

Be Like Jesus

One day I was talking to a young man in the student center of a famous American university. As we got to know each other better, he told me that he was raised in a Christian family and his father was an engineer. He also shared with me about his own studies. But when I asked him, "Dan, what is your purpose in life?" I got a very unusual answer.

"I want to be like my father."

"Be an engineer like your father?" I asked.

"No," he answered, looking me in the eyes. "A Christian like my father."

I don't hear that often, so I asked, "Do you think your father is a real Christian?"

And he responded like this, "He's the greatest Christian in the world." He paused for a moment and said, "Well, I guess that's a little subjective. Because I don't know all the Christians in the world. But of all the people I know, my father is the most amazing."

At this time, I started looking for a pen and paper to write down some key points, because I am also a father of several children. If one day my children are able to say that, it would be a great blessing from God – and I didn't want to miss it. So I asked Dan again, "What characteristics of your father made you think he is the greatest father in the world?"

He scratched his head and thought for a while, then finally said, "No one has ever asked me this question, so I don't really have an answer. But I can tell you..." Then he began to tell one story after another about his father – what he had experienced at home and what he had seen his father did.

By the time he had told me six or seven stories, I had jotted some of the characteristics his father exhibited. I watched it again and was surprised of these characteristics: only one or two can be called "spiritual." But every father has his harshest critics – his son – This man was "the greatest Christian in the world." Why? Because he was a man in the likeness of Jesus.

Stanley Jones once said, "If God wasn't like Jesus, He wouldn't be as perfect as He is." He was probably joking. But he was so deeply attracted to the life and character of Jesus that he could not imagine a better person than Him. One of the most amazing things that the Bible promises us is that we are able to imitate Jesus. The apostle Paul said that God predestined for us to be "conformed to the image of his Son." (Romans 8:29) That's one of the reasons God sent Jesus into the world: to show us what He wants us to be like. In the process of being changed into His likeness, one day we will be completely like Him. "We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

What does this include? What are the basic characteristics of Jesus Christ as we learn to be like

Him? One night, my wife and I were sitting in the dining room, waiting for the food to be served in the restaurant. "Honey," I said, "let me find something to do. Let's write down some of the names that have had a significant impact on our lives."

We listed eight people, men and women, and then we discussed one by one what made them so special. What moved us about them is not their ability or talent, or their gift of leadership, or their skill in handling things. The most important reasons were their attitude, their eyes, or their response to questions... all of these reminds us of Jesus Christ.

How the world needs such people today, people in whom Jesus Christ can be clearly seen. In the age of Jesus, sinners were deeply attracted to Him. They did not hang out with the Pharisees or the religious people, but they ate with Jesus and listened to Him. He did not condone their sin, but He loved them, and they knew it.

In our journey to become more like Jesus, we must strive to avoid two mistakes. First, we want to learn from a second-hand Jesus. That is, we often take some successful Christian leaders as role models and try to learn to be like them. We learn from his style because he is successful, and we also want to be successful like him. This approach will lead us astray because our role models should be Jesus Himself. Christ is all we need.

Paul in his letters says, "Be imitators of me," and exhorts the church to imitate the faith of its leaders, but that is because they have the following characteristics. People may have a great influence on us, but the one we imitate should be Jesus Christ.

The second mistake is that we often show our strengths to others. People who see us and talk to us, and those around us may have the following impression: "That person really studies the Bible hard. He often memorizes Scriptures. He gets up at five o'clock to meditate."

One day, a friend said to me, "I have been studying the wheel. (The wheel is a Navigator's diagram that represents a balanced life. In the Christian life, the axle represents Christ, and the pillars of the wheel are the Word of God, prayer, fellowship, and witness.) and I noticed that when the wheel turns fast you can't see the spokes. What you see is the axle. When it is stationary, the spokes take up a considerable amount of space, but when the wheel starts turning the spokes seem to disappear. They are still there, but you can't see them. Yet the axle become particularly obvious. When people look at our lives, and if they are only impressed by our spokes, then we are not moving forward!"

When people look at our lives, do they only notice the spokes? Do they see us memorizing three verses a week, praying, having good fellowship, or sharing testimonies? Do they see Jesus? The spokes still need to be there, because those are the tools that God uses, but they shouldn't be too obvious.

Africans are very afraid of contracting a terrible disease called "elephantiasis". Usually in some villages, you will hardly notice the caterpillars infected of this disease. They leave an itchy spot on

the leg, and the patient scratches it and gets infected, and ends up with very large swollen feet, just like that of a monster. The patient becomes very ugly because it is so swollen.

Like the infected foot, the “flesh,” or the self, can become very ugly when it is exaggerated in our lives. But some things become more beautiful when magnified, like the inside of a flower or the thin wings of a butterfly. Exaggeration helps us appreciate the details. This is what Paul wanted in his life – that Christ might be magnified. “With all boldness, whether by life or by death, as always the Lord is magnified in me.” (Philippians 1:20)

The word “magnify” is mentioned four times in the New Testament, and usually God is its subject. This is what Paul longed for – to magnify Christ, not ourselves. This can only happen when certain characteristics of Jesus' life become the character of our lives.

Frankness

When we lived in Nairobi, Kenya, our home had a giant glass window facing west. When my wife tidied the house, she would use soda water and paper towels to clean the glass windows. Our daughter was a baby at the time, and she usually followed her mother around, touch everything with her fingers. After noontime, when the sun shines through the window, you can see her marks on the glass. When the sun shines through, any small imperfections on the window will show through.

When people looked critically at Jesus, they could not find any flaws. Jesus lives in God's truth and wisdom, so when people come to Him, they can see God very specifically, they can see the Father through the Son. This is why the disciples were so drawn to Jesus; they knew what they were seeing was not just a replica.

Jesus' closest disciple said, “Walk in the light as the Lord is in the light.” (1 John 1:7)

The night before He was crucified, Jesus said to His disciples, “You are the ones who have been with me in my trials.” (Luke 22:28) Throughout His life on earth, Jesus had heart-breaks, temptations, and struggles; but He did not take them seriously. The author of the book of Hebrews gives a more in-depth description of Jesus' earthly life: “In the days of His flesh, Christ offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears. The Lord, who was able to save him from death, had heard him because of his piety.” (Hebrews 5:7)

I know well how heartbroken Jesus was as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. But as I learned more about this passage, I discover that his pain was not an isolated event but a characteristic of Jesus' life. Satan knew that if he could get Jesus to commit a single sin, it can completely destroy the plan of salvation. So Jesus often faced all of our temptations. Sometimes the temptation is so difficult that Jesus had to pray to His Father in Heaven “with loud voices and tears.” Jesus was completely candid with His disciples about His suffering, and the same is true when we pray to the Father above.

I once received a letter from a friend who was serving as a missionary in Southeast Asia. He told me a problem he was facing, and I wrote back, "I can sympathize with you because I have fallen into the same situation."

When he wrote back, I felt really bad because he said, "Jim, during those years when we were together on the East Coast, I often wanted to tell you about my problems, but you were so happy and cheerful, as if you never had any problems, so I thought you won't understand me." May God forgive us for deceiving our brothers and sisters because we are often not frank.

We often don't want to bring our problems to others. We don't want to be depressed by complaints or trials. But we can be sincere and concretely help others let go of their burdens.

One evening I was at the Navigators' headquarters in Gramercy, and a spiritual leader began his message with these words, "Tonight I want to share with you my failures in life." Over the next hour and a half, he mentioned his failures one by one, his failures in life and how he dumped all those burdens for God's sake.

An opportunity for revival has emerged! Did I shed tears out of sympathy for his experience, or because I realized that such a spiritual person could also make mistakes, and shed tears of liberation? I still haven't figured it out to this day.

There are four passages in the New Testament that encourage us to be frank in our lives. Paul wrote to the church in Philippi: "So that you may know what is good and may be blameless until the day of Christ." (Philippians 1:10) The word "blameless" in Greek means "as if illuminated by sunlight." It is best translated as "frank" (transparent).

People who are frank will not be threatened by others. He won't feel unsafe. In God's grace, he will live his life with peace of mind, and he is willing to let others know him. He won't build walls. One reason that we cannot live a blameless life is that we are not frank. We are constantly seeking and maintaining an illusion of ourselves, so we make many mistakes.

In his first letter to the church in Corinth, Paul rebuked them for their immorality, saying, "Therefore, we cannot use old leaven when observing this feast, not the leaven of malice and evil, but the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." (1 Corinthians 5:8) It is the love feast that Christ celebrated at the Lord's holy table. That was the peak of their fellowship. Paul exhorted them not to defile it with malice. Instead, it should be received with an frank and open life. If the fellowship between believers is superficial or there are boundaries between them, it would bring indifference and difficulties. Without sincerity, honesty, or frankness, there can be no real fellowship.

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul shared some of the heartbreak and pain he was experiencing in events, but he said: "For this is our boasting, this is the testimony of our conscience, that we have lived in the world in holiness and sincerity from God, not in human wisdom, but in the grace of God, we behaved ourselves in the world, and more abundantly to you." One of the secrets to joy in the Christian life is frankness. If you don't build a wall between yourself

and the world, and as long as you do what you are supposed to do, your life will be liberated.

LeRoy once told me that in his first few years of service with the Navigators, he tried to emulate the ways of Dawson, Dromon, and Ron Shanny. But one day he felt tired of learning like this, so he told God, "I can't be like these people anymore; I have decided not to try again. I'm just Leroy from Iowa, and the Navigators would be great if they could be like me, otherwise they have to endure me for a while." As soon as LeRoy had made this decision, he felt a wave of joy and relief wash over him. As a result, from that was on his ministry had a real breakthrough.

The fourth time the word frankness (or candor) appears is also in the letter to the Corinthians. Paul mentioned that his ministry was a deacon of the New Testament. Speaking of Christian witness to unbelievers, he said, "We are the aroma of Christ in the world." This is because "We are not as the many, corrupting the word of God, but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God, speak we in Christ." (2 Corinthians 2:17) When we are sincere in our message, there will be a release of power in our lives and testimonies that God can prove.

While we were serving the Lord in Africa, I heard about a man named William Naiganda. People said he was the most godly person they had ever met. This man's younger brother told me many times that whenever his brother went on stage to preach, people would shed tears of repentance after just a few words. I really wanted to meet him. One day, my family and I were driving on a road outside Nairobi, and I saw a man walking along the road. Maybe that's him. I parked the car, rolled down the window and asked, "Excuse me sir, are you William Naiganda?"

"Yes, I am. But, who are you?"

"I'm Kim White," I said as I got out of the car and shook his hand. "You don't know me, but I know your brother Dan. We hang out and pray together. I have been longing to meet you, sir, for several years."

He came in the front seat of the car and we talked for several minutes. Then he turned and looked into the eyes of my five-year-old daughter and said: "Hi, little girl, what's your name?"

"Valerie."

"Valerie, do you love Jesus?"

Valerie answered, "Ah-hmm," in a softest voice she had never used before.

After a few minutes, William Naiganda said goodbye and left. I started the car and drove on. A few minutes later, something unexpected happened, something that rarely happens in the history of the White family – five minutes of complete silence. Then, very shyly, Valerie climbed onto my wife's lap, looked into her mother's eyes and said, "Mommy, when I grow up, I want to be a woman of God."

If you knew my daughter, you would be as grateful to that African as I am. He is so powerful. Thanks to William Naiganda, that candid life of God releasing a power that enabled a little girl to

say such a word.

Meekness

One of the most misunderstood words in the Bible is meekness. In the twentieth century, the definition of a meek person was someone who was weak, fearful, and unable to be independent. When Jesus is described like this, people get turned off and walk away, but that is not how the word meek is used in the Bible. The word meekness in the Bible should be explained as follows: "An attitude of obedience to God's arrangements without resistance; and not retaliating against injustices."

Like most people, I get easily agitated by injustice, especially when it's directed toward me. But meekness was a registered trademark of Jesus' life. When someone opposed Him, He didn't even open His mouth. Peter says we should do the same: "But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insult at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly." (1 Peter 2:20-23).

Meekness was also a characteristic of Moses. "Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all the sons of men." (Numbers 12:3) Miriam and Aaron challenged Moses' authority in front of the Israelites: "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken with us also?" But Moses said nothing. He let God handle the challenge, and as it is written, God did. (Num. 12:1-15)

Most people think that meekness is often a characteristic of Christian leaders. Sometimes it's true, but sometimes you can find it in places you least expect. One weekend afternoon many years ago, I was planning a retreat that was being held at a church outside of Philadelphia. There is no place more lonely, quiet, and dead than a church on a weekend afternoon. Another man and I were going through the houses one by one, measuring their sizes and planning how many people each could accommodate. We walked into the lobby and the doorman was sweeping the aisle. He looked at us as we walked in, and we introduced ourselves, saying, "Hi, how are you?"

"Oh, not bad; probably better than most."

I thought, isn't that wonderful? What a joyful life this seems! Although he doesn't earn much, he is happy with his job and family.

We started talking and I asked him, "Are you married? Do you have a family?"

"Well, yes, I have a wife, but she is ill."

I said, "Oh! That's unfortunate, what's going on?"

"She's in a mental hospital."

"Oh, that's so sad, how did it happen?"

Then he told me this story, how six months ago his twelve-year-old child was hit by a careless person on a bicycle and died on the spot. Some neighborhood kids came and told him, and he ran to the scene of the accident. He immediately saw that his son was dead, and then he looked over and noticed that the driver was sobbing uncontrollably. The man walked up to him, and as he was comforting the driver, a policeman came over and asked, "Who are you?"

"I am the father of this child," he said.

"Well, then why aren't you crying? Your child is just lying there! Why are you comforting him?"

The man replied, "Sir, if this had happened two weeks ago, I would have cried. But last Sunday night in church, when the pastor said, 'Anyone who wants to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and know that they have eternal life can come to the front,' I saw my son stood up from his seat and walked to the front to accept Jesus as his personal Savior."

The man then told the police, "I know where my son is right now, but there is something wrong with this man here!"

The janitor continued his story, "But my wife didn't have the faith God gave me. She was a Christian, but not very strong. She collapsed in extreme pain, so she is now being treated in a mental hospital. It is very expensive to send her to the hospital, and it has used up all my savings. Under such circumstances, I can't support my daughter with my salary, so I gave her away as an adopted daughter. The saddest thing is to see my daughter calling someone else 'Dad'. But," he continued, "I work here during the day, and I have to take care of my wife at night, bring back her changed clothes, wash them, iron them, eat, and then it's time for me to go to bed. The next morning I get up and come here to work. That's my life."

"Sir," I stammered finally, "is there anything Jerry and I can pray for you?"

"Well," he said, "could you please pray for my family's reunion?"

I couldn't pray. I wanted to, but I don't think I could stop myself from bursting into tears. So I said, "Jerry, could you please pray?"

So Jerry began to pray, but after only three sentences he began to cry. By then, I had gradually calmed down, so I led everyone in the closing prayer.

Here is a man who obeys God without resistance, who lives with the pain of his son's death every day, whose wife is in a mental hospital, who spends all his salary on medical treatment for her, on her laundry, who lives alone, and who lets his daughter call someone else "Dad," and yet he says, "Oh, not bad; probably better than most." That is meekness. This is the life and character God wants us to have.

Love

The greatest characteristic of Jesus Christ is that He is a man of love. Paul exhorted the Ephesian Christians to imitate Jesus in this characteristic: "Therefore be imitators of God, as dear children, and walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:12). The kind of love Paul is talking about here is the kind that Jesus himself practiced. If we want to learn this, we must first imagine what it is.

On the day of judgment, God will determine whether we have love according to the following verses: "Then the Lord will say to those on his right, Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. Then the righteous will answer him, saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and come to you? The King will answer them, saying, Truly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it for one of the least of these my brothers, you did it for me" (Matthew 25:34-40).

When was the last time you showed kindness to another person? Maybe just washing the dishes for your wife? If someone has convinced you, you might have done it a few times, but the thing about Jesus was that you didn't have to preach to Him to move Him to do those acts of charity. These little things in life are so important to Him.

A very successful businessman learned this many years ago. He had been so focused on making his business profitable that he had not had enough time to be alone with God, and he was frustrated by his inability to grow spiritually. When he was about to give up his faith, he decided to try again. "God," he prayed on his way to work, "Today, I will try to be a Christian again."

Because he had to go to work in the city, he had to drive to the train station and leave his car in the parking lot. The parking lot was full that day, so he had to park his car far away and then rush into the platform to catch the train. Just as he was crossing the platform to step onto the train, a little boy with a suitcase in one hand and a jigsaw puzzle box tucked under his other arm was about to step onto the train in front of him. The businessman rushed past the child and knocked him, sending the toy box flying and scattering the jigsaw puzzle all over the platform.

The station attendant shouted, "Get on the train!" The train began to move, and the businessman was faced with a decision with no time. Such decisions often have very complex effects on our lives, even though they may not seem very important at the moment. He was thinking, should I get on the train and get to work on time, or..... and the boy stood there with tears streaming down his cheeks.

The man looked at the boy, the jigsaw puzzle, the train, and again the boy, the jigsaw puzzle, the train, and thought, this is my chance. As the train pulled away, he looked at the boy, smiled, and

bent down to pick the jigsaw puzzle pieces back into the box. When he was done, he closed the box, put it under the child's arms, looked at him and said, "Son, I'm sorry; this is yours!"

The little boy looked at him and asked, "Sir, are you Jesus?"

As this man turned back to wait for the next train, his heart was filled with joy and he realized – yes, he had been Jesus.

Jesus at that time showed the world His love by giving His own life. That kind of love doesn't think of himself first, but others. That is the love He wants to give to the world through us today.

Application (Practice)

One of the hardest things about being like Jesus is that we often think, "Oh, I'll never be like Jesus."

Fortunately, He doesn't expect us to do those things overnight, nor does He expect us to do them perfectly. The Bible does not give us a one, two, three training course to learn to be like Jesus. But it is clear that God wants to transform us into the image of His Son. The entire Bible does give us many practical principles.

If I want to imitate Jesus, I must first heed James' admonition, "You do not have, because you do not ask" (James 4:2). I should first pray that God would work these characteristics in me and that I would continually increase my concern for these things.

Second, I must remember what I have meditated on, and that is what I want to become. Jesus said, "I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15). If you have not done so, I suggest that you begin studying the person, life, and ministry of Jesus Christ. If you can just keep doing this forever – we will be changed forever.

Third, I can observe and catch up with the frankness, meekness, and love in the lives of Christians I know, but only as these reflect the characteristics of Jesus Christ. You may remember someone once said, "Example is not the main way to influence others; it is the only way."

While we should avoid being like the Pharisees who criticized the shortcomings of others, bad examples are often a tool to keep us on the right path. A prominent Christian leader pointed out to me the other day, "The biggest lesson I've learned from observing Christian leaders over the years is not what I should do, but what I shouldn't do."

Fourth, I must find my security and satisfaction in Jesus alone. Only by doing that can I be frank to myself. Only in this way can I help others. If Jesus is my safe place, then He is also my "boss" – the one who estimates the value of my work. Paul said, "I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human judgment. I do not even judge myself. Although I do not feel that I am in the wrong, this does not make me righteous. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not judge anything before the time, until the Lord comes, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and

reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then everyone will receive praise from God.” (1 Corinthians 4:3-5)

St. Francis de Sully once wrote in his journal: “Ah, my poor heart, here we are, in the ditch which we tried so hard to avoid. Let us ask God for mercy on us, and trust that He will help us to stabilize us in the future. Let us return to the ways of humility again. Be of good courage, my soul! Go forward, and let us be more vigilant. God, help us; we shall do well.” Humility is essential. Jesus will not work in us with these qualities unless we admit our need and lack of those qualities.

Finally, I must be content that I cannot see in myself the Jesus-likeness I have learned, that God will hide it from my eyes, and that God will not necessarily allow people to see any way He uses them. Because it would make us proud. Likewise, God often has a way of showing His children some powerful workings in their lives, but He also leaves them with some weaknesses that are clearly visible to Himself and to others.

After he was taken up to the “third heaven” by God, Paul said: “And to keep me from being exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, I was given a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. About this I besought the Lord three times that it might depart from me. But he said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” (2 Corinthians 12:7-9)