

L.I.F.T.

P.O.D. STUDY GUIDE

WEEK TWO - IMITATING GOD



INTRODUCTION

THE COMMAND AT THE CENTER

Last week we began L.I.F.T. with the greatest commandment: **love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength.**

This week we take the next step. Genuine love for Jesus should increasingly produce a desire to **become like Jesus.**

Ephesians 5:1-2

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

Paul gives believers an extraordinary command: **“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.”** The Greek word translated imitators is *mimētēs*, from which we get our English idea of “mimic.” It describes someone who follows or reproduces a pattern. Paul is not merely telling Christians to admire God. He is calling them to reproduce God's character in the way they live.



Notice, however, the phrase Paul places immediately beside the command: “**as beloved children.**” We imitate God because we already belong to His family.

A child does not imitate a parent in order to become a child; imitation naturally develops because the child already belongs to the family. In the same way, becoming like Christ does not earn our salvation. **It is the fruit of our salvation.**

This connects with one of the great purposes of salvation in Romans 8:29. Paul says that those God foreknew He also predestined “**to become conformed to the image of His Son.**”

God's purpose is not simply to forgive us and leave our character unchanged. He is restoring in redeemed humanity the image that sin has distorted. Salvation includes forgiveness, but God's work continues as the Holy Spirit progressively forms the character of Christ within us.

This means spiritual maturity cannot be measured only by how much Scripture we know, how long we have attended church, or how involved we are in ministry. Those things matter, but they serve a greater purpose. **The question is whether knowing Jesus is increasingly making us like Jesus.**



GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Ephesians 5:1 calls us “beloved children” before telling us to imitate God. Why is it important that imitation flows from our identity as God's children rather than becoming an attempt to earn His acceptance?

2. Romans 8:29 says God's purpose is to conform us to the image of His Son. If Christlikeness is one of God's primary goals for us, how might that change the way we define spiritual growth?



1. KEEP THE PATTERN IN FRONT OF YOU

Galatians 1:15-16

But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood

2 Corinthians 3:18

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

Paul possessed tremendous religious knowledge before encountering Christ. He knew Scripture, tradition, and theology, yet knowledge alone had not produced Christlike character. Paul could defend what he believed while persecuting people made in God's image. His conversion therefore involved more than changing his theological conclusions. He says God was pleased **“to reveal His Son in me.”** Christ was not only revealed to Paul; Christ increasingly became visible *through* Paul.



2 Corinthians 3:18 helps us understand how that transformation happens. Paul says that as believers behold the glory of the Lord, we “**are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.**” The language is important because the transformation is something being done to us. Christianity is not a self-improvement program in which we manufacture Christlike character through determination. **The Holy Spirit is the One who transforms us.**

Yet we are not passive. Paul connects **beholding** with **becoming**. The Spirit transforms us into the image upon which our attention is increasingly fixed. Scripture, prayer, worship, obedience, and communion with God continually place the character and ways of Jesus before us.

This helps explain why the four Gospels are so important to discipleship. We do not encounter Jesus merely as a collection of doctrines. We watch how He treats the rejected, responds to opposition, handles temptation, speaks truth, forgives enemies, serves others, submits to the Father, and remains faithful under suffering. Jesus gives us a visible picture of the character the Spirit is forming within us.

First John 2:6 therefore says, “**The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.**” A mature Christian eventually moves beyond asking only, “**Is this sinful?**” and begins asking a better question: “**Does this look like Jesus?**”



GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Second Corinthians 3:18 connects “beholding” Christ with being transformed into His image. What practices help keep Jesus and His character clearly before us in everyday life?

2. How would our decisions change if, instead of asking only “Is this wrong?” we regularly asked, “Does my attitude, response, speech, and behavior look like Jesus?”



LIFE APPLICATION

Choose one area of Jesus' character to intentionally study this week. It might be His compassion, courage, forgiveness, humility, prayer life, response to criticism, or submission to the Father.

Read a Gospel passage that displays that quality and ask two questions: **“What do I see in Jesus?”** and **“What would it look like for the Holy Spirit to reproduce this in me?”** The goal is not merely to learn another fact about Christ, but to keep the Pattern before you long enough for His ways to increasingly become your ways.



2. GOD USES PEOPLE TO SHOW US THE PATTERN

1 Corinthians 11:1

Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.

Hebrews 13:7

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

Paul makes a statement that can initially sound almost arrogant: **“Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.”** Yet the second half of the sentence changes everything. Paul is not making himself the ultimate standard. Christ remains the pattern. Paul is saying, in effect, **“Where you see Christ reproduced in me, follow what you see.”**

This reveals an important dimension of biblical discipleship. God gave us His Word and the perfect example of Jesus, but He also places mature believers around us who demonstrate what following Jesus looks like in real circumstances. Hebrews 13:7 tells believers to remember their leaders and, after **“considering the result of their conduct,”** to imitate their faith.



Notice that Scripture does not tell us to imitate someone's charisma, personality, gifting, platform, or style. It tells us to examine the **fruit of a person's life** and imitate their faith.

Before copying someone's pattern, Scripture tells us to consider where that pattern has taken them.

This is one reason Christianity was never intended to be lived in isolation. Biblical discipleship is relational. Paul could tell the Corinthians that Timothy would remind them of “**my ways which are in Christ**” (1 Corinthians 4:17). Christianity had become recognizable in the way Paul lived, and Timothy had spent enough time with Paul to observe those patterns firsthand.

There is a beautiful multiplication at work: **Christ shaped Paul; Paul disciplined Timothy; Timothy became an example to others.** God often uses people who have already walked part of the road to help those who are still learning how to walk it.

The question, then, is not simply whether we have Christian friends. **Do we have people close enough to us whose faith is worth studying?** We need people who know Scripture better than we do, pray more faithfully than we do, have endured suffering without becoming bitter, have built healthy marriages, have remained faithful for decades, or demonstrate qualities of Christ that are still developing in us.



GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Hebrews 13:7 says to consider the “result of their conduct” before imitating someone's faith. What qualities would you look for in someone whose spiritual life is worth imitating?

2. Who has modeled some aspect of Christlike character for you? What did you learn by watching their life that you might not have learned merely by hearing a lesson about it?



LIFE APPLICATION

Identify one person whose walk with Christ demonstrates an area in which you want to grow. Instead of merely admiring that quality, become intentional about learning from it.

Have a conversation with them. Ask how they developed that discipline or how God shaped that character in them.

Discipleship becomes powerful when biblical truth becomes visible in an actual life.



2. BECOME A PATTERN WORTH FOLLOWING

1 Timothy 4:12

Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.

Philippians 3:17

Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

Timothy spent years watching and learning from Paul, but eventually Paul turned the responsibility around. He told Timothy, “**In speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.**” Timothy could no longer remain only the person looking for an example. He now had to become one.

Notice where Paul places the emphasis: **speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity**. He does not tell Timothy to become an example primarily through gifting, preaching ability, leadership position, or public ministry. Paul points toward character. The credibility of Timothy's ministry would be demonstrated by the kind of person he was becoming.



This is an important transition in spiritual maturity. Early in our Christian lives, we naturally ask, “Who can help me? Who can teach me? Who can show me how?” Those questions never completely disappear because we should always remain teachable. But eventually another question must emerge:

“Who is learning from me?”

Jesus built discipleship this way. In John 13, after washing His disciples' feet, He said, **“I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.”** Jesus demonstrated something and then called His disciples to reproduce it. Christian formation was intended to multiply.

Whether we recognize it or not, our lives are already teaching. Children learn what Christianity looks like by watching Christian parents. New believers watch mature believers. Coworkers observe what happens to our faith under pressure. Friends watch how we handle disappointment, conflict, success, money, forgiveness, and failure.

That makes Paul's instruction intensely personal. **We are modeling something whether we intend to or not.** The issue is whether what others see in us is helping them see Jesus. The progression of discipleship is therefore beautifully simple: **I look to Christ. I learn from people who look like Christ. Then I live in such a way that someone else can see Christ through me.**



GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Paul tells Timothy to become an example in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity. Which of these areas would most challenge you if someone began intentionally modeling their Christian life after yours?

2. If someone copied the way you pray, forgive, speak, serve, respond to pressure, handle offense, and treat people, what picture of Christianity would your life give them?



LIFE APPLICATION

Think specifically about the people who regularly observe your life—your family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, or younger believers. Choose one area where you want the character of Jesus to become more visible.

Do not approach it as image management or an attempt to appear spiritual. Ask the Holy Spirit to genuinely form that quality in you so that what others eventually imitate is authentic.



BRINGING IT HOME

The goal of imitation is not to manufacture a religious personality or become a copy of another Christian. **The goal is Christlikeness.** Jesus is the pattern, the Holy Spirit is the One who transforms us, mature believers help demonstrate the pattern, and eventually our lives should help others see what following Jesus looks like.

Second Corinthians 3:18 holds these truths together: as we behold the Lord, we are “**being transformed into the same image.**” There is both participation and grace in that process. We turn our attention toward Christ; the Spirit performs the transformation.

Personal Reflection

- What aspect of Jesus' character does God seem to be forming in me right now?
- Who has God placed in my life whose faith I should intentionally learn from?
- Who may already be learning what Christianity looks like by watching me?



This week, make imitation intentional. Look closely at Jesus in the Gospels. Learn intentionally from someone whose faith bears good fruit. Then ask the Holy Spirit to make one aspect of Christ's character more visible through your own life.

The goal of Christianity is not merely that people know we believe in Jesus. The goal is that increasingly, when people encounter us, they can recognize something of Jesus in us.

Prayer

Father, thank You that You have not only saved us from sin but are transforming us into the image of Your Son. Keep Jesus clearly before us and teach us to behold Him in Your Word, in prayer, and in the way we live each day.

Place faithful people around us whose lives demonstrate what it means to follow Christ, and give us humility to learn from them. Through Your Holy Spirit, transform our speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity so that our lives increasingly reflect Jesus.

And as You change us, make us examples that help others follow Him. May Christ not only be revealed to us, but increasingly be revealed through us. In Jesus' name,
Amen.

