



Becoming like Christ: Session 1 – Facilitator’s ppt script.

The numbers correspond with the slides. This is an edited version of the Content booklet. ① indicates an animation click is needed.

1. Intro slide

2. Why do disciples aim to ‘become like Christ’?

3. The aims of this module are to ① grow in our *understanding* of who Christ is and what He has done (the focus of the first two sessions) ① 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).
4. 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?) ① **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?) ① **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?)

5. Why is knowing Jesus central to knowing God better?

6. Many people may sense God’s reality through general wisdom and experience. But the reason Christ is at the centre of discipleship is simple. ① 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*. ① Martin Luther King looked for Christians to have, “zeal for Christ” and “zest for His kingdom”.
7. As the first Christians pieced together who Jesus was, 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*. Jesus answered: ① “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9) 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”. ① Irenaeus put it like this: “In Jesus Christ, God allows himself to be seen, and in seeing God we come alive.”

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

9. ① **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) 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 ① “true God from true God” and “one in being with the Father”.
10. **Christ the ① 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.”

11. Is ‘becoming like Christ’ really part of discipleship? And in what ways might we expect this to happen?

12. As human beings, *we are all being formed by something or someone*, whether on purpose or not. Jesus’ invitation to His disciples was to be apprentices, who would intentionally become like Him. ① 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*.
13. To become ① 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)

14. How do we know about Him?

15. 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, ① 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."

16. What is the background to Jesus' life?

17. 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*. ① As the story develops, a new hope emerges. ① The people look forward to a time when God will fully rule over His people as King and they will be restored. 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 ① 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.

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

19. 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) ① 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 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. Therefore, to be a disciple was (and still is) someone *who will respond to this announcement by letting Him be King and live under His rule (kingdom)*. ① The kingdom is where God is reigning – wherever what God wants done is done.

20. It also makes sense of what it means to call Jesus "Christ". Three times we read the same story. "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)

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

22. 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). 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: ① **He clearly establishes that He is the true King and that God's Kingdom is only worth complete loyalty and commitment.** ① Disciples who are becoming like Him will be growing in giving Him their ultimate allegiance.

23. He ① **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 ① *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. ① 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.

24. He ① **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. ① 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*. ① 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 of creation.

25. He ① **sees Himself as decisively establishing the fulness of God's kingdom, but also looking to a future completion.** While in Him ① "the kingdom has come near" (Mark 1:15) and the power of evil 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.

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

27. 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 ① 'Son of Man' (14 times in Mark alone). Throughout the Bible God promises that ① 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 ① 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, ① "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 ① 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.

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

29. 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*. ① 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 ① 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 recognize 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?' ① '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)

30. At the same time, while the early Christians in particular wrestled with how to understand it, the clear understanding they arrived at is that ① 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. ① 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*. ① Neither was Jesus a mixture of "human body/divine mind" - He was completely human in every way.

31. In terms of becoming like Him, ① knowing that Jesus was fully God and fully human also helps us because: ① **We don't have to choose between being 'godly' and human**. Jesus being fully God and fully human shows how God ① 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) ① He does not overwhelm us and paint us out of the picture but releases us to contribute even more than we could by ourselves.

32. **We ① have an example we can truly follow**. St Athanasius said, ① "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 WW1 army chaplain Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy put it like this: ① "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...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?

33. How did Jesus demonstrate a spiritually healthy life?

34. 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? 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 ① 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."