



Becoming like Christ: Session 5 – 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. **Should life be easy for a disciple who is becoming like Christ?**
3. As one writer puts it, “...the Scriptures teach us that there is no path to God that does not pass through the wilderness. The God of the Bible is the God of the desert.” (David Runcorn)
4. There at least four good reasons why in some ways the fact that life is difficult can *intensify* in the adventure of being a disciple. ① **You are now a ‘new creation’ - open to God changing you from the inside out.** We have been made “perfect forever” as a once for all act. (Hebrews 10:14) But this is also a *process* which involves increasingly being able to allow God to be in control. ① **You are now seeking what He wants in the world above everything else** – which can put you in conflict with your own instinctive desires (what the Bible calls the “flesh”) – and with the some of the values which surround you (what the Bible calls “the world”). ① **You are now engaged in the spiritual battle between good and evil.** For example, Jesus warned that for some throughout history (and many in the world today) that will include experiencing persecution. ① **And you are not immune to the common sufferings of being human**, as we wait for the completion of God’s victory.
5. In this session we explore how discipleship means becoming like Christ *through* difficulties, not *despite* them. The Content booklet story of Nancy, who was told by God she had “had a healthy body and a crippled soul but from then on I would have a crippled body and a healthy soul” illustrates this well. Jesus was the greatest example of how to respond to suffering. ① In this session we focus on two things: ① **being formed as people who live in hope of resurrection.** And, by “fixing our eyes on Jesus”, ① **specifically looking at how Jesus, and early Christians, met suffering, evil and death**, we can be shaped as people who “will not grow weary and lose heart”.
6. **What does God say will ultimately happen to His whole creation?**
7. In some senses Christian hope is a *mystery*, but it is not a *guess*. **The first wonderful and important truth about ① ultimate hope is that it must make sense of the whole story of Bible.** In brief, the whole story of the Bible can be seen as God’s plan to reunite God’s space (heaven) with human beings’ space (earth). The crucial thing is that ‘heaven’ in the Bible is not so much an other-worldly place we go to when we die, but a way of saying ‘wherever God is fully present’. The Old Testament is the story of God seeking to bring heaven back to earth through a covenant people, who meet Him in the Temple – the one place in which heaven and earth can touch. But it is through Jesus, who united God and humanity in Himself again, that God began to reunite all of heaven and earth. This is why when Jesus arrived John proclaimed, “The kingdom of Heaven is at hand!” Wherever Jesus went, he brought the kingdom of heaven to earth, and through the cross became the ultimate temple sacrifice which broke down the barrier between God’s space and us (this was why the curtain in the centre of the Jerusalem temple which was meant to separate us from God’s presence was ripped in two when Jesus died.) (Matthew 27:51) We are still waiting for this reunion between heaven and earth to be complete. There will come a ‘Day of the Lord’ when the Saviour we eagerly await from heaven (Philippians 3:20) will return to free the world from corruption, completely defeating evil by judging with justice, and restoring us. God will make “all things new” (Revelation 21:5) – new in the sense of not being a completely different thing, but a restored and renewed version of something that already exists. ① In Jesus He would not “condemn the world, but ...save the world through him.” (John 3:17)
8. **This shows that ① our ultimate end is not to ‘go to heaven when we die’ or that we will not be taken off the earth to go to ‘heaven’.** The idea that ultimately God wants us to be with Him in a purely spiritual heavenly existence, removed from the earth, would be a *departure* from the story, not the *completion* of it. **This shows that ultimately ① God does not want to bring about the “end of the world”.** Linked to the idea that we ‘go to heaven when we die’ is the vision that God will ultimately destroy the earth. But in 2 Peter 3: 6-7; 10-12 Peter is not talking about complete destruction, but the hope that God’s return will completely purify His world – laying bare all the injustice, pain, sin, evil and brokenness – and dealing with it once and for all. **This matters because ① the picture we have of God’s ultimate future completely shapes our discipleship today.**

① If we believe that the world will be destroyed and that our final aim is to escape to heaven this has potentially disastrous results. We might stop caring for the earth because we believe it has no long-term future anyway. We might think God is only interested in the “spiritual” parts of our lives – because these are the only things that ultimately matter – rather than the everyday work we do. Instead, the Christian hope for a reunited heaven and earth opens up a vision of life in which everything we do now matters. God will take everything we do in line with His kingdom into the future.

9. What happens after to me death?

10. The clearest lens we can look through is Jesus’ own resurrection. Because He is the one who has first broken the power of death, He is the pattern, the “‘firstfruits’ of those who have fallen asleep.” What happens to *Christ*, then happens to *everyone*. The two perspectives of looking at the whole Bible story, and the nature of Jesus’ resurrection, are the best way of understanding what happens to us after we die. ① We will be “raised imperishable; (we can’t die again)...in glory...in power...raised a spiritual body.” (1 Corinthians 15: 42-44) ① We are promised that we will see God “as He is”. (1John 3:2) ① All evil, death and sin will have been completely dealt with. As a result, God will be “all in all”. (1 Corinthians 15:28) ① With the end of evil, there will no longer be any barrier between God and people. Resurrection promise is a restoration of original relationship, but also of our original *calling*. The Bible begins with God seeking covenant-partners who will work with Him to look after and develop His creation. ① Logically, it ends with human beings *recovering the dignity of this image of God in us*, being able, once again, to take part in ruling over God’s renewed creation.

11. How might I personally experience life after death?

12. It is clear that the risen Jesus was not just walking around in His human body brought to life again. While it was recognisably Him, it was what Paul calls a ‘resurrection body’ – a body in which death and sickness no longer could exist because the sting of death has been removed. ① This is a physical *and* heavenly existence in a body suited to be with God, and partner with Him, in a renewed heaven and earth. We will be similar, but also changed. Jesus was still recognisable but as both earthly and heavenly He was significantly different. ① His wounds were still visible, but rather than being signs of pain and shame, they were evidence of His glory. This kind of heavenly/earthly resurrection existence is exactly what we would expect as an outcome which completes the whole story of the Bible, and the life, death and victory of Christ.

13. What happens if I die before the final resurrection?

14. An important clue in knowing about life after death is that the Bible talks about us experiencing *two* stages. Whereas the resurrection is described as God’s ultimate plan, to be completed when all things are *fulfilled*, ① those who have already died are said to have “*fallen asleep* in Christ”. ① So there are two stages – this is why we talk about ‘Resting in Peace’ and ‘Rising in Glory’. ① We could describe the resurrection as ‘life after life after death’.

15. Why can I be confident in the resurrection?

16. “...if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ① If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.” (1 Corinthians 15: 17-19) While the cross gives comfort, it is the resurrection that gives hope – that heaven has come to earth, and that we can live in God’s kingdom from today. ① There are twelve recorded appearances of Jesus to His disciples after the resurrection (see handout). For Paul, this was of “first importance”. By emphasising twice that this was “according to the Scriptures” he is making the point that the resurrection completes and makes sense of the whole story.

17. The handout ‘Jesus: Lord or legend?’ unpacks some of the arguments against this evidence. Objections have centred around three ideas: ① **Jesus was not really dead.** Not many people give much credibility to this argument. ① **The disciples were deliberately lying, joining together to make up a religion to honour their rabbi.** Yet Christians were put to death for their belief in the resurrection, and it is also hard to understand the motive for lying in the face of such persecution, or why not a single one of them deserted or withdrew their story. In addition, as a made-up story there are so many aspects of it that would have been offensive to first-century Jewish people – not least that a human being could be a crucified God. Finally, if it were genuinely a lie, it could have been easily disproved by both the Roman and Jewish authorities – but there is no record of any ancient person accusing the disciples of making it up.

18. They were not lying, but were so devoted to Jesus, that ^① a myth quickly developed about Him. While most scholars do not believe in the lying theory, it is not uncommon (as in a lot of study of religion) for people to put forward this legendary interpretation. There are at least six reasons why the legend theory has problems: It is hard to believe that such a speedy development of a risen-Jesus myth could arise among Jewish people who, at the time, saw their belief in one God *as an antidote to many of the pagan-god legends* that surrounded them from other cultures. ^① Legends always *reflect the culture* they come from – it is unlikely that, in first-century Jewish eyes, a myth about a crucified and cursed Messiah would have brought honour to Jesus. ^① Jesus *overturns* many aspects of their culture, rather than reinforcing them. For example, in a culture in which it was assumed women were liars (they could not testify in court), the male writers of the gospels emphasise that it is women who first witness Jesus' resurrection. ^① Legends cast their *heroes in a positive and larger-than-life light*. Yet in the gospels the disciples often appear foolish. ^① The main objection to the legend theory is the *short amount of time between Jesus' resurrection and the accounts of it*. Normally legends take generations to develop. Yet 16 years after Jesus, Paul is already calling Him God, as if this is already known. The gospels refer to eye-witnesses who would have still been alive when they were written – for example, Jesus' brother James. ^① Finally numerous writers have noted how the gospels *read like history, not legend, including countless examples of irrelevant detail*. Mark tells us several times, "Jesus looked around him, and then said..." There are numerous historical details which have been shown as accurate by archaeological evidence. All the earliest witnesses, who staked their lives on Jesus' resurrection, emphasise that they are neither lying, nor honouring a Lord whom they know to be a myth. As John writes, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life." (1 John 1: 1-4, written between 62 and 77 years after the resurrection)

19. How do disciples see death?

20. Dallas Willard said, "I think that, when I die, it might be some time until I know it." In contrast to a culture which in many ways finds it hard to accept or talk about mortality, the hope of resurrection makes it possible for us to face death without fear or denial. ^① **Disciples can embrace death without fear.** Paul wrote, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body." (Philippians 1: 21-24) ^① **Disciples still resist death.** Yet, while no longer the ultimate evil, death remains an enemy we are longing to see completely overcome. The "victory" and "sting" of death has been defeated (1 Corinthians 15: 55-57) through Jesus' death and resurrection, but, like Jesus, who cried at his friend Lazarus' tomb, we can still weep at the significant but temporary grief and pain death and dying can cause. But the hope of resurrection means that grief might no longer be *despairing* ("... you do not grieve like the rest of humankind, who have no hope." (1 Thessalonians 4:13)) It is important in our discipleship that we can welcome death. John Wesley said, "Our people die well." ^① **Death can help us live well as disciples** For disciples, seeing death through the lens of hope is a gift in living well now in anticipation of the future. The medieval writer, Thomas a Kempis puts it like this: "Happy and wise is he who endeavours to be during his life as he wishes to be found at his death."