

# Become like Jesus

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Good morning, everybody. Good to see you today. The Lord bless you as you listen to his word, and it's a really important message for us as a church here at Wipi Christian Fellowship because it is the beginning of the second year of our vision purpose statement, which is on the board behind you, but I'll remind you of it. As followers of Jesus, we direct our lives around three objectives. We seek to be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and to do what Jesus did.

That's for those who are visiting. That is our purpose statement as a church, and it emphasizes what is important to us as a fellowship of God's people, and that is that our religion is not a religion not identified around a set of rules, but it is a relationship that we seek to live out with our Lord Jesus Christ. So that Jesus becomes as much as a daily reality to us as people in our households, our wives, our husbands, our children. The things that we do every day, wherever we go to work and whatever we do, we do it for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we do it in fellowship with him. We seek his help and his support, whatever we're doing. That's not just for ministers, that's for join us, and for builders, and for people who are working on computers, and for students at school.

We seek his help every day, and then we seek to share his love with people. We seek to share the good news of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ each day as we live out that relationship.

We seek to do these things so that Jesus becomes a living reality in our lives, as much as any human being that we see every day. And we really believe that's possible. We really believe it is possible to live at this level of intimacy. So last year, we looked at the theme of be with Jesus, because that's where it starts. The disciples who were called to follow Jesus were called, first of all, to be with him, before they did anything else. And you be with Jesus in order to learn about him, but learn what it is to live in communion and fellowship with him. You inhabit his world, and you learn his culture. Now, we're all being formed, aren't we? We're all being formed into something and into someone by the culture in which we live, the environment in which we live. If you think of children when they're born, when they're first born, of course, they're very dependent. They make a lot of noise and make lots of smells and make lots of demands, but they don't do an awful lot else, except they're inhabiting a culture. And very soon, it will come out. So if it's a loud house, they'll have a loud crying baby, because the baby has to cry loud to be heard. And then as the baby develops its character, it develops a character. Usually, if mom and dad does look just like mom and dad do, and then siblings around them too, and then they start to look, sound like they're siblings. And when they get to a certain age, they transform into horrid Henry or perfect Peter. One of the two, depending on which of the siblings and which of the parents influence them most. They inhabit a culture, and they mimic the culture. They copy the culture, because it's all they know. And then, of course, when they go to school, they either become the cool kid or the nerdy kid, or a combination of both, depending on whether they're compliant or willfully rebellious.

If they're compliant, they will inhabit both, depending on what they think they can get away with in any circumstance. Otherwise, they will just be willfully rebellious and not care about the consequences. And then they develop into teenagers and young people and young adults, and they become like the culture around them. If they want to stay cool and with it and in it, then ironically, they have to copy the coolest in it people, in it, in it, in it people around.

[ 4 : 35 ] So everybody begins to look like Kim Kardashian or Kanye West or somebody like that. That's if you're American. I don't know who the English equivalent is, because it bores me to death. But it's ironic, isn't it, that in order to assert your independence, you become like some icon. Physically like them sometimes, literally physically like them sometimes. Everybody looks the same in order to be different.

The irony. We are being formed by our cultures. And then there are all kinds of subcultures. You might support a football team, so you become like a Newcastle supporter. Is there any other team?

And you behave like a Newcastle supporter, which means you take your shirt off in the middle of November, stand on the terraces and go daft. Make lots of noise and drink lots of Newcastle brown ale.

And be ever optimistic that one day, sometime, somehow, we will win something. But still have not.

Unless I've put a really negative image into your mind about me being bare-chested, don't worry, I don't do that. I'm not so influenced by my culture. And so it goes on.

[ 5 : 58 ] We are being formed constantly by our culture, our political cultures, our social environments, our social ideas of what's normal and what's not normal.

Our political ideologies and our ancient prejudices being played out currently, sadly, in Israel again. Culture forms us.

We can't help it. And that's the great thing about being a Christian. Our culture should be forming us. It's why we spend time with Jesus. In order to inhabit his culture.

In order to become like him. You see the progress. We spend time with him, to become like him, and then to do what he does. So in our church, we have alpha courses in order that people might have an opportunity to discover Jesus.

And then we have a next step course where we want people to become like Jesus. So we don't instantly launch them into evangelism. It's great if they do it. Naturally, it should flow out of them.

[ 7 : 04 ] But there is a progress, a natural progress, a natural development from new birth to infancy where they feed and develop and nourish and understand and then to maturity in service.

We become like Jesus in order to do what Jesus did. Spiritual formation then is important. Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 3 in verse 18.

I think we have a slide for this. You can just look at it on the board. And we with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Now in context, Paul is speaking about what happens whenever people hear Moses being read the Torah, the Old Testament, which is strictly speaking actually the Torah is the first five books of the Old Testament.

When they hear Moses being read, Paul says they don't really understand what they're hearing. There's loads of law there, but actually they don't appreciate why it is that God gives the people of Israel the law.

[ 8 : 23 ] Not that they should earn brownie points by saying, oh, well, I've kept that one, but I, well, I messed up there, but I've kept that one and that one and kind of bouncing it out because that's the way they read it.

But he says, when people turn to the Lord, the veil that is over their eyes that prevents them from understanding the grace of God that is exhibited in the law is removed and they discover that Jesus perfectly kept the law for them and died in their place in order that they may not be held to account for their transgressions of the law.

The perfect sinless son of God became our substitute, fulfilled all the requirements of the law in order that we might be saved. When we turn to the Lord, we are released from the burden of obeying the law.

We live by grace. We live by faith. And Paul says here, when we look at Jesus with unveiled face, unlike the Israelites who couldn't look at Moses when he went into the presence of God because his face shone so much that he had to cover his face to hide the presence of God, when we come to Jesus, we see the face of God, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

And when we behold Jesus, we are transformed. We are literally, because this is the Greek word, metamorphosized. You know what that is?

[ 10 : 04 ] When a caterpillar enters into a pupa or a pupa rather enters into a chrysalis and then becomes a butterfly. We are transformed into the same image, the image of Jesus from one degree of glory to another.

For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. So here is something wonderful that's taking place. Believers are in that kind of pupa stage.

They have seen Jesus and they are being transformed so that one day we will be perfectly like Jesus. Let's just go back a slide and see it here.

Beloved, says John, we are God's children now and what we will be has not yet appeared but we know that when he appears we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is.

I've told you about my old friend who actually literally believed that everybody in heaven would be a man because he said John says we will all be like Jesus and Jesus was a man so all the women are going to be made into men.

[ 11 : 21 ] It's not what John means. It doesn't mean we're going to be like him in terms of his gender. It doesn't mean that we're all going to be transformed into men. It is we're all going to be transformed into the moral image of Jesus Christ into perfection into sinlessness as we are transformed from one degree of glory to another.

We are in the process of transformation. We are growing more and more to become like Jesus. That is our duty our job on earth.

And that's what we're going to focus on today in some detail. The change that we need which sometimes we refer to as spiritual formation is absolutely vital for us to acquire.

So let's see the next slide please after the 2 Corinthians 1. This is Dallas Willard. The people who come here regularly know that he's one of my kind of rabbis.

He's somebody who teaches me an awful lot about this. He says spiritual formation in the Christian tradition is a process of increasingly being possessed and permeated by the character traits of Jesus as we walk in the easy yoke of discipleship with Jesus as our teacher.

[ 12 : 53 ] Just have a look at it. It's quite complex, dense, it is the process of increasingly being possessed and permeated by the character traits of Jesus as we walk in the easy yoke of discipleship with Jesus our teacher.

Don't you want to be possessed and permeated by Jesus? You see, if you think about your life, you are constantly being possessed and permeated by stuff. It might be EastEnders, it might be Match of the Day, it might be Sky Sports, it might be gambling, it might be alcoholism, it might be all kinds of things.

There's a world of difference I realize between alcoholism and gambling and EastEnders. But of course, we are permeated all the time. Which is why John says, do not love the world or the things of the world.

Why? Because it permeates us. It starts to dominate our thinking and our mindset. And you know what it's like when you're permeated and possessed by something? It takes control of your mind, doesn't it?

It's kind of on your mind constantly. Well, let's be possessed and permeated by Jesus then. That is the counterbalance to the world. Not loving the world means loving Jesus in return because we can't be vacuous.

[ 14:17 ] We are constantly being character formed. And the greatest issue facing the world today says Dallas Willard with all its heartbreaking needs is whether those who by profession or culture are identified as Christians will become disciples, students, apprentices, practitioners of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from him how to live the life of the kingdom of the heavens into every corner of human existence.

That's the big question. It's the question we have for everybody who professes Jesus. We say welcome into the family. We're going to baptize you now. We're going to identify with you Jesus.

Here's now the really hard part. You have to take up the cross. You have to determine to follow Jesus. You have to determine to be his disciple and allow his character traits to permeate and possess you in order you might become more like him.

you enter into apprenticeship. Have you ever been an apprentice? I was an apprentice once. The thing I learned about apprenticeship is you have to listen and learn. When I first became an apprentice they sent me for a long stand to the store and I stood for a long time oblivious to the fact that every apprentice has gone through this process and I remember saying to the guy behind can you give me a long stand please?

Yes it's coming. It's coming. Can you give me a long stand? I stood there ages and I turned around and everybody was laughing at me and then I realised a long stand you idiot. You learned.

[ 16:00 ] I used to be a young boxer and when I was a young boxer they kind of taught you the initial stuff and you thought yeah I'm going to be Muhammad Ali it doesn't matter that I'm only about seven and a half stone and I'm never going to be six foot four but never mind I'm going to be a Muhammad Ali one day I can beat anyone and then Rob the blacksmith turns up blacksmith in the mine you're going in the ring with Rob the blacksmith and then all the trainers are going to disappear and there's going to be no bell and he's going to tell you keep your hands up every time he hits you and he absolutely battered me and I was crying I was only a 14 year old kid but I was crying and angry and frustrated because I couldn't hit him and he kept hitting me and hitting me and hitting me no mercy because your job as an apprentice is to learn it's to learn to learn that you can't do it without an expert help and support of those who know what they're doing because they've done it for years and they say follow me even as I follow Christ you get a young pup in the church who's newly converted and thinks they're going to transform the world and they don't need to learn anything and they don't need any help and advice it usually always ends in disaster always we are desperately in need of taking up the cross and becoming disciples so how do we do it next slide we become like Jesus through following him in discipleship next slide

Josh when Jesus said I am the way said Jonathan when Jesus said I am the way he wasn't just saying the way to get forgiveness of sins he says I am the way the way I lived is the way you should live he is the narrow way and he is inviting you and me to walk as he walked his life was the perfect hallmark of selflessness now I hear people saying and I understand why they say it well of course it's alright for Jesus he was sinless but I'm not you can't expect me to be perfect well God does be ye perfect for I your heavenly father am perfect he says also be holy for I am the Lord your God holy in other words he doesn't lower his standards just because you can't do it he sets an aspiration in front of you and said your job in life is to become more and more like Jesus until you become perfect you just don't give up you don't get complacent you don't think well

I've been a Christian for 42 years that's me by the way for 42 years and I think God should be satisfied with the effort I put in don't you except I've never put enough effort in and I've still got a long way to go the interesting thing about thinking that you're becoming like Jesus is usually the next time you trip up you realize you've still got a lot to learn but the desire and the aspiration should always be there I am not what I was I am not what I ought to be but one day I will be that person I will become like Jesus you see we cannot separate being a Christian and being a disciple they are the same thing in the New Testament how many times do you think you can shout it out because we can be interactive here and dangerous but Mike did that song so there we go how many times do you think the word

Christian is used in the New Testament three well done Fiona Fiona gets a brownie point Fiona gets an extra piece of cake for being absolutely right it's three occasions how many times do you think the word disciple is used in the New Testament a hundred no more come on Stella who said 250 you are amazing 250 at least over 250 times so we call ourselves Christians the New Testament calls us disciples yeah the word Christian is associated with kind of Christendom and the idea of kind of like dominating the world being the world's largest religion it's not a bad word it just means you're one of Christ but actually those who were one of Christ were normally called disciples over 250 times so biblically we should really call ourselves followers or disciples or apprentices either any of those will do and discipleship is part of our spiritual formation our journey that every follower of

Jesus needs to go on not just pastors not just missionaries not just church leaders but every one of us for Jesus says Matthew 16 24 whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me whoever wants to follow me must follow me to death that's what he says you must deny yourself now it's very hard to deny yourself isn't it just try and go on a diet you know it's fine for a day a couple of days whatever then somebody has a mcdonald's or somebody eats a bothams mince pie or yum yum or something butter bun I'm told is the best thing if you've never been to mcdonald's there bothams just down the road tomorrow will do it's not open on a sunday and then we realize actually it's really hard to deny your desires really hard to deny yourself to put somebody else first that's really hard because we try really hard when we're married we try to put our wives first or our husbands first or our children first whatever we might do and we know that sometimes we just want to fulfill our own desire

[ 22 : 12 ] Jesus says your job now is to do what I want you to do to take up your cross deny yourself and follow me and what was Jesus desire my food he says is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work that's my desire that's the thing that gets me up in the morning to do the will of God who sent me and to fulfill his work and that's what you should desire to father what is your desire for me today what work do you have for me to do and as you do that you become more like Jesus and great it's actually not difficult to pray that prayer it's just difficult to do it difficult to do it notice he doesn't say wait until you feel like it wait until you're hit with some kind of supernatural zap and you yeah I'm on fire Lord I'm going out there to do your will no no no he just says do it got a headache doesn't matter

I've got lots to do today it doesn't matter today that's your job you have one job to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work discipleship said Dallas Willard sorry there's lots of Dallas today to listen and he's uncompromising in his demands and it's just kind of right that we should tell you what's the truth take up your cross every day and follow him and do the will of the father who sent you because that's what he wants you to do and if you don't want to do that well you can't be his disciple simple yeah so we are created in the image of

God and as such we are created to reflect the glory of God but what about the fact that we're fallen what about the fact that we're sinful all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and what about the fact that we have to deal with our weaknesses and our frailty and our failure and the fact that it's really hard for us to live life in the kingdom of God because of all the pressures we have the fact that we live with unbelievers because we've got such a busy life and busy jobs all of those things don't we take that into account absolutely we do which is why we need to do it see the answer to stress is not more stress it is to be free from stress by taking the yoke of Jesus come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest he doesn't say I'll take away all your hard work he says I will give you rest in the midst of all of that labor you're carrying a great burden in life do you know you can't carry it on your own the only way you can carry it is with me so let me take some of that from you says Jesus let me bear the

Lord for you and then you will find amazingly that you'll cope much better my brother one of my brothers is a recovering alcoholic he's been a recovering alcoholic for years 20 plus years he's never had a single drink in those 20 plus years and you know what he prays every day something called a serenity prayer which asks God to help him to get through another day and he tells me that if he drank one drink he would be back where he started he lives every day in dependence on what they call a higher power that's the way to bear a yoke it's a wonderful thing I heard a clinical psychologist say the only thing that's ever really been successful with alcoholism is spiritual conversion because you have to stop trusting yourself to get yourself through you have to trust in a higher power it's the only thing they found that works isn't that amazing you discover the power of God most when you're weakest and feel

I can't do it exactly when you get to that point where you think I'm just so overwhelmed and I can't do it Jesus can pick you up and carry you in a way that you would never have dreamt possible so yes we take into account our fallen nature which is why we need to depend upon him more so back to that passage in 2 corinthians chapter 3 verse 18 we all with unveiled face notice the word behold in the glory of the lord are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory for this comes from the lord who is the spirit in other words we are transformed when we behold behold Jesus and to behold means we keep him in our sight we keep our eyes fixed upon him we're looking to him constantly how am I going to get through we behold the lord when you have little children and they're terrified by something what do they do they fix their eyes on mom or dad why because I can't I can't survive without you mom or dad I just don't know what to do you need to be here for me when we are overwhelmed we behold Jesus when we want to be transformed we behold Jesus when we want to become more like him we behold Jesus and there is the challenge he doesn't say God will behold your eyes for you so that you can behold him he says you are transformed as you behold him in other words you will not be transformed if you don't and that explains why some people make real progress in discipleship and other people get stuck the ones who make real progress are beholding the glory of the lord the ones who get stuck are not discipleship is a process that we must engage in as Augustine says without God you cannot without you he will not without God you cannot you can't be transformed you can't because you need grace but if you don't put the effort in he will not it is down to us to work together with God for transformation so this is the challenge what are we beholding what has our attention what are we prioritizing in our life if it's Jesus then we become like the one we behold if we truly desire to become like Jesus then we must behold him see I have a dog Maggie if you've never met Maggie she's just amazing you meet Maggie she's just like we are she's like the winter dog you can tell slightly quirky loves her food likes her sleep likes her comforts once one two walks a day loves routine so either we're becoming more like our dog or our dog is becoming more like us Maggie will behold us at certain times of the day time to get up she's all excited because it's food time she jumps up and down makes a racket till she gets fed once a walk stands in front of the box looks at it till you look at it in the hope that you may go out when you get the lead out she sits on her hunches waiting for you to put it on she beholds us and then she pulls really hard and we go flying after her all the way up the street and around the box bring her back and then she comes in and she looks again where is the food and then a certain time of night she puts herself to bed beautiful dog she lives in a relationship of beholding

[ 30 : 49 ] that's how we ought to live in the morning Jesus I behold you feed me well he says okay read your bible pray begin to behold me and then you will be fed you go through the day and pressures come and you Lord I can't cope well behold me Jesus help me through this is really hard had some crisis some struggle some difficulty Jesus I behold you ready for bed thank you Jesus for today keep me safe I behold you we live in the easy yoke of discipleship what are we beholding if we're beholding EastEnders and football and all of this stuff at the expense of Jesus we are not being transformed it's not there's anything wrong with those things you can do both but you can't just do one don't expect to grow if you don't behold

Jesus think of this hymn that's coming on the screen the hymn of Bernard of Clairvaux Jesus the very thought of thee with sweetness fills the breast but sweeter far thy face to see and in thy presence rest I love that hymn this is a mind trained didn't come immediately overnight this is a mind and a heart trained by devotion you learn to desire him as you learn to get to know him you discover more about him so you desire more of him and haven't you been in those moments where you've had wonderful experiences of the presence of Jesus perhaps at a prayer meeting or as you read the scriptures and God came to your heart a fresh way you felt the peace of Jesus overwhelm you and at that point you thought I could stay here forever this is heaven on earth and then when that experience has gone you kind of mourn it as if why can't

I have that more a glimpse of heaven but the glimpses of heaven are important because they stir our hearts and desires but not having them is also important because if we had them every day we would have all our heavens on earth so we need sometimes to be left with longing it's a bit like a kind of being in love romantically isn't it you ever been in love romantically I know some people haven't you ever been in love romantically it's kind of a funny thing isn't it you meet this person something happens wow you want to spend all your time with them like you text them every morning well actually when I was caught in you don't even use the word caught in now you didn't have a text you know like you could ring them up or if you were at a distance you could send them a letter which took ages to come kind of hung on their every word and then it settled down not boring isn't it we're married now flowers once a year if you're lucky romantically in love you never get enough of the desire do you never get enough of the romance and you think it's going to last forever and it doesn't but with

Jesus it really does and you know if you have that desire for love you're never satisfied with it there's an ache there it's a kind of funny thing romance because it leaves you with a fear of loss because there's nothing better than love is there the greatest gift of all really is and when you get it it transforms you remember Christmas Carol and Dickens or even better the Grinch who here did Christmas but then he got a heart that grew and he learned to love and then his whole life was transformed that's what love does it transforms your heart the love of Christ enters into you transforms your heart with desire and you want more and more and more Jesus the very thought of thee with sweetness fills the breast but a longing but sweeter face far thy face to see and in thy presence rest we can never get enough of him next slide please let me tell you about

Mabel I've got two more points I'm not going to do the next two points I'll just kind of flag them up because I love this story of Mabel I was going to tell you this story before but I didn't have time it's funny that how sermons like do that to you but I want to tell you this story John Ortberg tells it about Mabel in the book The Life You've Always Wanted it's called Mabel's Story!

[ 36 : 03 ] On the brightest of days he says it seems dark inside and it smelled of sickness and stale urine I went there once or twice a week for four years but never wanted to go there and I always left with a sense of relief it is not the kind of place one gets used to one particular day he met Mabel this John Ortberg I saw an old woman strapped up in a wheelchair her face was an absolute horror the empty stare and white pupils of her eyes told me that she was blind the large hearing aid over one ear told me that she was almost deaf one side of her face was being eaten by cancer there was a discolored and running sore covering part of one cheek and it had pushed!

her nose to one side dropped she a flower in her hand and said here's a flower for you happy mother's day she held the flower up to her face and tried to smell it and then she spoke and much to my surprise her words although somewhat garbled because of her deformity were obviously produced by a clear mind she said thank you it's lovely but can I give it to someone else

I can't see it you know I'm blind I said of course and I pushed her in her chair back down the hallway to a place where I thought I could find some alert patients I found one and I stopped the chair Mabel held out the flower and said here this is from Jesus that was when it began to dawn on me that this was not an ordinary human being later I wheeled her back to her until her mother died then she ran the farm alone until 1950 when her blindness and sickness sent her to the convalescent hospital for 25 years she got weaker and sicker with constant headaches backaches and stomach aches and then the cancer came too Mabel and I became friends over the next few weeks I would read her from the Bible and often when I would pause she would continue reciting the passage from and the question occurred to me what does

Mabel have to think about hour after hour day after day week after week not even able to know if it's day or night so I went to her and asked Mabel what do you think about when you lay here and she said I think about my Jesus I sat there and thought for a moment about the difficulty for me thinking about Jesus for even five minutes and I asked what do you think about Jesus she replied slowly and deliberately as I wrote I think about how good he's been to me he's been awfully good to me in my life you know I'm one of those kind who's mostly satisfied lots of folk wouldn't care much for what I think lots of folk wouldn't think I'm kind of old fashioned but I don't care I'd rather have Jesus he's all the world to me and then she began to sing an old hymn Jesus is all the world to me my life my joy my all he is my strength from day to day without him

I would fall when I am sad to him I go no other one can cheer me so when I am sad he makes me glad he is my friend and that's a true story of a lady who had nothing but who had everything in Jesus when you listen to Mabel's story it's very difficult to say but I don't have time or life has been so hard for me you know listen you never will find time you have to make time for Jesus life will always be hard but the issue is not because it's so hard I'm going to keep away from him he says just bring it all to me lay it all at my feet and discover something wonderful I'll carry you and I'll take your burden as well we need to become like

[ 41 : 32 ] Jesus we need to become like Jesus by beholding him I had two other things to say it didn't matter the other people will say it through the month beholding him 42 years I have served him and he's been so so good to me I cannot imagine life without him and I would not have believed that I would be who I am apart from his grace to me and the amazing thing is loads of you have that story too and you're not like me you don't become like me but you're all becoming like Jesus and that's the best thing the best image for your life let us pray