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WHY SHOULD I WANT TO BE LIKE JESUS?

Larry McCall

What would Jesus do? Bracelets and necklaces with the now familiar “WWJD” acronym seem to be everywhere. No doubt many adults and young people wearing the WWJD ornaments are well-intended in wanting to have a regular reminder to check the choices they make in everyday life. We should be thankful that these people are showing an apparent concern for the happiness of Jesus above their own. I do wonder, however, how much these young people know about Jesus—how much they know of His character. If the basis of their decision making is “What would Jesus do?” one must make the assumption that the decision maker *knows* what Jesus would do. Have the WWJD wearers made a study of that issue so that they can make well-informed decisions? A few may have done just that, but sadly, most have not. I fear that as a backlash to this presumptive approach to “*what would Jesus do,*” some “thinking” Christians might demean the subject altogether. Some might say that the issue of “What would Jesus do?” is unanswerable or unimportant. I would like to passionately suggest that “What would Jesus do?” should indeed be asked by sincere Christians. Knowing in some fundamental way the answer to that question will affect how I approach my life as a follower of Christ. Instead of speculating “What would Jesus do?” maybe a better pursuit would be “What *did* Jesus do?” And, how did the activities of Jesus reflect His character? And, how is the character of Jesus reflected in my own life?

As a professing Christian, I am clearly told in the Bible that I must pattern my life after Christ. The kind of character seen in Jesus must also be seen in me. The apostle John said it like this, "The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked" (1 John 2:6). Why should I take time to study what Jesus was really like? Why should I be concerned with being like Jesus?

BECAUSE IT IS MY CALLING

Jesus stood before a Galilean crowd and said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:28-30). King Jesus Himself has given me His gracious command to come to Him to learn. I am called not primarily to an institution or a particular body of doctrine, but to a real person. And it is from that real person with all His attributes that I am to learn. King Jesus calls me to come to Him to learn, and I must obey His authoritative command. As I respond, my initiation into Christ must be followed by imitation of Christ.

BECAUSE IT IS MY OBLIGATION

Saying that I am connected to Christ in a saving way carries with it an obligation to back up that verbal claim with a lifestyle that mirrors the character of Christ. "By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked" (1 John 2:5b-6). Faith in Jesus as Savior and conformity to His character are inseparable. William Hendriksen said it like this:

The apostle [Paul] never proclaimed a Christ who was a Savior but not an Example, nor a Christ who was an Example but not a Savior. Christianity for Paul was, indeed, a life, but

a life based on a doctrine. And for those—for those alone—who embrace Christ as being, by God's sovereign grace, Lord, Savior, and thus Enabler, he can also be Example.¹

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Christians are called upon to follow Christ
in their paths to Christian maturity.*



Being like Christ is a necessary standard for the Christian. Sinclair Ferguson has written: "In a word, maturity equals Christlikeness. No other standard may be allowed to substitute. All other standards will be lesser, man-made alternatives that disguise the all-demanding standard God sets before us in the Scriptures."² Repeatedly in the New Testament, Christians are called upon to follow Christ in their paths to Christian maturity. In addition to 1 John 2:5b-6, consider these calls to Christ-likeness: "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you" (John 13:15). "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps" (1 Peter 2:21).

If I am not seeking to follow the character of Christ in my own life, what right do I have to claim to be a "Christian"?

BECAUSE IT IS MY PASSION

When I am savingly drawn to Christ, I find that He becomes *precious* to me (1 Peter 2:7). The more I get to know Him, the more I *want* to know Him. And knowing Him more and more leads to being more like my Savior in my daily life. After decades of being a Christian, the imprisoned missionary, Paul, could still write with passion, "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death" (Phil. 3:10). Charles H. Gabriel wrote a gospel song that is the heart cry of every Christian: "More like the Master I would ever be." The theologian B. B. Warfield wrote with equal passion, "Christ our Example' after 'Christ our Redeemer,' no words can more deeply stir the Christian's heart than these."³

BECAUSE IT IS MY WITNESS

Much of what the watching world knows of Jesus Christ, it knows from watching the lifestyles of those who claim to be united to Christ. The world's opinions of Christ largely reflect the world's opinions of Christ's followers. E. F. Harrison has written on the necessity for first-century Christians to model the character of Christ. In that era, the canon of Scripture had not yet been completed and compiled. What nonbelievers knew of Christ they largely gleaned from what they heard from those who professed to be His followers and what they saw in the lives of those same people. "It was imperative that every believer should preach with his life so as to adorn the doctrine and commend it to others."⁴ In our own day, there is a great neglect of the Bible. This modern ignorance is reminiscent of the first century's lack of knowledge regarding the New Testament Scriptures. Once again, most of what the watching world knows of Christ it will gain from observing the Christians around them. The modern Christian has a min-

istry of providing a "constant flesh and blood demonstration" of true Christianity.⁵ On the other hand, "Nothing hinders the testimony of the Christian church more than the wide gap between our claims and our performance, between the Christ we proclaim verbally and the Christ we present visually."⁶

BECAUSE IT IS MY DESTINY

My life is not purposeless. As a Christian, I am heading for a destiny that God had planned for me even before He said, "Let there be light." Paul wrote of this destiny in Romans 8. Many Christians find great comfort in quoting Romans 8:28, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." But sadly, few believers have looked in that same passage to discover what Paul was referring to as the "good" that God is working in our lives. The very next words from the pen of the apostle explain, "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29).

To better appreciate the significance of my God-ordained destiny, it is helpful to go back to the very beginning of the human race. God decided to make one of His creations "special." There would be one creation who would be placed over all other created things in order to manage/rule them on behalf of God, the Great King. "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth'" (Gen. 1:26). Adam and Eve were created "special" by God—in His own "image"—in His own "likeness" in order to represent Him and rule for Him as His "prince and princess." Yet, the prince and princess rebelled against the Great King, desiring to be their own "bosses" rather than to

represent the Sovereign God. Because of their rebellion, God's likeness in man was tarnished by sin, and man's designed rulership over the creation was not fulfilled. Man's "job description" as God's image bearer is still in force, but unfulfilled. The author of Hebrews notes this uncompleted destiny by quoting Psalm 8, then making a candid observation.

What is man, that Thou rememberest him? Or the son of man, that Thou art concerned about him? Thou hast made him for a little while lower than the angels; Thou hast crowned him with glory and honor, and hast appointed him over the works of Thy hands; Thou has put all things in subjection under his feet (Heb. 2:6-9).

*He is molding me and shaping me
"to become conformed to the image
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Then we find this sad note: "For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him" (2:8). How we might despair were it not for the encouraging words that follow, "But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of

the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone" (Heb. 2:9). In other words, the "first Adam" did not fulfill his obligations as God's image bearer. But God never abandoned His goal of having man operate as His special representative, ruling this created world in the name of the Great King. When the first Adam failed in his mission, God set in motion the plan of redemption and restoration. He sent His own perfect Son in real human flesh as the "Last Adam" to restore that which was lost in the sinfulness of the first image bearer. Now, as the great goal of my redemption, God is bringing all things into my life for the "good" of making me like Christ. He is molding me and shaping me "to become conformed to the image of His Son." I am currently in the school of redemption, becoming more and more like Jesus. "The ultimate aim of redemption is to make every believer resemble Jesus Christ."⁷ "God's whole purpose, conceived in a past eternity, being worked out for and in his people in history, to be completed in the glory to come, may be encapsulated in this single concept: God intends to make us like Christ."⁸

Graduation day awaits me. "We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2). And then, having been conformed into the image of the Last Adam (the very thing that was predestined for me), I shall "reign forever and ever" in His likeness and under His perfect leadership (Rev. 22:5).

If my heavenly Father has predestined me to be like Jesus, and if He is currently bringing all things into my life to work that "good" in me, then I shall be very much interested in knowing all I can about my Savior, into whose image I am being restored. It is my *destiny* to be like Jesus.

CONCLUSION

Why should I want to be like Jesus? There are a number

of crucially important reasons why I should devote my life to knowing Jesus Christ so that I might be more like Him. Being like Jesus is my calling, my obligation, my passion, my witness, and ultimately, my destiny. I must devote myself to the study of Christ through His holy Word, praying that His Holy Spirit will more and more conform me to the image of my blessed Savior.

Author

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Notes

1. William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1964), 92.
2. Sinclair B. Ferguson, "Being Like Jesus" in *Discipleship Journal*, 24 (November 1, 1984), p. 20.
3. B. B. Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1950), 563.
4. E. F. Harrison, "Exegetical Studies in 1 Peter" in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 392 (October-December 1941), p. 459.
5. Ibid.
6. John Stott, *Focus on Christ* (New York: William Collins Publishers, Inc., 1979), 143.
7. Leslie B. Flynn, *The Power of Christlike Living* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 13.
8. Stott, 142.