

FIVE MARKS OF GROWING

Session 1 – Christ-likeness

LEADER'S NOTES

This session took 1 hour 40 minutes and this included a ten minute coffee break after Group Activity 4.

On the pages that follow are.....

- The Leader's Notes which contain the input and discussion group activities.
- The Opening & Closing Worship.
- The Bible texts – this sheet could be printed on the reverse side of the worship sheet.
- The Discussion Questions – these can be printed back to back and then cut into three smaller sheets.
- The Seven Suggestions of how to grow in Christ-likeness. The A4 sheets need to be cut into four A6 sheets and given out at the end. (This is an optional extra)

The last four of the above need to be printed out for the participants.

Some opening and closing worship is included, or you can devise your own. Appropriate hymns and songs that could be used include.....

Make me a channel of your peace
May the mind of Christ my saviour
Purify my heart
Change my heart, O God.
In my life, Lord, be glorified
May the fragrance of Jesus fill this place

There is a redeemer is included on the Worship Sheet as a first song so that there is an initial focus of worship on Christ who is the one we aspire to be like.

You will need to make copyright arrangements when printing the songs. Many churches will have a CCL licence.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth:
Worship the LORD with gladness.

Come into his presence with singing:
Enter his gates with thanksgiving.

Enter and his courts with praise:
Give thanks to him and bless his name.

HYMN

There is a Redeemer
Jesus, God's own Son.
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
Holy One.

*Thank you O my Father
for giving us your Son
and leaving your Spirit
till the work on earth is done*

Jesus my Redeemer,
Name above all names,
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
Oh for sinners slain.

Thank you O my Father.....

Send your Holy Spirit
on us gathered here.
Fill us with your mighty power
take away our fear.

Thank you O my Father.....

When we stand in glory
we will see his face
and there we'll worship you forever
in that Holy Place.

Thank you O my Father.....

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BIBLE READING

2 Corinthians 3.7-18 (See over)

SONG

In my life, Lord, be glorified, be glorified.
In my life, Lord, be glorified today.

In your church, Lord, be glorified, be glorified.
In your church, Lord, be glorified today.

In this place, Lord, be glorified, be glorified.
In this place, Lord, be glorified today.

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CONCLUSION

Lord Jesus, as we gather in your name:
Inspire us and guide us by your Spirit.

May all that we think and do and say:
Bring glory to your holy name.

May blessing and honour and glory and power:
Be yours for ever and ever.
Amen.

GROUP ACTIVITY 1 (4 minutes)

You may be able to recall occasions when someone said to you, “You’re just like your father!” or “You’re just like your mother!” and the person was referring to the way you did something or said something.

Do you think there are aspects of your personality that you inherited from your mother and/or father?

Would you be willing to divulge some of these?

In pairs: 2 minutes each way!

Afterwards see if anyone has the courage to divulge any such traits or characteristics – they may not want to!

INPUT 1

Apparently Sigmund Freud who is known as the father of psychoanalysis once said, “I have examined myself thoroughly and have come to the conclusion that I don’t need to change much.” I wonder if people who knew him well agreed with him!

When you look at your own life would you agree with Freud – that you don’t need to change much? Or are you conscious of aspects of who you are which you wish were different?

The first “Mark of Growing” that we are going to focus on is: Christ-likeness. So what is Christ-likeness? The phrase word is self-explanatory – it means being like Christ in the way that we live out our lives – in our actions, in our words and even in our thoughts.

The New Testament doesn’t use the actual phrase “Christ-likeness”, though there are many references to how Christians should live and act like Christ did when he was on earth.

For example.....

Text A: Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2.5 NRSV)

Text B: Whoever claims to live in Christ must walk as Jesus did. (1 John 2.6 NIV)

In the Scriptures, the technical terms that is used to describe the process of becoming Christ-like is “sanctification”. And in the NRSV this word comes 23 times in the New Testament in its different forms, “sanctify, sanctification”. For example.....

Text C In 1 Thessalonians 4.3 Paul writes, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification.”

The word means “to make holy” and it is a recurring refrain in both the Old Testament and the New Testament that we are to be holy. To be holy is ultimately to be like God - to be like Christ.

GROUP ACTIVITY 2 (2-3 Minutes)

In a survey on Christian discipleship in 2012, people were asked who they thought were the most Christ-like people. What would you say?

Discuss this in two’s or three’s.

Invite responses.

The top three from the survey were John Stott, Billy Graham and Archbishop Sentamu!

John Stott was an Anglican clergyman who died in 2011 at the age of 90. He was a renowned Christian leader and teacher of the Bible. In 2005, *Time Magazine* ranked him among the 100 most influential people in the world.

In his last sermon in 2007 he said this.....

"I want to share with you where my mind has come to rest as I approach the end of my pilgrimage here on earth and it is - God wants his people to become like Christ. Christ-likeness is the will of God for the people of God."

So as one Godly Christian leader approached the end of his life, he reached the conclusion that becoming like Christ was of paramount importance as disciples of Christ.

Indeed one person has said, "To claim to be a Christian but not to be in a process of becoming more like Christ is a contradiction in terms."

So if we need to become like Christ, a key question for us to consider is, "What was Jesus Christ like?"

GROUP ACTIVITY 3 (5-10 minutes)

Give out the following questions to everyone on a piece of paper.....

- What words and phrases would you use to describe what Jesus was like?
- Can you give some examples from the Gospels of when Jesus displayed these qualities?

Get responses. You may wish to write up the list on a flipchart.

INPUT 2

So we've seen that becoming Christ-like is a key factor in our Christian lives. We've identified what this means with the list of qualities we have come up with. So, to the really hard question, "How do we do it?"

A simplistic approach would be to familiarise ourselves with what Christ was like, what he did, what he said, how he reacted, and so on, and then to try to imitate him – much in the same way that children imitate their parents, or people copy people that they look up to.

However, there are a few problems with this approach. At heart, it's no different from any other religion or philosophy. A Muslim presumably tries to imitate Mohamed; a Buddhist, Buddha; a Marxist, Karl Marx; an Aristotelian, Aristotle; and so on.

A second problem with trying to imitate Christ is that most of us would admit that he set such a high standard that it is an impossible task to emulate him to any substantial degree.

It is interesting that Martin Luther did not agree with the idea of trying to imitate Christ and it is said that he questioned the very principle behind the book by Thomas a Kempis which is called *The Imitation of Christ*.

He didn't like the word "imitate" because it speaks of achieving something in our human strength whereas the Christian life is to be lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. He preferred to use the phrase "being conformed to Christ" with the understanding that this process is a result of the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

Of course, Luther was correct when he stressed that becoming like Christ can only be attained by grace and the inner work of the Holy Spirit in the believer.

This raises the question about whether this is a process of which we as individual Christians are aware of or not. So is it like growing up or growing old?

When we think about growing up, we are often conscious of changes that are discernible. From a physical point of view we outgrow our clothes. What's more we are able consciously to help ourselves "grow up" by receiving education and we realise that our understanding and abilities are developing. We can make sure we have a healthy diet and get exercise, and this will facilitate our physical growth and our health.

Or is it like growing old? This just happens and day by day we are not aware of the process moment by moment. However, we become conscious of it having happened when we look in the mirror, or feel a pain in our legs when climbing the stairs, or have to go to the opticians to get our eyes tested, and so on.

"So is growth in Christ-likeness something that happens automatically as a result of the work of the Spirit within us, or does it depend upon our own conscious effort?

Perhaps both are true to some degree. There are certainly indications in the Scriptures of the necessity of willing cooperation, even though we recognise that Christ-likeness is a result of God's grace. So there should be a desire to imitate Christ's example and there should be a willingness and longing for the Spirit to work in us.

God is glorified by positive, conscious obedience and by conscious moral effort in the power of the Spirit to behave in a Christ-like way in everyday situations."

What's more we should be praying that we will grow in Christ-likeness and that the process will be as straight forward as possible with a minimum of interruptions, hesitations, deviations, or even back-sliding!

We find both sides of the coin in a couple of verses in Philippians where Paul writes.....

TEXT D: *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (2.12-13 NRSV)*

On the one hand, we need to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, and on the other hand, we know that it is God who works in us enabling us to will and to work for his good pleasure.

These verses reveal that we should consciously want to become more Christ-like while recognising that every thought of holiness and longing for goodness is something that comes from Christ in the first place. He works in us, first to give us the desire – the "will" to want to be more like Christ and then he works in us to help us to "work" at this."

If it is the Holy Spirit who makes us more like Christ, we cannot do it ourselves directly. However, we can facilitate this by putting ourselves in a "place" where the Holy Spirit can work in us.

So growing in Christ-likeness is a bit like growing fruit in our garden or allotment. We cannot make it grow, but we can facilitate it by watering, weeding, fertiliser, pruning and so on. We cannot produce the growth directly but we can facilitate it by making sure that the fruit tree is in such a "place" where the fruit will grow.

However, the other side of the coin is that we can prevent growth. We can neglect to water, to weed, to apply fertiliser and so on. Or even worse, we could damage the plant or pull it up.

In a similar way we can put ourselves in a place where we will become more Christ-like, or we can do the very opposite.

So the emphasis is on faith and trust. When we have worked hard in the garden, we simply trust that the fruit will grow – that is faith.

There are in fact two ways that you can have a tree with fruit on it. One is to make sure that the tree is in a “place” where the fruit will grow naturally. Another way of doing it is by getting some cherries or apples and fastening them onto the tree. If we did this we might even fool the casual observer – at least at first. However, the passage of time or closer inspection would reveal that it was phoney.

Similarly we can try to fasten Christ-likeness on to us in our own strength. But those who are close to us who see us more clearly, and over time others would see that it is phoney. What’s more its all about trying – our own effort – it’s not about trusting. And the Christian life is a life that is meant to be lived by faith.

So what are the things we can do that can help us become more Christ-like? How can we put ourselves in “a place” where we are open to the Holy Spirit? These activities are sometimes call “Spiritual Disciplines”. And “God has given us these disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving his grace. The way it works in that the disciplines enable us to place ourselves before God so that he can then transform us.”

“So by themselves the spiritual disciplines can do nothing. They can only get us to the place where something can be done. They are God’s means of grace. The disciplines of the spiritual life are the means by which we are able to put ourselves in a place where God can transform us and bless us.”

GROUP ACTIVITY 4 (5 minutes)

What are some of the *spiritual disciplines* that enable us to put ourselves in a place where Christ-likeness can develop in us?

Get responses.

Write up the list on a flipchart.

A man called Richard Foster has written a book called *Celebration of Discipline* and he covers twelve such “disciplines” in twelve chapters. He calls the disciplines “The Door to Liberation”.

It is interesting to see which ones are common to our list and to his list and which ones only appear on one list. His twelve are: Meditation, Prayer, Fasting, Study, Simplicity, Solitude, Submission, Service, Confession, Worship, Guidance, Celebration.

There’s one that I think he misses out, and that is fellowship – our interaction with one another. Christ-likeness is something we also need to work at together as well as on our own.

One definition of what it is to be Christ-like is Paul’s list of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5.....

TEXT E: “*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*” (22-23)

We could easily rephrase that like this.....

From the Gospel accounts, we know that Jesus was loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle and self-controlled.

It is significant that five of the nine fruit can only exist in relationships.....

- We can only be loving in relation to another person.
- We can only be kind in relation to another person.
- We can only be faithful in relation to another person.
- We can only be gentle in relation to another person.
- Patience is a quality we need in our relationships with people - and also sometimes with things. eg computers!

What's more we can help one other achieve Christ-likeness. We can encourage one another in this.

For example, a group of Christians who know each other well could go each write on a piece of paper what they thought the most Christ-like quality was in the other people in the group. That could be quite affirming.

However, it would take quite a lot of courage to go one further and to ask a Christian friend the question, "How Christ-like do you think I am?. Do you think there's an area of my life in which I need to be more Christ-like?"

The apostle James is quite challenging when he writes in his letter, "Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed." (5.16 NRSV)

2 CORINTHIANS 3 (Read as part of the opening worship)

The refining work of the Holy Spirit is vitally important in the process of sanctification – of becoming more Christ-like. This comes over in a number of Scriptures. One such passage is 2 Corinthians chapter 3. **See TEXT F**

In this chapter, Paul makes it clear that being changed into the likeness of Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit and in the last verse of the chapter he sums it up like this in the New International Version....

TEXT G.....

And we.....are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (18 NIV)

Earlier in the chapter he has explained that when in the time of Moses, the Word of God was read to the people of Israel they didn't understand it. It was as though they were wearing a veil. It meant that they were hardened in their thinking about the things of God.

And today there are many people who are wearing a spiritual veil. They also are hardened to the things of God.

So how can this veil be removed? Paul tells us in verse 16.....

Whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. (16 NLB) **See text F**

So when we come to Christ, when we are "in Christ", that veil is taken away and we encounter the glory of God through the Holy Spirit working in our lives. What's more, we reflect his glory. And as this happens, the Holy Spirit makes us more and more like Jesus and, bit by bit, he changes us so that we are more and more like him.

Let's read the last verse of this chapter in two versions of the Bible. First in the New Living Testament.....

TEXT F: *So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord - who is the Spirit - makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image. (18 NLB)*

Then from the Revised Standard Version.....

TEXT H: *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

So the process of becoming like Christ involves spending time in his presence so that we reflect his glory and degree by degree become more and more like him.

Becoming Christ-like - being changed into his glory - is the work of the Holy Spirit within us.

And if we live our Christian lives habitually spending time in the Lord's presence, then, we will become more like him.

Let me offer an illustration. You will have seen people who look as though they have just spent a month in the Mediterranean. They have a wonderful bronze tan. However, we might be fooled, because there are two ways you can get a tan.

One way is to buy some instant tan lotion and lash it on all over.

I typed "Instant Sun Tan" into Google and I found such a product. It is called.....

Bronze Ambition Glow 'N' Go Instant Tan Shimmer

It says on the label.....

"Bronze Ambition Glow 'N' Go creates a flawless instant golden glow that easily washes off, whilst giving your skin a silky smooth finish. This lightly fragranced formula is enriched with a special tanning agent for an instant glow suitable for all skin types."

So that's one way of doing it. However, you need to spend quite a lot of time and effort putting it on day after day and making sure that you get a consistent covering. So it will take quite a lot of effort.

The other way to get a tan is simply by sitting in the sun. No effort is required! You just sit there and soak up the sunshine and you automatically get a sun tan.

Afterwards something of the "glory" of the sun is seen in you.

So the first method is all about effort and work, the other way is grace.

One way is artificial, the other is natural.

However we have to facilitate it. You have to put ourselves in those "places" where the sun will shine on us and sit in its presence.

Afterwards we will reflect the glory of the sun: S-U-N. And people will know that we have spent time in the presence of the sun.

I think the parallel is obvious. When we spend time in the presence of the Son: S-O-N, we will reflect the glory of the Son, and people will know that we have spent time in the presence of the Son.

GROUP ACTIVITY 5 (10 minutes)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Feel free to discuss any of these questions in any order.

- Which spiritual disciplines help you most progress towards the goal of becoming like Christ?
- Can you identify one Christ-like attribute you would like to cultivate?
- Is there one aspect of your character that you would like to be refined?
- If your Church were a Christ-like church, how would people in your community know this?
- Is there a difference between being 'good' and being 'Christ-like'?
- What would you say to someone who said, "To be 'Christ-like' means simply copying Jesus behaviour"?

Don't get feedback after this section.

CLOSING INPUT (*This can be optional*)

Five points about the process of becoming Christ-like.....

(1) Christ-likeness authenticates our Christian lives.

Jesus said, “By your fruits you will know them”. Think of people whose preaching and teaching has influenced you. Was that all that mattered? Or did you instinctively look at their lives to see whether they were consistent with what they said? For example, did you notice their reactions in unguarded moments? Did you note the way they treated people?

With such people, for most of us, the Christ-like quality of their lives, modelled over a sustained period will have played a key role.

The way we conduct our lives, the way we behave, has been called ‘a silent language’ which either authenticates us as Christians or not. One person has said, “Christ-likeness produces integrity as people observe you. It’s more important than ability.”

(2) The more Christ-like we become, the more we become aware of how we fall short. This is because the closer we come to the light, the more that light reveals our imperfections.

There's an old hymn called, *At even e'er the sun was set* and one verse goes like this.....

*And none, O Lord, have perfect rest,
For none are wholly free from sin;
And they who fain would serve thee best
Are conscious most of wrong within.*

(“*Fain*” is an archaic word that means “happily” or “willingly”)

Bishop Lesslie Newbigin said this, “The true mark of the man in Christ will be that the more he grows in holiness the more will he know that he is a sinner, and the more he will long for and press on towards the fullness of sanctification.”

(3) It is a gradual process

When we read in 2 Corinthians 3 that we will be “changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another” it teaches us that it is a step by step, gradual process. There is no such thing as instant holiness, instant Christ-likeness.

And in our age of instant gratification, it’s easy to live an instant, shallow life. We require determination and perseverance if we are to become Christ-like.

In his book, *Ordering Your Broken World*, George MacDonald gives a helpful illustration of this.

Invite someone to read it out.

Some years ago, when Gail and I bought the old abandoned New Hampshire farm we now call Peace Ledge, we found the site where we wished to build our country home strewn with rocks and boulders. It was going to take a lot of hard work to clear it all out so there could be grass and plants. The whole family went to work on the clearing process. The first phase of the clearing project was easy. The big boulders went fast. And when they were gone, we began to see that there were a lot of smaller rocks that had to go too. And so we cleared the area again. But when we had cleared the site of the boulders and the rocks, we noticed all of the stones and pebbles we had not seen before. This was much harder, more tedious work. But we stuck to it, and there came a day when the soil was ready for planting grass.

Our private lives are much like that field was. When I first began to follow Christ seriously, he pointed out many major behaviour and attitude patterns that, like boulders, had to be removed. And as the years went by, many of those great big boulders did indeed get removed. But when they began to disappear, I discovered a whole new layer of action and attitude in my life that I had not previously seen. But Christ saw them and rebuked them one by one. The removal process began again. Then I reached that point in my Christian life where Christ and I were dealing with stones and pebbles. They are too numerous to imagine, and as far as I can see, for the rest of my days on earth I will be working with the many stones and pebbles in my life. Every day at spiritual discipline time, there is likely to be a new stab at the clearing process.

But I must not leave this story without noting something else. Every spring at Peace Ledge, after the frost is out of the ground, we find that new stones and boulders appear around our country home. They have been beneath the surface of the ground, working their way up. And at their appointed times, one by one, they show up. Some of them are very frustrating to deal with because they look small until we try to remove them. And only then do we discover that there is more to those boulders than meets the eye.

My sinfulness is exactly the same. It consists of stones, pebbles, and boulders that come to the surface one by one. And the man or woman who ignores the daily experience of confession in spiritual discipline will soon be overwhelmed by them. I understand why the apostle Paul at an advanced age would call himself the “chief of sinners.” Even while in jail facing the end of his life, he was still removing pebbles and boulders.

George MacDonald, *Ordering Your Broken World* Pages 164-165

(4) We do make progress

This could make us feel a bit defeated. However, it is the experience of many Christians that as we look back, we can see how we have changed for the better.

John Newton was once a horrible man. He was immersed in the slave trade and his life was a real mess. He became a Christian and the Holy Spirit began to work on him step by step. He once said this.....

“I am not what I ought to be.
I am not what I would like to be.
I am not what I hope to be.
But I am not what I was.
And by the grace of God I am what I am.”

(5) We will get there

Finally, one day we will actually be like Christ!

F.F.Bruce once said.....

“Sanctification is glory begun, and glory is sanctification completed.”

Finally, one day we will be like Christ!

As the apostle John writes in his first letter.....

TEXT I.....

Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. (1 John 2.2-3 NRSV)

So if that’s how we are going to end up – let’s get on with it!

Afterwards, give out copies of Charles Burgess’ seven ways to approach the goal of becoming more Christ-like.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth:
Worship the LORD with gladness.

Come into his presence with singing:
Enter his gates with thanksgiving.

Enter and his courts with praise:
Give thanks to him and bless his name.

HYMN

There is a Redeemer
Jesus, God's own Son.
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
Holy One.
*Thank you O my Father
for giving us your Son
and leaving your Spirit
till the work on earth is done*

Jesus my Redeemer,
Name above all names,
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
Oh for sinners slain.

Thank you O my Father.....

Send your Holy Spirit
on us gathered here.
Fill us with your mighty power
take away our fear.

Thank you O my Father.....

When we stand in glory
we will see his face
and there we'll worship you forever
in that Holy Place.

Thank you O my Father.....

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BIBLE READING

2 Corinthians 3.7-18 (See over)

SONG

In my life, Lord, be glorified, be glorified.
In my life, Lord, be glorified today.

In your church, Lord, be glorified, be glorified.
In your church, Lord, be glorified today.

In this place, Lord, be glorified, be glorified.
In this place, Lord, be glorified today.

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CONCLUSION

Lord Jesus, as we gather in your name:
Inspire us and guide us by your Spirit.

May all that we think and do and say:
Bring glory to your holy name.

May blessing and honour and glory and power:
Be yours for ever and ever.
Amen.

CLOSING WORSHIP

Men: May the fragrance of Jesus fill this place.
Women: May the fragrance of Jesus fill this place.
Men: May the fragrance of Jesus fill this place.
Women: Lovely fragrance of Jesus,
All: Rising from the sacrifice
Of lives laid down in adoration.

Men: May the glory of Jesus fill his church.
Women: May the glory of Jesus fill his church.
Men: May the glory of Jesus fill his church.
Women: Radiant glory of Jesus,
All: Shining from our faces
As we gaze in adoration.

Men: May the beauty of Jesus fill my life.
Women: May the beauty of Jesus fill my life.
Men: May the beauty of Jesus fill my life.
Women: Perfect beauty of Jesus,
All: Fill my thoughts, my words, my deeds,
My all I give in adoration.

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Heavenly Father, we thank you for the wide variety of fruit
that we are able to enjoy. For the taste, the freshness and
for the good it does us. As we consider the example of
Christ, we bring before you one area of our lives which we
feel should be more Christ-like. As we focus on this aspect
of lives, give us the will to be changed into the likeness of
Christ from one degree of glory to another, through the work
of the Holy Spirit in us. Amen.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us,
and we have seen his glory,
the glory as of a Father's only son,
full of grace and truth.
From his fullness we have all received,
grace upon grace.

**Lord Jesus Christ,
You are full of grace and truth,
You are the radiance of the glory of God.
May we come to know your love
and be completely filled with the very nature of God.**

Now to him, who by means of his power working in us
is able to do so much more than we can ever ask for,
or even think of:
**to God be the glory in the church
and in Christ Jesus for all time,
forever and ever.**
Amen.

CHRIST-LIKENESS

New Testament passages to consider

A

Let the same mind be in you
that was in Christ Jesus.

(*Philippians 2.5 NRSV*)

B

Whoever claims to live in Christ
must walk as Jesus did.

(*1 John 2.6 NIV*)

C

For this is the will of God,
your sanctification.

(*1 Thessalonians 4.3 NRSV*)

D

Work out your own salvation
with fear and trembling;
for it is God who is at work in you,
enabling you both to will and to work
for his good pleasure.

(*Philippians 2.12-13 NRSV*)

E

The fruit of the Spirit is
love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, gentleness
and self-control.

(*Galatians 5.22-23 NIV*)

F

⁷ The old way, with laws etched in stone, led to death, though it began with such glory that the people of Israel could not bear to look at Moses' face. For his face shone with the glory of God, even though the brightness was already fading away. ⁸ Shouldn't we expect far greater glory under the new way, now that the Holy Spirit is giving life? ⁹ If the old way, which brings condemnation, was glorious, how much more glorious is the new way, which makes us right with God! ¹⁰ In fact, that first glory was not glorious at all compared with the overwhelming glory of the new way. ¹¹ So if the old way, which has been replaced, was glorious, how much more glorious is the new, which remains forever!

¹² Since this new way gives us such confidence, we can be very bold. ¹³ We are not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so the people of Israel would not see the glory, even though it was destined to fade away. ¹⁴ But the people's minds were hardened, and to this day whenever the old covenant is being read, the same veil covers their minds so they cannot understand the truth. And this veil can be removed only by believing in Christ. ¹⁵ Yes, even today when they read Moses' writings, their hearts are covered with that veil, and they do not understand.

¹⁶ But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord - who is the Spirit - makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.

(*2 Corinthians 3.7-18 NLB*)

G

And we.....are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory,
which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

(*2 Corinthians 3.18 NIV*)

H

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

(*2 Corinthians 3.18 RSV*)

I

Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed.
What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.
And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

(*1 John 2.2-3 NRSV*)

- What words and phrases would you use to describe what Jesus was like?
 - Can you give some examples from the Gospels of when Jesus displayed these qualities?
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Feel free to discuss any of these questions in any order.

- Which spiritual disciplines help you most progress towards the goal of becoming like Christ?
- Can you identify one Christ-like attribute you would like to cultivate?
- If your Church were a Christ-like church, how would people in your community know this?
- Is there a difference between being ‘good’ and being ‘Christ-like’?
- What would you say to someone who said, “To be ‘Christ-like’ means simply copying Jesus behaviour”?

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GROWING IN CHRIST-LIKENESS

The New Testament writers exhort us to be purposeful and intentional in cultivating Christ-likeness. Charles Burgess suggests seven ways to approach this.....

- Remain in the vine - abide in Christ (John 15). Without healthy and sustained spiritual habits, transformation is unlikely to happen.
- Invest in wise and safe friends who will have the courage and grace to speak the truth to you.
- Don't try to fix everything at once.
- Guard your minds. Actions begin as thoughts. (See Philippians 4.8)
- Counter unhelpful thoughts and attitudes by practising opposite behaviours. For example, by praying for those we dislike; seeking out the 'least' to talk to.
- When difficult times come, keep in mind that more transformation and fruit usually result from the valley experience than the mountain top experience.
- Always remember - we live under grace.

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