WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU GET

Have you ever caught yourself doing or saying something exactly like your parents? Perhaps it was a certain tone or some physical gesture. It may be a common phrase or some subconscious facial expression. Children often vow never to be like their parents, but somehow there are these small, unintentional behaviors that trickle through. When we catch them, we either smile with reminiscence or with humorous disgust.

It is interesting that human behavior mimics that which it sees. This is not only restricted to parents and family members. Those obsessed with particular cultural icons find themselves moving, acting, speaking, and doing things like that person. In fact, it is not only for cultural icons, but we subconsciously copy everyone around us. This is the basis for fashion, trends, shifts in language, media, music, art—the list goes on.

When it comes to Christianity, however, are there tones, gestures, words, actions, and characteristics that we should mimic? In this lesson, we establish that becoming a disciple is not only about thinking or doing things differently, but it is a change of identity. And when we are associated with the Lord Jesus as His disciples, our behavior, values, and character—all things—start to change from the mere action of seeing Him.
Write out Philippians 3:12–20 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write Philippians 3:15–17. You may also re-write the passage in your own words, outline, or mind-map the chapter.
Some people are a little wary when they hear the words discipleship, evangelism, or outreach. Of course, we should be a little cautious if our zeal amounts to merely wanting to grow numbers, develop growth charts, and conduct strategy sessions. But at the same time, Jesus Christ Himself implemented a discipleship program. What was the goal of Christ’s form of discipleship? “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). The goal of discipleship is Christlikeness in character and behavior. Christ teaches that there are specific ways in which this change happens:

1. “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Jesus wanted His disciples to be known for one characteristic—love; not only the abstract form of love or the theory of love, but the actual practice of love. Verse 35 states that love is for “one another.” Selfless love for those around you is one of the greatest arguments that Christ is living in the community of disciples. The reason it is so great is that it is so unnatural. It is unnatural to take on a negative for another person with no direct benefit; yet that is precisely what love does. Think of parents who have nothing to benefit from having a helpless baby around. They are deprived of sleep, alone time, money, health—the works! Yet because of love, the parent takes on all those negatives for the baby.

But that is a parent-child relationship. What would cause an individual to take on a negative for an unrelated individual? Nothing. But the example and power of Jesus Christ in the context of discipleship can miraculously change the individual to one who loves others. In short, disciples are loving.

2. Not only should disciples love each other, but Jesus also instructs them to deny self—Matthew 16:24. Similar to the first point, the individual not only takes on a negative for someone else but also denies a positive for self! No, this is not some form of religious self-flagellation. Rather, it is the simple teaching of being noble, unselfish, self-sacrificing. Again, what would cause an individual to deny a positive for themselves? Nothing. But the example and power of Jesus Christ in the context of discipleship can change the individual to one who is selfless. In short, disciples are self-denying.

3. “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men’ ” (Mark 1:17). Along with loving each other and denying self, Christ also called His disciples to be fishers of men. Taking note of their secular profession of being fishermen, Christ now promises the ability to catch individuals for the kingdom of God. But it is not they who are to do it, but Christ who makes them become the fishers of men. Too often, we rely on programs, strategies, and training systems for evangelism (and they do have their place). But Christ here is not commanding; rather He is promising that if we only follow Him, it is He who will do the transforming. What would cause an individual to bring individuals to God? Nothing. But the example and power of Jesus Christ in the context of discipleship can change the individual to one who is evangelistic. In short, disciples are soul-winners.

Whereas so-called Christians should be loving, self-denying soul-winners, those who are disciples, that is, those who follow Jesus, are loving, self-denying soul-winners. Their association with Him changes them to be just like Jesus.
CHRIST-LIKE LIVING

When people say that they follow Jesus, various assumptions are made about discipleship. One model is that following Jesus means merely being a nice person who smiles and is kind. Another model is that following Jesus means literally selling everything that you have and becoming some spiritual vagabond. Other versions include being an activist against some social injustice, while others think it is the academic exercise of reading and memorizing various religious works.

Scripture paints a composite picture in which following Jesus has various elements. Philippians 3 lists some of them. First, the passage emphasizes growth: “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected, but I press on” (v. 12). Growing in Christ-like character is a continual process in which the disciple grows in their understanding of God’s love. Second, discipleship entails “forgetting those things which are behind” (v. 13). There is a level of self-denial and forsaking of past behaviors, values, identities, and relationships. Third, “Reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (v. 13). To accept and follow Christ is the continual mantra, motto, personal mission statement, and lifelong endeavor of the disciple. Last, Paul says, “Join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern” (v. 17). Discipleship entails winning others to Christ and getting them involved in the discipleship process.

In short, disciples are growing, loving, self-denying, and soul-winning. Discipleship is not a private matter between the individual and God. It becomes infectious, so that now these disciples lead new disciples to grow, deny self, accept and follow Christ, and to repeat the call for other disciples. When Christ gave the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations, He included teaching and modeling these elements of Christ-like living.

Though Christ-like living begins with His habits of communing with God, His dependence on the Word, His witness to the truth, and His loving ministry to the needs of humanity, it also includes many other areas, such as baptism, Sabbath, reverence, stewardship, health, modesty, entertainment, marriage, family, relationships, and so on. Discipleship isn’t limited to these topics but seeks to affect every aspect of our lives. This is the scope of discipleship: Christ-like living in everything!
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What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

John 13:34
Matthew 4:18–22
1 Peter 2:21–25
Colossians 1:28, 29

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with the goal of discipleship?

Review your memorized verse from Philippians 3:12–20.
IN AND OUT

The classic battle in the local church is between in-reach and outreach. There are always arguments that outreach cannot be done until sufficient in-reach is done. Likewise, there are other arguments that churches have so focused on in-reach that no outward expression of faith is seen in the community. Which arguments have you heard in your church, and which side are you on?

Those who emphasize outreach focus on the community. Perhaps they use language like evangelism, soul-winning, service, the meeting of social needs, and numerical growth. There are others who emphasize in-reach. Their vocabulary includes nurturing, mentoring, inner growth, spirituality, development, spiritual discipline, and holy living.

The reality is that both are needed and both feed each other. Like two legs walking, one limb propels us forward so that the next can move the body forward. When working in concert, the two are inseparable. “The more one tries to explain the Word of God to others, with a love for souls, the plainer it becomes to himself. The more we use our knowledge and exercise our powers, the more knowledge and power we shall have” (Christ Object Lessons, 354). “Let ministers teach church members that in order to grow in spirituality, they must carry the burden that the Lord has laid upon them—the burden of leading souls into the truth” (Christian Service, 69).

Member care cannot be nurtured without training and equipping each other to get involved in soul-winning. Soul-winning cannot occur if we do not love and care for one another. Loving and caring cannot occur if we are not following Christ as our Lord and Master. There is no such thing as in-reach without outreach or outreach without in-reach. Discipleship is one continuous process that begins before baptism, continues after baptism, and leads the disciple to become more like Jesus.
SET THEM TO WORK AT ONCE

“Personal responsibility, personal activity in seeking the salvation of others, must be the education given to all newly come to the faith. . . . Personal faith is to be acted and practiced, personal holiness is to be cultivated, and the meekness and lowliness of Christ is to become a part of our practical life. The work is to be thorough and deep in the heart of every human agent.

“Those who profess to receive and believe the truth are to be shown the deadly influence of selfishness and its tainting, corrupting power. The Holy Spirit must work upon the human agent, else another power will control mind and judgment. Spiritual knowledge of God and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent is the only hope of the soul. Each soul is to be taught of God, line upon line, precept upon precept; he must feel his individual accountability to God to engage in service for his Master, whose he is, and whom he is required to serve in the work of saving souls from death. . . .

“God’s people are to feel a noble, generous sympathy for every line of work carried on in the great harvest field. By their baptismal vows they are pledged to make earnest, self-denying efforts to promote, in the hardest parts of the field, the work of soulsaving. God has placed on every believer the responsibility of striving to rescue the helpless and the oppressed. . . .

“Humble, simplehearted, trusting souls may do a work which will cause rejoicing in heaven among the angels of God. Their work at home, in their neighborhood, and in the church will be in its results as far-reaching as eternity. It is because this work is not done that the experience of young converts never reaches beyond the ABC in divine things. They are always babes, always needing to be fed upon milk, and never able to partake of true gospel meat. . . .

“When souls are converted, set them to work at once. And as they labor according to their ability, they will grow stronger. It is by meeting opposing influences that we become confirmed in the faith. As the light shines into their hearts, let them diffuse its rays. Teach the newly converted that they are to enter into fellowship with Christ, to be His witnesses, and to make Him known unto the world.

“None should be forward to enter into controversy, but they should tell the simple story of the love of Jesus. All should constantly search the Scriptures for the reason of their faith, so that, if asked, they may give ‘a reason of the hope that is in them, with meekness and fear.’

“The best medicine you can give the church is not preaching or sermonizing, but planning work for them. If set to work, the despondent would soon forget their despondency, the weak would become strong, the ignorant intelligent, and all would be prepared to present the truth as it is in Jesus. They would find an unfailing helper in Him who has promised to save all who come unto Him. . . .

“Those who are most actively employed in doing with interested fidelity their work to win souls to Jesus Christ, are the best developed in spirituality and devotion. Their very active working formed the means of their spirituality.”

(Evangelism, 354–356)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

Does your life imitate more the life of Christ or the life of someone else?

What three areas of Christ’s character and behavior are most profound to you? Are there any areas of dissonance?

How do the common religious definitions of discipleship differ from the biblical definition of discipleship?

In which areas do you need Christ to train you?

In which areas does your local church need Christ to train you?

How come some disciples don’t seem to grow, deny self, love others, and win souls?

How can more balance between in-reach and outreach be achieved?

What eclipses the real goal of Christian discipleship?