



## Becoming like Christ: Session 4 – 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. What is Christian character?
3. Becoming ① like Christ is not just what we choose to *do*, but who we *are*. We are all becoming *someone*, and our characters are being shaped in some way by those who influence us. Jesus is gentle and compassionate to the woman caught in adultery, but He is also sometimes angry and challenging - passionately opposed to injustice. The “fruit of the Spirit” is the clearest summary of Jesus’ character. ① He is a person of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23) How can we helpfully summarize all these Christlike qualities? ① “And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” But this begs the question...
4. What is love?
5. The Bible says, “This is how we know what love is...” The Bible offers ① four words (in the New Testament Greek) which we can compare to help us fully understand the nature of God’s love. There is the kind of love that looks AT someone or something and finds them attractive in some way. (I love your hair/your car/your smile.) The Greek word for this is *storge*. ① There is the kind of love that looks at life WITH someone, sharing friendship, a sense of purpose and values. (I love your opinions/outlook/the way you see life.) The Greek word for this is *philia*. ① There is the kind of love that looks INTO someone – the love of intimacy, soul touching soul. The Greek word for this is *eros*.
6. But when the Bible defines the love of *Christlike character* it uses a different word. And it does not give us an *abstract* definition of this kind of love, but says, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us.” (1 John 3:16) The Greek word for love here is *agape* – ① and we see it demonstrated in Jesus dying for us. It is the kind of love that bears the cost of emptying itself on behalf of others. ① **Agape is blind:** It is blind because it has nothing to do with ‘looking’ for qualities in other people. ① **Agape sees:** Ultimately, *agape* is a choice at the centre of who we are to *see other people as those who were worth Christ dying for*. In terms of loving people, it is *blind* to their qualities but *sees* beyond those to view them through the lens of how God sees them. To do this is how the Bible defines love.
7. How is the cross the greatest revelation of God’s character and love?
8. The depth of love one has for a beloved can be measured by the sacrifice the lover is willing to make for the beloved. The cross is the fullest picture we have of the nature of God’s character and love which overflows to us. To become like Christ is to grow in this self-sacrificial *agape*, being willing to go as far in love towards others *as He does*. Paul says, ① “Be imitators of God. Live in love as Christ loved us *and gave himself for us...*” (Ephesians 5:1-2)
9. What does this show about the main way God works in the world?
10. While Jesus’ death and resurrection was the fullest expression of God’s love and power, ① *everything He did* led up to it and was part of it. In *every aspect of His life* He brought in God’s kingdom and pushed against the way evil had warped the world with precisely the same kind of *agape* ① He demonstrated on the cross. See examples on the slide.
11. How should this make Christian love distinctive?
12. Cross-shaped *agape* for people means that what often makes Christian love distinctive is choosing to act for the good for others *whether they can repay you or not*. ① It is also about our capacity to love our enemies – giving worth to them not because of what they do, but because of their true value as those Christ was willing to die for. It is important to know that Jesus is not telling us to be *passive* in the face of evil. Rather, He is showing us the most powerful way that evil *can be truly resisted*. ① Self-sacrificial *agape* is a ‘weapon’ because it stops us from becoming similarly evil and instead overcomes evil with good. It shows evil up for what it is, breaks the cycle of people hurting one another, and is the only way of creating the opportunity for genuine change.
13. Doesn’t this make God look weak?
14. From the beginning, Paul recognized that “...we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles...” ① A *stumbling block* because it is offensive to believe that a holy, powerful God could take on sinful flesh, let alone be crucified. *Foolishness* because in a world where power is so often about the ability to force your will on others, Jesus did precisely the opposite. Many people in the world today continue to find the idea of a human and crucified God offensive, or even foolish for the same kind of reasons. ① But by becoming a crucified human being, God’s love and power are *not compromised*, but *fully revealed*. God does not reveal His loving essence by imposing His will on people – any ‘god’ can do that. God reveals the glory of His love by *being willing to stoop to the furthest extreme of*

weakness possible. And God's power is not restricted by being crucified, but rather He overcomes evil in the only way truly possible - through self-sacrificial love.

## 15. How do I become like Christ in my relationships?

**16. Including <sup>①</sup> and welcoming.** As we grow in Christ's *agape* love, like Him we will become the kind of people who notice and invite those who are at the bottom of the world's pile. Merton: "We have to love others for their own good, not for the good we get out of them." *Practically this might be expressed the more we can reach out to those who cannot repay us.*

<sup>①</sup> **Not judging.** The more God becomes king in our lives, the more we will let go of the right to judge others. Jesus is clear: "Do not judge..." (Matthew 7:1) The *agape* love of Christ on the cross gives us the most powerful way to stop judging others, because it reminds us to *see ourselves as those who have been forgiven and accepted by God*. Being realistic about ourselves is the first step away from a judgemental character. "How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?" (Matthew 7:4-5) *Practically this might mean first of all noticing when we are being judgemental of others, remembering God's grace to us, and choosing to see them as God sees them.* <sup>①</sup> **Honouring.** To honour someone means affirming their God-given worth in such a way that we help *draw out the goodness in them*, to deliberately treat them as Christ. *Agape* love and honour are the foundations for the most intimate relationships of all. A sexual relationship centred on *agape* and honour makes sex into something in which two people put the other first. *Practically this will mean that we love people in a Christlike way the more our first priority is to honour them by showing them what they are worth to God.*

**17. Forgiving.** <sup>①</sup> As hard as forgiving people can be (and it is often a journey we need to help each other with) Jesus said that there should be no limit on how much we forgive others. Jesus and Paul always link our ability to forgive others with knowing how much we have been forgiven. "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Ephesians 4: 32) *Practically this will always mean when we are seeking to forgive others that we always start by looking at ourselves first.* <sup>①</sup> **Coming against things in the opposite spirit.** In some forms of martial arts, the way you defeat your enemy is not by responding with greater aggression but acting in such a way (for example stepping aside at the right moment) that your opponent is brought down *by the force of their own attack*. In many ways this is a good picture of how *agape* love overcomes evil. By replying to an insult, not with another insult, but with silence, or even with blessing, the insult is robbed of its power. Time and again, we see this in the way Jesus demonstrated love. He refused to answer back, He said that if someone slaps you on one cheek offer them the other. He allowed evil to run its course on the cross, but ultimately triumphed. As we have seen, this was not a surrender to evil, but the way of truly defeating it.

## 18. How does this shape the church community?

**19.** More than anything else, Jesus said people would come to see us as disciples when they see the love that we have for each other. He gave His final command to them at the Last Supper: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13: 34-35) Practically speaking, growing in *agape* love will be expressed in at least two important ways: <sup>①</sup> **No hierarchy or division.** It is true that some roles in the church are more public than others. But in a community of *agape* love, no one will be more important than anyone else. Whereas outside the church community people might be divided up by being in this tribe, or in this social grouping, or in that gender, these distinctions no longer have relevance in a family in which the main thing about its members is that they are "in Christ". With this in mind, the essential qualification for those who want to lead is a desire to be downwardly mobile. <sup>①</sup> **Offering my gifts.** If there is a perceived division in the church between those at the front who are leading and the rest of the community, it can feel hard to build the equal family which Paul writes about in which *each part of the body can share gifts*. Yet it is clear that every disciple is given gifts to share. "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." (1 Corinthians 12:27) But there can be at least two reasons why this some don't use their gifts. *We may not be aware of what the gifts God has given us or lack confidence.* We can encourage each other by recognising and naming the gifts we see in each other. *We might misunderstand humility.* There can be a false humility (or even an upside-down pride: "I don't want to look stupid or fail") about not being able to offer my gifts. But true humility is not thinking of yourself too little, or too much. *It is the freedom that comes from not having to think about ourselves at all.*

## 20. Can I really become the kind of Christlike person who can *agape* others - loving enemies and forgiving those who hurt me?

**21.** Genuine change happens from the inside out. While human beings "look at the outside, God looks at the heart". (1 Samuel 16:7) In the Sermon on the Mount it is not the *actions we do* that matter to God, but the *inner attitudes we have*. Jesus taught that it is the *inner* person that generates our outward responses and actions. "A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. <sup>①</sup> For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of." (Luke 6: 45) So over time Paul said he did the things Christ does because they *became things he wanted to do*. The *natural choices* he made were to do what Christ would do if He were in Paul's situation, in the strength that He gives. Paul's habitual thoughts, feelings and actions became more like Christ's. <sup>①</sup> How does this happen? It is through the habits we live by that we are transformed like this in two ways: *Our minds*

are renewed so we see the world and people more and more as God sees them. *Our innermost selves (hearts) are changed by allowing God's Holy Spirit to change us from the inside out.*

## 22. How is my mind renewed?

23. The first step to change is always the renewal of our minds – seeing things as much as we can as God sees them. When Jesus called people to turn back to God the first step was to “repent” – literally to change their way of thinking. Paul encourages us to ① “have the same mindset as Christ Jesus”. (Philippians 2:5) The more we think about something, the more it *becomes a natural part of the way we understand reality*. Our thought patterns are like the development of a footpath in a field. ② When people first start walking through an overgrown field it is hard work, and the path is barely visible. But over time, the more we walk that way, the easier and more visible the path becomes.

## 24. How do I grow in wanting what God wants?

25. Genuine change occurs as we grow into wanting what God wants. In the Bible, the word used to describe where the deepest desires that shape us come from is the *heart*. Another word we could use is the “will”. The part of us that wills things. Our will is what controls us. ① There is an ‘automatic’ and immediate aspect of our will, driven by appetites. It’s the part of us, for example, which sees someone’s shiny new car and reacts by wanting it. (The New Testament calls this the “flesh”). But our “heart” is the deeper “reflective” will, from which the true, long-term choices, longings and visions for our life come – the place where we sometimes “want to want” things. It’s where we want to do the right thing. While our “flesh” might want to eat that éclair, our deeper will wants to diet in order to be healthy. *It’s where our character is born.*
26. To be a disciple is to let the character of *Jesus’ will become our will*. Thankfully, becoming like Christ in our will and character is much less about what we do, *and much more about what God does in us*. In fact, becoming like Christ always takes more than our own will power. Jesus said, ① “Without me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5) ② The deepest desires we have can become more like what God wants by allowing Him to flow in our hearts.

## 27. How do I give God the space to change me?

28. As we have explored *it is our habits which shape our desires, and which make us want the things we know in our minds are true and good*. For example, the habit of shopping shapes us. Most people know that the more we get the more you want. But whenever we buy something, we think that will satisfy us. Yet the habit of shopping ends up making us want more. The more we shop, or the more we eat...the more we want. ① *It is things we do which set the direction of what we love*. If someone is addicted to pornography and is tempted to watch it at night, simple will power won’t be enough. What will count is whether, long before the moment of temptation, they have been shaped by in their mind and heart by habits through which they are allowing God to change them into someone who *wants* to turn away from it. Only then will they have the ‘soul reflex’ to be able to say no to what they want in the moment, and yes to what they really want in their heart. One picture from the Pacific islands puts it this way. A man keeps two dogs in a cave. These two dogs are in continual conflict with one another. They are like the Holy Spirit living in us, and the desires in us which pull us away from God. The man has a choice about which dog he feeds. The dog that is fed and nourished will grow stronger and will gain the upper hand over the animal that is starved. It is through habits that engage our mind and heart with God that we access the power of God’s Spirit, enabling Him to deal with the parts of us that need to change. While it is possible for God to change our character in ‘Damascus’ moments, ① most of us only grow in becoming Christlike over time through the process of day-to-day life. By “waxing on and off” the Karate Kid can perform fantastic karate moves when needed. By reading the Scriptures over time we might more easily see our difficult neighbour as God sees them. By worshipping regularly with others our openness to God’s presence may grow.

## 29. How much is God’s work, and how much is mine?

30. Our relationship with God is a partnership in which God never forces His will on us. Because He is *agape* love, God always invites us to be in covenant with Him. This means that He will only change us to the extent that *we are willing to allow Him*. In any kind of relationship, both parties have a part to play. ① By adopting the practices of Christ, we are playing our part – creating the conditions for God’s Spirit to change us. “Without Him we can’t, but without us He won’t.” God’s cooperation with us is another example of His self-giving love. Richard Foster describes this as ‘the path of disciplined grace.’ ‘It is ‘grace’ because it is free; it is ‘disciplined’ because there is something for us to do.’

## 31. Can this happen on my own?

32. The character of Christ grows in us as the beliefs in our minds are renewed and the desires of our hearts are shaped by God working in us. The ‘method’ of this is simply by giving God room as we centre our lives around the life-giving practices of Jesus. But there is one more essential way in which we can open ourselves up to God’s work in us, and that is through *relationship with other disciples*, in which we are intentional about growing together. Community with others will change us if ① relationships are genuine and close enough to *reveal the parts of us which need to change*, but which we might be unconscious of when we are on our own. Particularly in the Christian community, where we do not choose our brothers and sisters, we can come face to face with the ways in which we need to be shaped by *agape* love.