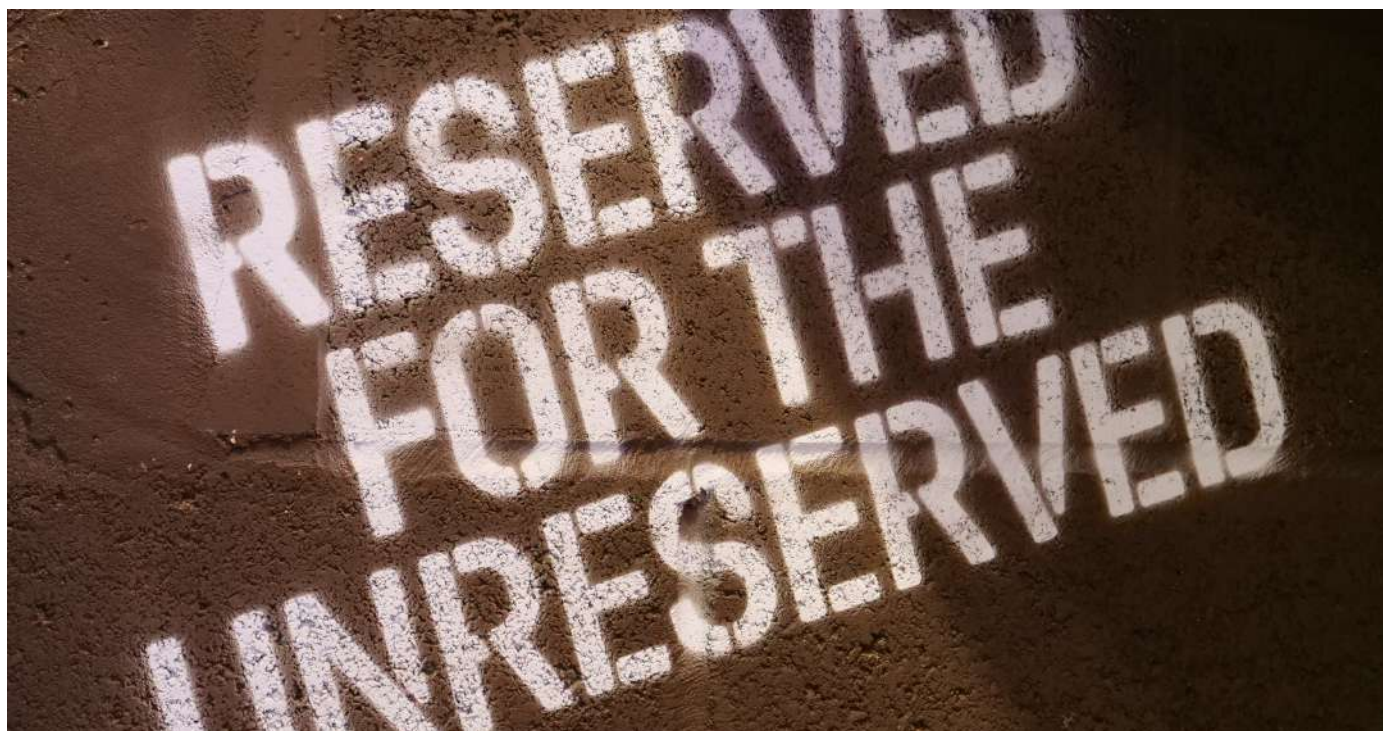
In His teaching Jesus gathers people towards God's kingdom not by establishing a set of rules, but by painting pictures of it with words, using parables and images beginning with, 'The Kingdom is like...'

By doing this He motivates through creating a new vision, but also challenges people to make their own responses.

Disciples who are becoming more like Christ will be seeking to express their covenant love for God in lives marked by the values of the kingdom.



For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."
(Matthew 9:13)





He demonstrates the rule of God as bringing restoration in body, mind and spirit, and driving out evil.

In announcing that in Him God's kingdom was near, Jesus is claiming that God's reign was entering reality, on earth as in heaven.

His healings and miracles are more than proof of His identity – they are demonstrations of God's saving and restoration of His people and creation.

At the beginning of His ministry He applies a promise from Isaiah that God will send someone "to proclaim good news to the poor...liberty to the captives...recovering of sight to the blind...liberty those who are oppressed" to Himself, saying, "Today, this is fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4: 17-21)

Having cleansed lepers (Matt 8:1-4), raised the dead (Matt 9:25), healed the blind (Matt 9:27-31) and cast out demons (9:32-34) he tells His disciples to do the same, "And proclaim as you go, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!'" (Matthew 10:7-8). The proof of God's rule of heaven on earth is this new wholeness.

Similarly, Jesus demonstrates God's rule by assuring people their sins are forgiven, in a way only God can. Importantly, Jesus understands that the reality of God's kingdom sometimes involves spiritual freedom from the presence of evil.

He demonstrates God's rule as coming against opposite (and sometimes hidden) forces of evil – which He ultimately confronts in His death and resurrection. "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." (Matthew 12:28)

Disciples who are becoming like Christ will want to be growing in seeing God's healing reign in their own lives, the lives of others, and in the life of creation.



He sees Himself as decisively establishing the fulness of God's kingdom, but also looking to a future completion.

While in Him "the kingdom has come near" (Mark 1:15) and the power of evil is broken in a decisive way, Jesus also looked to a future moment (which He expected to come soon) when it would come fully. Creation and people will be restored, and evil, sin and death ultimately defeated.

Many of the parables look to this future "banquet". This is also why two of the 'Beatitudes' talk about God's kingdom being in the present moment, but the rest talk about a time when the kingdom "will be".

It's also why Paul can write about God's presence and action in the present, but also look to "the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed." (Romans 8: 18-19) The final verses of the Bible strain for this future completion saying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Disciples who are becoming like Christ will be growing in the wisdom to seek God's kingdom, knowing that there is still struggle and incompleteness.





What was Jesus' favourite title for Himself and how does this affect discipleship?

There are a number of titles for Jesus throughout the Bible (and as we have seen He didn't use all of them) but the one He most consistently uses for himself is the 'Son of Man' (14 times in Mark alone) – even though others don't use it when speaking of Him.

In using it He is drawing from the Old Testament hope that the humanity God designed to be gloriously and peacefully reigning with Him, yet which walked away from God and has fallen into such self-destructive and chaotic ruin, will one day be restored to its original calling.

And this will be achieved because throughout the Bible God promises that one day a human being will come who will fully represent His glory and break the power of evil.

The prophet Daniel focusses in on this hope by describing a vision in which a human figure “like a son of man” is raised up by God over all the brutal kingdoms of the world, ruling with God and being worshipped with Him. (Daniel 7: 13-14)

This figure is a human yet divine character, opening the way for human beings to be restored to our original destiny.

At His trial, while refusing the title of Messiah, Jesus says, “But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God” (Luke 22: 67-69) clearly understanding His mission to be fulfilling this promise.

By adopting this title, Jesus reveals that He is both the representative human being, showing us how to live fully in God's kingdom, and the one through whom we can receive God's life and love.





How can a human being be God? How does this help us in becoming like Christ?

The claim that Jesus was more than a 'good teacher', but actually "God with us" asks us to be disciples who do more than follow an example but who offer our whole lives to Him. In what ways did Jesus claim to be God?

We have already seen how Christ acted as God's kingly representative, doing things only God can do, and adopted a title for Himself which reflected a human-divine nature.

In addition, throughout Mark's gospel Jesus is called "Son of God" (the title He is given in the first sentence of the book). In Mark 5:7 demons recognise Jesus as "Son of the Most High God", God calls Jesus his Son at the Transfiguration (Mark 9:7) and even the Roman centurion near the cross calls Jesus by this name. (Mark 15:39)

In case we think Jesus' claim to be God was a misunderstanding, the clearest statement about it comes in the gospel of John: "Again his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, 'I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?'

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We are not stoning you for any good work,' they replied, 'but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.'" (John 10:31-33)

Finally, despite it being clear from the commandments that only God should be worshipped, Jesus' disciples worshipped Him. (Luke 24:50-53) (A handout explores in more detail reasons why the claims about Jesus in the gospels can be credible.)

At the same time, while the early Christians in particular wrestled with how to understand it, the clear understanding they arrived at is that Jesus was fully God AND fully human (see the Athanasian creed).

In the 'incarnation', entering into our flesh, Jesus didn't stop being God in any way, but instead took on what it means to be human. He didn't leave behind anything of what it means to be God, and He took on all it means to be human. Whatever happened to Jesus, happened to, and inside of, God.

Neither was Jesus a mixture of "human body/divine mind" - He was completely human in every way. (A handout summary of a chapter from "Café Theology" explores how and why these ideas are balanced.) In the next session we shall see why this is important in understanding the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection.





In terms of becoming like Him, knowing that Jesus was fully God and fully human also helps us because:

We don't have to choose between being 'godly' and human.

Jesus being fully God and fully human shows how God can be present in a human life without restricting what it means to be human. When we allow Him to work in and through us (like, for example, Mary) He does not overwhelm us and paint us out of the picture but releases us to contribute even more than we could by ourselves.

Becoming like Christ is not about leaving our humanity behind – it is about allowing God to liberate us to live a fully human life. Because the “divine doesn't swamp the human,” (Mike Lloyd) becoming like Christ is about combining practical human wisdom with spiritual power. As Mike Lloyd continues,

“Some people say you shouldn't take out an insurance policy. Compare this with Nehemiah, who when the walls of Jerusalem were under threat of an attack 'prayed to God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.' In a properly incarnational mindset the divine and human belong together, with prayer and preparation not squeezing each other out.”



We have an example we can truly follow.

St Athanasius said, “He became what we are so that we could become what He is.”

By meeting us as we are, in Jesus God makes Himself truly accessible to human beings. The WWI army chaplain Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy put it like this: “In Christ I meet the real God. In him I find no metaphysical abstraction, but God speaking to me in the only language I can understand which is the human language.”

In addition, Jesus has taken our full humanity into the heart of God, showing us that God fully understands us. “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin.” (Hebrews 4:15).

What difference might it make to know that the fully human Jesus understands grief, pain, or injustice?



How did Jesus demonstrate a spiritually healthy life?



While these first two sessions are focussed on our understanding of who Christ is, and why we become like Him, we can nevertheless start to look at the pattern of His life as something on which to shape our lives in a very practical way.

When Jesus called His disciples to follow Him, He was also doing so to offer them “life in all its fullness”. (John 10:10) What does this life look like?

In the life of Christ, we can see this fullness in the way Jesus lived out a balance between three relationships: with God, with His close community, and to the wider world. Sometimes the three dimensions of

UP (to God)
IN (to community) and
OUT (to be a blessing to others)

are used to describe this.

For example, in Luke 6: 12-17 we can see that Jesus

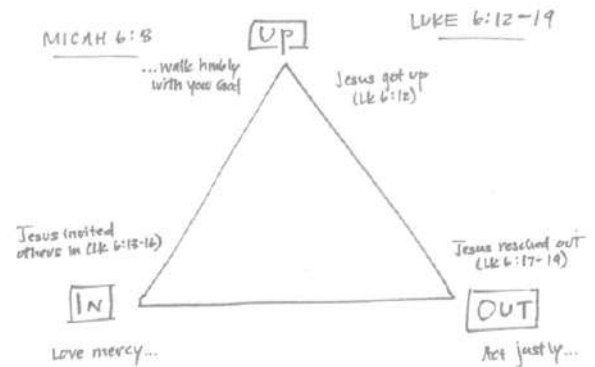
first went up a mountain to pray (spending time with God - UP).

From there, He chose disciples to be with Him (IN).

Then together they went and blessed others (OUT).

Why might it be important that things happened in this order? Why do you think Jesus only chose a small number?

In John 15 Jesus tells his disciples that they must “bear fruit” (OUT), but that first they must love one another (IN) and cannot do either unless they remain in Him (UP).



We see the same balance of relationships with God – community – others, in the Old Testament prophet Micah, who asks, “What does the Lord require of you?” Three things: To love mercy (have peaceful relationships with others – IN). To act justly (be a blessing in the world – OUT). To walk humbly with your God. (UP).

A spiritually balanced life is healthy and fruitful. The consequences of being unbalanced may lead to burn out, isolation, or being ineffective in the work God has given us to do.

For example, what might be the difficulties we face if we only pay attention to our relationship with God and close community, but never look outwards? Or if we look outwards with others, but do not focus on God? Or if we spend time with God, looking outwards, but do not connect with a close community? Christ lived the best life possible. Dallas Willard wrote that



He “is the smartest man who has ever lived...He always has the best information on everything and certainly on the things that matter most in the human life.”