

Developing Christ-like Behaviours: 3 studies

Introduction

These 3 Bible Studies focus on behaviours that Christians can develop in their walk of discipleship and pursuit of Jesus. Each behaviour/character trait relates primarily to one of the '3 circles' of our engagement in our walk of discipleship ('Communion' with God, 'Inclusive Community' and 'Mission').

However, whilst each of these traits might be said to apply *primarily* in this circle, this is not meant to mean that it implies *exclusively*. For example we will study humility in relation to our engagement with God, but from that place we expect that humility will overflow into all elements of life. The purpose of focusing on humility in relation to our engagement with God in that study is intended to give us focus, a starting place.

Likewise, the purpose of focusing on only 3 character traits (humility, authenticity, love) is to give us a foundation, a starting place not to imply that other character traits don't matter. From this starting place we hope to see all godly traits begin to become evident in our lives as we follow Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit – gentleness, faithfulness, joy, peace, kindness, patience, self control, generosity...

The best piece of advice I was ever given was this: *'focus on where you start, then trust God for the overflow!'*

These studies give us a focused place to start: to understand how to train our behaviours to be more Christ-like. Then we trust God for the overflow into other behaviours & every area of life... one day at a time!

Finally, by way of introduction, let us remember that no Christian behaviour will make us 'good enough' to get in to heaven. We are saved because of what Jesus has done for us. Any behavioural change is a joyful response to the good news that Jesus has freely forgiven us and died for us while we were still sinners; he paid our debt, we were bought at a price and by his righteousness alone are we able to enter the presence of God.

Our desire to be more like Christ in the way we live is only appropriately a response to the gospel. Any other motivation, especially any motivation that makes us feel superior or inferior to another person, has the potential to do more harm than good. The gospel is primary. It's all about Jesus... Our life is simply lived in grateful response.

*The gospel is primary. It's all about Jesus...
Our life is simply lived in grateful response!*

1) The 'Communion' Circle: Developing The Art of Humility

Introductory Questions

- 1) What do you think the word 'humility' means? Have you ever met a 'humble' person – describe them, and comment on what it was about them that made you think they were humble.
- 2) What do you think the word 'pride' means? Have you ever met a 'proud' person – describe them, and comment on what it was about them that made you think they were proud.
- 3) How important do you think humility is in comparison to other Christian character traits? Why/Why not?

Read this quote from an article by Tim Keller in Christianity Today Magazine by way of introduction.

The Article was Called '*The Advent of Humility: Jesus is the reason to stop concentrating on ourselves*':

"Innumerable Christmas devotionals point out the humble circumstances of Jesus' birth – among shepherds, in a crude stable, with a feed trough for a bassinet. When Jesus himself tried to summarize why people should take up the yoke of following him, he said it was because he was meek and humble (Matt 11:29). Seldom, however, do we explore the full implications of how Jesus' radical humility shapes the way we live our lives every day.

Humility is crucial for Christians. We can only receive Christ through meekness and humility (Matt 5:3, 5; 18:3-5). Jesus humbled himself and was exalted by God (Phil 2:8-9); therefore joy and power through humility is the very dynamic of the Christian life (Luke 14:11; 18:14; 1 Pet. 5:5)."

Bible meditation

Take a few moments to read **Philippians 2:5-11** personally. Read it 2-3 times slowly; be open to God as He may highlight particular words or phrases to you.

Share: Do you have any reflections from the passage or from the Tim Keller quote that was read beforehand?

The gospel and humility

Read this additional quote from the same article mentioned above:

"Christian humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less, as C.S. Lewis so memorably said. It is to be no longer always noticing yourself and how you are doing and how you are being treated. It is "Blessed self-forgetfulness."

*Humility is a byproduct of belief in the gospel of Christ. In the gospel, we have a confidence not based in our performance but in the love of God in Christ (Rom. 3:22-24). This frees us from having to always be looking at ourselves. Because Jesus **had** to die for us, we are humbled out of our pride. Because Jesus was **glad** to die for us, we are loved out of our need to prove ourselves."*

- 1) In 2's or 3's explain your understanding of 'the gospel'.
- 2) What is the difference between the 'gospel message' and the 'gospel story'? What is the overlap/similarity between the gospel message and the gospel story?

3) How does the gospel help us overcome pride and become humble?

The two great barriers to true humility: Inferiority and Superiority

In an article entitled 'how an inferiority complex can be a form of pride' the author writes:

"There are two ways to fail to let Jesus be your Saviour. One is by being too proud, having a superiority complex—not to accept his challenge. But the other is through an inferiority complex—being so self-absorbed that you say, "I'm just so awful that God can't love me." That is, not to accept his offer.

In other words, saying something like "I'm not a very good Christian, Jesus couldn't use me, I don't have any gifts or strengths" isn't a humble thing to say... because you are still focusing on you say you are capable of, not what God says you are capable of.

Have you ever thought about pride & humility this way? What is new to you? how does that make you feel?

Charles Spurgeon is referenced as having said that Christians are "*Just beggars showing other beggars where to get the bread.*" What do you think of this picture? Do you find it helpful for yourself? In explaining the gospel to non-Christians? Are there any limitations or downsides to this picture?

Summing it up

1) After all that has been read and discussed so far, take 5 minutes to write down your own definition of humility and pride as you understand them now. This is for yourself not for the group necessarily. However, if you would like to share what you have written with the group please feel free to do so. Write this summary/definition at the top of a piece of paper.

2) Underneath your definition (or on the back of the page if you wrote a lot!) draw a picture of a person (stickmen & stickwomen welcome) and write down some of the attitudes or behaviours that someone desiring to model humility in their life could use to enable them to grow more humble (be careful not to judge anyone who doesn't write down the same things as you!)

Leaders Note: Here is an example to share after the exercise or to stimulate ideas as needed:

(a) Every day seek to find the good in someone and speak an affirmation or encouragement over them before you make a negative comment that day.

(b) Confess wrongdoing to God or an accountable friend.

(c) Listen attentively to another person and reflect back to them what they say or ask follow up questions instead of just waiting for your turn to speak.

(d) At some point each week make a point of mentally listing some your spiritual blessings and spend time in prayer thanking God for those things and for who he is before praying 'request' prayers.

2) The 'Inclusive Community' Circle: Developing The Art of Authenticity

Starter questions

What are you and Jesus working on right now? Who is Jesus calling you to love?

Take time to go round the group, or break into smaller groups of 3-4 and discuss the two core questions of discipleship. How is your pursuit of these two foundational elements going? What are you struggling with? Be honest about your struggles

Passage: Luke 11:37-54

Tonight we are looking at the subject of 'authenticity'. One of the most helpful ways to understand what authenticity is, is to understand what it isn't! The attitude of the Pharisees, exemplified by Jesus' critique of them in Luke 11, has been variously described as 'Pharisaism', 'Hypocrisy', 'Legalism', or 'Religion' (*Side thought: ... the bible only once uses the term 'religion' positively (James 1:27) and that use is probably ironic. Christianity was originally viewed as an 'anti-religion' by the early Roman world because it looked so different from every religion in existence at the time... perhaps we have lost this distinctiveness and made it easy for the world to classify Christianity as a 'religion' alongside all the others that we should look so different from?*).

In any case, as we understand the legalistic attitude of the Pharisees, perhaps we will gain a deeper understanding of what Christ-like 'authenticity' looks like by contrast.

Observation

Having read Luke 11:37-54, define the word 'religion'/'legalism' based on the attitude of the Pharisees described in that passage. Write out your description individually... Pool thoughts on flip chart/A3 paper or just have a central person note it down.

Have you ever met someone like what Jesus is describing? How did that person make you feel when you were around them?

Interpretation

Fun Fact: The word 'hypocrite' in the greek originally meant 'actor'. An actor in those days would hold masks in front of their face in order to represent different characters in a play. The term came to be used negatively of people outside the theatre who would represent a false version of themselves to those around them.

People who wear metaphorical masks so that they don't let anyone see any of their faults, mistakes or shortcomings and pretend to the world that they have it all together or are practically perfect in every way are 'acting hypocritically'. But lets be honest... we all have a tendency towards acting like this! That's because authenticity is difficult. So how can we move forward?

1. **Authenticity requires vulnerability:** If the Pharisee's approach to faith made people hide their imperfections then what, by contrast, is the Christian approach to faith that enables people to be comfortable to admit their imperfections?

Leaders note: *the answer is essentially the gospel of grace! but there's a difference between knowing the answer and knowing the answer so deeply that it prevents us actually feeling fear, guilt, shame at our failures and imperfections is very different ... take the discussion to the deeper level by acknowledging that we do still often feel this way despite knowing the gospel in our heads, and ask the follow up question: How do you think we can progress from 'head knowledge' to lived experience? What has worked for you?*

2. **The Mountain Analogy:** I often share the following analogy when trying to explain what is unique about the gospel with Christians & non-Christians alike. Share this analogy and ask people:

- (i) What did you find helpful about this analogy?
- (ii) How might this picture inform our discussion of how the message of grace could help us stop feeling so guilty/fearful, and thus enable us to be more open, honest, vulnerable & authentic?

The Mountain Analogy: *All religions/worldviews (including atheism and agnosticism) work the same way. They say "at the top of the mountain is something you need to feel of value and worth, to have security, to gain a sense of ultimate purpose etc." That could be a God or gods, it could be non-divine 'idols' (an idol is just something that's 'number 1' in your life) like money, fame, love, family, spouse, friends, power, success etc. Then they say "here is how you climb the mountain to get there... x, y, z".*

Until you 'get there' you will feel that you lack purpose, security, value etc. especially if you see someone else on the mountain who is closer to the top than you (this creates feelings of guilt, shame, fear, failure etc.). Alternatively you might start comparing yourself to those who are not as 'high up the mountain' as you are and look down on them (this leads to feeling superior arrogant behaviour & a critical attitude towards others, seeking to draw attention to their shortcomings lest they 'climb as high as you' (ever met anyone like that?).

This view of the world is lose-lose. Either you feel crushed by your own failure and 'lack of progress up the mountain' or you become the kind of person I suspect you don't want to be: arrogant, critical, defensive, out to 'tear down' others.

Surely there's another way? ... There is only one other Way.

The Christian view of the world is that everyone is at the bottom of the mountain with broken legs and the mountain is higher than mount Everest; impossible to climb. At the top of the mountain is God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). But God doesn't tell us to come up on our own. God comes down! Jesus stands next to us and says 'do you need a lift to the top?' we need to achieve nothing. But we must admit our inability and our need of him as Help, Guide and Saviour. And as he walks us up the mountain, even if he takes a turning we disagree with, our part is not to start walking, but to simply follow by clinging to him. If we are 'higher up' than others we can remain humble because we know it is not our efforts that have taken us this far. If we are 'lower down than others' we feel no fear of not arriving, no guilt for not being further ahead because it does not depend on us, ours is simply to continue to hold on to Jesus and be grateful – gratitude, humility and confidence are a combination of character traits uniquely enabled by the Christian worldview... if it's put into practice!

3. **The Danger of Oversharing:** One danger that is always raised whenever you encourage people to be open, vulnerable and authentic is the danger of 'over sharing'. "Certainly its not appropriate to 'air our dirty laundry' and share inappropriately with everyone who crosses our path" people say. Indeed! So how do we tell when to share and who to share with?

Leaders note: *a discussion about appropriate boundaries and gradually building relationships of trust – sharing to the depth of relationship you have with someone may be a helpful direction to take things here. When is it appropriate to share? Right location? Right timing? Right person? What are people's experiences of when this has been done well? Poorly?*

Application

The two equal and opposite dangers in this discussion are ...

... to be an '*Under-sharer*' who just bottles up their emotions, fears, worries and is inwardly struggling, even dying. On the other end of the spectrum there is the '*Over-sharer*' who tells their most negative emotions or inner fears inappropriately to an inappropriate person

- a) Which would you say you have a tendency to be more like – why do you think that is?
- b) How might the message of the gospel help you to move forward?
- c) What else would you need to create a space where you can deal with your emotions appropriately and authentically?
- d) Without this emotional burden weighing on you, knowing God loves you no matter what and that he already knows your inner most fears and failures, yet he loves you and died for you anyway... if you knew that deeply every day how might your life look different?

3) The 'Mission' Circle: Developing the Art of Love

**This study is quite long and will likely be worth spreading over more than one week. Alternatively, to get through it in one week, please feel free to cut out chunks of the study as relevant to your group context.*

Icebreaker

Share an experience of when you have spoken to someone about Jesus or taken part in a 'mission' where you practically helped those outside the church – how did you feel? What did you enjoy about it? What do you think the barriers are to doing that kind of thing more often?

Introduction to this study

Doing 'mission trips' and events are often great things to be involved in, they give us new experiences and skills, push us out of our comfort zones and help us understand the needs around us. But they are not meant to be all that we do. Mission is not a weeklong event; it is a mind-set or attitude that affects how we live our lives. Influential missiologist Hugh Halter talks about this set of attitudes/mind-set as developing your 'Missional Posture'. Thus, the purpose of short-term events and trips should be to inspire and train us to develop the posture of a missionary that we will take into all of life.

In this study we will look at 4 disciplines we can cultivate (from the book *'The Tangible Kingdom'*) to help us adopt a 'missional posture' as part of our everyday life. These disciplines are based around the model that Jesus gave to us in his whole life on earth.

Passage: John 1:1-5 & 10-14

Fun Fact: The word 'dwelt' literally means 'pitched his tent' and draws up images from the Old Testament of the Tabernacle or 'Tent of Meeting' where God's presence dwelt so that he could meet with his people and affect the way they lived, becoming a light to the nations.

I also rather like Eugene Peterson's translation of John 1:14 in 'The Message' paraphrase: **"The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish."**

1) Leaving

i) In John 1 where did Jesus come from, and what was it like there? By contrast, where did Jesus go and what was it like there? How do you think Jesus felt about this transition?

"When we come to this part of our church training seminar, often we ask all the pastors to grab their notebooks, coffee muffins (all pastors eat muffins), and whatever else they have, and move outside. It's humorous to watch leaders, annoyed at having to leave their comfortable spots behind a table to go stand outside and listen to our training. That's a mini-version of the fight related to leaving, which entails intentionally giving up what is comfy, easy and familiar and going somewhere else, doing something different and giving up time so that we can connect with people." – Tangible Kingdom, page 127

ii) What areas of 'comfort' do you currently experience in life?

iii) What do you think is the difference between a 'comfort zone' that God is calling you out of and a 'Restful 'Sabbath' Space' that God needs you to take time in so that you can rest and recuperate in order to be energized for times of mission?

2) Listening

- i) Have you ever been deeply listened to? Describe the situation and how it felt.
ii) What images in John 1 show the way the world was? What about Jesus, from the passage, came as a solution to those problems?

Read the following excerpt aloud to the group and discuss the questions that follow:

“When you hear the word ‘listen’, you probably think its about setting up a coffee time and trying to ask probing questions. It may include that, but our kind of listening is really more about what you do with your eyes instead of just your ears...[our] training is called Zer0, primarily because we’re trying to instill a missionary posture in our leaders. The basis of missionary activity is to make *no* assumptions... 2 Corinthians 5:16 says, ‘So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.’ The context of this Scripture reflects how we often view people based on superficial qualities. So listening in our context is about “knowing” the person.

Jesus, again, is our master and modeler. Notice how he dealt differently with every person he came into contact with. Whether it was the woman at the well, Nicodemus, Levi, Mary Magdalene, or the disciples, he listened and knew how to respond in a way that would affect their hearts.. Each person is unique. Their experiences, traumatic moments, family background, ethnic heritage, and church experience all make up how they interpret relationship and process faith and belief. Whenever we skip over the listening piece we’ve failed.” Tangible Kingdom pages 132-133

Call to mind the discipleship question from our initial studies ‘who is Jesus calling you to love?’

- iii) With the answer to that question in mind, what have you ‘heard’ about that person that helps you understand how they might need love and support? How they might need Jesus?
iv) What might you do to listen more deeply to them? (spending time, asking questions etc. but what would that look like in your context?)

3) Living Among

- i) John In what ways did Jesus ‘dwell among’ people (both in his ministry and before (you’ll have to use your imagination for the second part of that!))?

Halter uses the word ‘whimsy’ to explain his view of ‘whimsical holiness’ as the defining word that shapes the kind of holiness we pursue... “Whimsy is the ability to laugh, make light of, or downplay the words, behaviours, and worldview of sojourners that might offend. Whimsy is deeply tied to our discussion of *posture* as we remember that behaviour doesn’t change until the heart changes. Whimsy, therefore, allows you to [live among] people regardless of their angle of life without casting any judgment their way. It paves the way for them to feel comfortable enough to be themselves, feel loved and dignified as human beings.

It’s not making an issue of anything that’s not the main issue. That simply means we don’t flinch at sin or bad language or nasty T-shirts or crude music or a Sojourner who over indulged. Whimsy may be the missing element of Christlike love in today’s world. It’s the essence of missional posture that helps gain a someone’s heart so that, someday, their behaviour may also change... Whimsy implies that you can seamlessly interact win the culture with ease, humour, love, and holiness without being swayed away from *clear* biblical boundaries. – Tangible Kingdom, page 138-139

- ii) What activities in the surrounding culture have Christians historically been afraid to participate in?
iii) Draw a line down the centre of a piece of paper with ‘doable’ and ‘not doable’ at the top of each respective column and note down the answers you come up with in discussing the following question:

Which of these activities should we not engage in because they are explicitly 'sinning' and which should we recognize as appropriate to engage in as long as we don't do x, y & z. (For example, going down the pub is fine as long as we don't get drunk and start fights 😊)

iv) How do you feel about the idea of not challenging negative behaviours of Sojourners (non-Christians who are connected to your community and spiritually open) so that you can connect with their heart before you expect to see behavioural change? (Belonging comes before believing which comes before behaving?)

4) *Loving without Strings*

i) How did Jesus show his love for people? What words in John 1 are images of how Jesus loved people? (e.g. he brought light into the darkness.

ii) List both general contexts and specific stories from the life of Jesus outside of John 1 for how Jesus loved people. Do you have any favourite stories or passages about the love Jesus showed? (My favourite verse is Romans 5:8!)

“Did you know that we're all created with a built-in desire to love the world, to bless people? It's the min job description of a Christian... free up some time and money and go bring a smile to someone's face. Relieve someone's pressure. Surprise someone with a gift. Jesus mentions blessing a s giving sight to the blind, captives being set free, debts being paid off, food for the hungry, friends for the lonely, meaningful employment for the discouraged and self-doubting, rest for the weary... The Tangible Kingdom! Blessing wan't just nice things you said to make people forget about their problems. It was actually doing something about their problems... [sometimes] we think God tells us to serve in order to get people to respect us or like us so that they'll accept our God. The real essence of biblical blessing is that it's done with *no strings attached*. Hopes, desires, fervent prayer, yes – but no strings at all attached.” Tangible Kingdom, page 143

iii) Certainly sharing faith is an expression of loving someone (Jesus is the cure to the spiritual sickness of the world and its loving to share the cure with someone who wants to get free from the sickness) but how do you respond to the idea of loving *without strings*?

In other words, if you knew that such and such a person was *never* going to become a Christian, would you still sacrificially love them in practical ways?

iv) What is the impact on your own heart and attitude as well as on others when you love people *so that* they will come to faith rather than loving without strings *whether or not* they come to faith?

Summing it up

Write the words 'Leaving', 'Listening', 'Living Among' and 'Loving without Strings' on a piece of paper that you will put on a fridge, or a bookmark (somewhere you will see it regularly) and take 10 minutes to ask yourself how you do these practically

Leaders note: *I have written expanded questions below next to each word. Please use them if you find the expanded questions helpful, but no obligation to use them if the simple 'how do you do them practically?' is a sufficient question):*

- a) **Leaving:** What comfortable/familiar thing is God calling me to leave so that I can go where he's calling me to go?

- b) **Listening:** What have I already heard from the people/community around me that I need to respond to? How might I listen more deeply to the people/community around me?
- c) **Living Among:** Do I have a whimsical approach to holiness, able to not get stressed about negative behaviours because I understand that the heart needs to change before I will see a behavioural change? Is there somewhere I have not been going/someone I have not been spending time with because I have had unrealistic expectations of them? Do I need to repent and start going there/being with them?
- d) **Loving Without Strings:** Given my answers to the above 3 questions, how can I love the people/community I live among and listen to in practical, tangible ways?

Write down on your bookmark/piece of paper any helpful answers to these questions as reminders to yourself/points to pray through.

In future weeks it might be worth checking in about how each of you are doing in observing these 4 missionary disciplines, offering grace where we fall short, encouraging where we see fruitfulness or faithfulness (both are worth encouraging – fruitfulness doesn't come without faithfulness coming first!) and praying for God to transform us, and the world around us, as we go. Amen

*The gospel is primary. It's all about Jesus...
Our life is simply lived in grateful response.*

*As we go, may God transform us ...
and the world around us. Amen*