



Becoming like Christ: Session 2 – 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. **How is it possible that I can approach God?**
3. In session 1 we have explored ① two of the three reasons why disciples seek to ‘become like Christ’- ① He is the one *through whom we can know God*. He is ‘Emmanuel’, God with us and the ‘Son of Man’ who reveals God in human likeness. And ① because *He deserves our allegiance* - He is the anointed King (Messiah) who in His coming brings God’s kingdom – God’s healing and loving rule – on earth as it is in heaven.
4. The ① third reason we are exploring for becoming like Christ is because *He is the one who has made this possible*. He is the one who rescues us from evil, or what the Bible diagnoses as sin. ① The name ‘Jesus’ in itself reveals this as the centre of His purpose – it means ‘God saves’.
5. **Where do we see this being saved in the New Testament?**
6. One of the stories that is found in all four of the gospels describes how a ‘sinful woman’ anoints Jesus’ feet with perfume and her tears and dries them with her hair. She is pouring out her love and gratitude to Him because she has experienced the freedom of forgiveness. Jesus tells a story to show the guests who are there that, ① “her many sins have been forgiven – as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.” (Luke 7:47)
7. In the middle of the prayer Jesus taught us is the invitation to pray regularly, ① “Forgive us our sins...” Being restored (saved) through forgiveness is at the heart of the good news of being a Christian, and at the heart of who Jesus is. For Jesus, His death and resurrection were necessary to fulfil God’s plan to bring the world back to Himself. He came ① “for us and our salvation” (Nicene Creed). By becoming human, dying and rising again, God through Christ has rescued the world from sin and death.
8. **Does thinking I need forgiveness lead to low self-esteem?**
9. In one of his letters Paul gives himself a blunt assessment, but without any hint of this being anything but a *healthy* approach: “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst.” (1 Timothy 1:15) While most religions teach about ‘sin’, it’s true that there are many examples of people who have been crippled by guilt, shame and even ‘bad religion’ in a life and soul-destroying way. Even while coming as Saviour, Jesus angrily criticised religious leaders who “tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders”. At a time when identity and mental health can be fragile, it is vital to have an understanding of sin, forgiveness and salvation which offers a *real diagnosis of our condition* and is about *restoring* people in God’s image. The best starting place for our wellbeing has to offer a *realistic* view of God and of ourselves and the world.
10. **In what ways do we need to be realistic about approaching God?**
11. Moses once came across the presence of God in the desert. Yet when he approached the bush God said, ① “Do not come any closer...Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” Similarly, the prophet Isaiah had a vision of God being worshipped by angels singing, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” His response to seeing God was, ① “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.” Again and again throughout the Bible God is described as “holy”. The more realistic our approach to God, the more we will be *overwhelmed by His holiness*.
12. The unique holiness of God is like the sun which is *life-giving* to all around it. But the sun is also *dangerous* – you cannot get too close. The paradox at the heart of God’s holiness is that it will destroy anything that is not equally holy, not because God’s holiness is bad, but because it is good. ① Just as the same radiant light and heat from the sun gives life or destroys depending on how close you are to it, so God’s intense love for people *and* His “wrathful” judgement are from the same burning “white heat” of His Holy Love – but *experienced in different ways*. This attribute of God is described as a “consuming” or “refining” fire in the Bible. ① The more accurate our view of the unique, loving, holy God the more we will have a realistically healthy understanding of ourselves.
13. **In what ways do we need to be realistic about ourselves and the world?**
14. The writer Donald Miller has this reflection on trying to be good: ① “I found myself trying to love the right things without God’s help, and it was impossible. I tried to go one week without thinking a negative thought about another human being, and I couldn’t do it. Before I tried that experiment, I thought I was a nice person, but after trying it, I

realised I thought bad things about people all day long, and that my natural desire was to love darkness.” If we are made to love God and love other people as ourselves, Miller is honest that he both *fails* to do it and finds it *impossible* to do. He knows what is good but falls short. Or as St Paul says, ① “For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.” (Romans 7:19) This reflects the robust description of the reality of the human condition we find in the Bible, and which accurately portrays our world today. As G.K. Chesterton put it, ① “Sin is the one doctrine you can’t dispute.”

15. Sin is not a religious word for bad behaviour but has many aspects. It is a description of what happens when we ① **fall short of the goal** – it’s a failure of the truly human calling to love God and love others, and the Bible views this as embedded in ① the story of humanity like a chain reaction, creating a kind of slavery to sin. There is a word which describes the **breakdown of relationship** between people or between people and God – when we betray trust we *transgress*. By ignoring God’s will, Adam breaks trust. There is a word which describes what happens when ① **something originally good has been bent out of shape or distorted**, or what should be a blessing is corrupted – *iniquity* is distorted behaviour which leads to wickedness and guilt. (In the Bible, the idea of *punishment* is more often about people being *left to deal with the consequences* of their own disfigurement).

16. What are the results of this Fall?

17. The Bible reflects a world in which the effect of this fall affects not just the individual person, but in which ① the *environment* of our relationship with God, with others and with creation has been polluted. The world is not as God wants it to be. ① We long for liberation in two ways: **from the chaos, disease, war, decay and ultimately death which dominate the physical world**. But in Scripture this is linked to an unseen conflict in ‘the heavens’, in which prideful spiritual forces of evil, represented as a snake, or satan, or **principalities and powers, seek to undermine God’s kingdom**. ① This is why we fight “not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Ephesians 6:12)

18. What did Jesus do for us on the cross?

19. The meaning of the cross is like a *diamond* – one gift but with many ways to see it. Over the next few sessions we will explore a number of these. But in the letter to the Colossians Paul writes that by dying and rising again Jesus achieved (at least) two things for us which we could not do for ourselves: ① **Dealing with sin through complete forgiveness** which saves us and puts us right with God and ① **Dealing with its destructive effects** through victory over the fallen powers which pollute the world and lead to death. So the meaning of the cross is personal *and* cosmic – and it is at the centre of God’s purpose.

20. What helps me understand Jesus’ death?

21. The word ‘crucial’ refers to something that we cannot do without – and literally means ‘like a cross’. The teaching of the Bible is that we cannot put ourselves right with God. But through His torture, death and resurrection Jesus “ransoms, heals, restores and forgives” us in a way that nothing else can achieve. At the heart of the cross is ‘atonement’. God always wants to be reconciled with His covenant people. But for the forgiveness which restores the relationship to be possible, there must be a way to make amends for the damage caused – to ‘atone’ for it in a way that *heals its effects forever*. To atone literally means to cover over someone’s debt – whether that is a *direct* debt because of specific harm done or, as in much of our experience, how our sin can *indirectly pollute* our relationships with God, creation and each other. ① The animal sacrifices of the Old Testament provided a temporary solution but did not effect the change God was looking for. ① God promises an atoning sacrifice which will deal with sin once and for all, through a person – a King – who would become a “suffering Servant” – and die for the people. Isaiah promised that this person would bear the consequences of all the kinds of brokenness we have described: “But he was pierced for our *transgressions*, he was crushed for our *iniquities*; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53: 4-10 abridged)

22. How does Jesus’ death reconcile us to God?

23. Jesus and the New Testament writers rarely use the actual word ‘atonement’ to describe His death and resurrection. Instead, different words emphasise the wonderful way in which Jesus saves us by taking the consequences of sin upon Himself. These pictures serve to reveal the *completeness* of what God has done. **Who He is on the cross:** ① **Ransom** Through the cross Jesus gives “His life as a ransom for many”. (Mark 10:45) ① **Sacrifice** He is the “sacrifice” (Ephesians 5:2), the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29) “...our Passover lamb, (who) has been sacrificed.” (1 Corinthians 5:7) ① **Representative**. He represents us, standing in our place and bearing the punishment for our sins: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us...” (2 Corinthians 5: 21) “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross...” (1 Peter 2:24) He also becomes “a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.’” (Galatians 3:13) ① **Fully God and fully human:** By being *divine* Jesus isn’t only able to take sin into God at the cross – He also destroys it as sin dissolves on contact with the undiluted holiness of God. But only by becoming

fully human is it possible for a holy God enter into the full depths of sin, evil and death, taking our place and responsibility for our history of failure. Only by being one of us, can He be both our judge *and* our saviour.

24. **How this reconciles us to God:** ① **Redemption and freedom.** To be redeemed is to be bought out of slavery and the bondage of sin and being under a law we could never keep. ① **Justification and no condemnation.** Atonement also means that the *consequences* we might expect from a holy God for sin are removed. There is now “no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1) ① **Cleansing and purification.** Just as the sprinkled blood in the Temple symbolically purified the community, so on the cross while Jesus takes on the sin of the world, human beings now *receive His purity in exchange*: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21) ① **Reconciliation.** Through the cross, the peace with God we could never earn for ourselves is achieved. “...we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” (Romans 5:11)

25. **Did Jesus protect us from an angry Father?**

26. One possible understanding of the cross is to see a ‘good Son’ protecting the world from an ‘angry Father’ – as if God has a split personality. Some have described it as “cosmic child abuse”. Rather than being good news of freedom and forgiveness the cross becomes a place of fear and guilt. Rather than seeing a God of love and grace we see a God of *contained anger*. If the picture we have of God is the most defining thing about us, it is vital that at the cross we see that: ① **God is fully involved in every way.** So while the various pictures God gives us to understand the atonement speak in many different ways, the foundational truth is that on the cross “*God was in Christ* reconciling the world to himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19) pouring Himself out in the only way His nature allows. ① **The love of God for us is on display.** God IS love and therefore cannot do anything but love. Even before the cross Christ revealed the nature of that love in forgiving sins and restoring people. John 3:16, perhaps the most famous verse in the Bible, says, “For God so *loved* the world that He gave His only Son.” The cross is not just something that God who is love does; it is the expression of who He is. St Catherine of Siena said, ① “Nails were not enough to hold God-and-man fastened to the cross, had not love held him there.”

27. **How does Jesus’ life and death help me to become like Christ in my lived experience?**

28. If God is to genuinely change us, we need to be able to come to Him with **confidence and trust**. As the writer to Hebrews puts it, “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16) Religion can be about how human beings build a bridge to God through a series of outward behaviours or sacrifices. This can lead to ‘performance anxiety’ – we are never quite sure if we have done enough to earn God’s favour. But through His life, death and resurrection, Jesus reverses this direction – ① God builds the bridge towards humanity and becomes the sacrifice. His “perfect love casts out fear.” (1 John 4:18)

29. To become like Christ, we need to be **set free from guilt or shame at our core**. In our Western context, we are familiar with the idea that our *guilt* has been dealt with through Jesus’ atoning death. But other Christians (from the more Eastern Orthodox tradition) have emphasised that the cross takes away the *shame* that creates distance from God and others. Most people in the world identify more with an honour/shame understanding than a guilt/innocence one, and the issue of shame is referred to far more widely in the Bible than that of guilt. ① **In a ‘guilt culture’ we could say that God deals with what I have done by taking its consequences away. In a ‘shame culture’ we could say that God restores who I am and my relationship with Him and others.** This is the message of the lost sheep or coin that has been found. Of the Prodigal Son who returns to His father and is restored to relationship.

30. Linked to this is **being freed from the need to earn God’s favour**. The elder brother in the story of the Prodigal Son illustrates how difficult human beings can find it not to have a relationship with God based on a ‘contract’. But the basis for becoming like Christ is knowing that God’s favour is given to us *without regard to whether we deserve it or not*. ① “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

31. The most revealing aspect of our sinfulness can be the easy way in which we mentally judge or compare ourselves with others. But the more we understand the cross, and the more we see people as those for whom Christ died, **the less likely we are to judge others**. When Paul reminds the Philippian Christians of how Jesus, “humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross” he frames it by reminding them to ① “have the same mindset as Christ Jesus...in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” (Philippians 2: 4,5,8) Finally, ① **genuine change comes not from fear, but from love for a Saviour**. Paul wanted to ① “live for God...who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2: 19-20)

32. **How do I receive salvation in my lived experience?**

33. The covenant relationship God offers us means that He never forces His love on us but *invites us to respond* in our daily lives. In doing so, the confidence, healing and restoration that God offers can move from idea to reality through **embracing two attitudes which are expressed through one habit**. The attitudes are *repentance* and *faith*. The habit of

confession can help us to be rooted in these attitudes in our daily lives. ① **Repentance.** Jesus' call to people was 'repent and believe' (Mark 1:15). In the Bible, being able to repent is the first step that "leads to life." (Acts 1:18). It is much more than feeling sorry. It means 'return' or 'turn round', literally to change your mind. It is the decision to go God's way – the first essential step towards change and healing. ① **Faith.** The Bible repeatedly contrasts the fruitless path of trying to be put right with God by obeying the law with instead receiving His righteousness through faith. Receiving God's salvation is about turning towards Him and having *confident trust*, "faith in" Christ. John's gospel is written so that, "...you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." (John 20:30-31)

34. How does the habit of confession help in this and change me?

35. Confession is a practice or habit through which we can consciously receive God's forgiveness. It involves repenting and placing our faith in the faithfulness of Jesus. **Why is it necessary?** ① "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) There is a symbolic way we can see this in the Bible. During the Last Supper when Simon Peter refuses to let Jesus wash his feet Christ replies, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean..." (John 13: 8-10) The preacher Charles Spurgeon linked this to confession when he said, ① "We have been cleansed once for all, but our feet still need to be washed from the defilement of our daily walk as children of God." Confession is a practice for those who are fundamentally "already clean".

36. How do we do it? In terms of the attitude we bring to confession, the word used in the Bible means ① 'to say the same thing'. In other words, to *agree with God about our sins* – not to cover up. Bernard of Clairvaux offers this counsel in terms of feelings of sorrow: ① "Sorrow for sin is necessary, but it should not involve endless self-preoccupation. You should dwell also on the glad remembrance of the loving kindness of God." Practically speaking, there is no specific rule about how often confession is good, but it is always wise to keep short accounts with God and to give time to think through the things we need or want to confess. ① We are, first and foremost, confessing to God alone: "I acknowledged my sin to You, and I did not cover my iniquity..." (Psalm 32:5) However, the Bible also offers the possibility of confessing before other people, whether this is through using particular forms of words when we gather, or with a specific person. "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed." (James 5:16) Some Christians - Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and some Anglicans – do this through the sacrament of confession (also called the sacrament of penance or the sacrament of reconciliation), as they confess their sins to a priest. Others find they can confess to trusted Christian friends. The Content Booklet unpacks some thoughts around listening well to other's confessions.

37. What does it do? The purpose of the practice of confession is ① **greater closeness to God**, opening us up to God working in our lives as we are "entrusting ourselves, beyond sin, to the mercy of a loving and forgiving God." (Pope John Paul II) ① **It deals with pride and brings psychological wholeness...** "it breaks the build up of shame within which happens when we hoard our mistakes and keep them to ourselves. The fear of rejection gets shattered when we sit in front of someone and get to hear the sweet words, 'You are forgiven'." (KXC website). ① **It rebels against individualism** by opening us up to one another and creating community. It helps us acknowledge that our behaviours have consequences while **healing the "loneliness of sin"**. "Sin wants to be alone with people. It takes them away from the community. The more lonely people become, the more destructive the power of sin over them...." ① Sin must be brought into the light. What is unspoken is said openly and confessed. All that is secret and hidden comes to light." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)