

“All Ages Worship: Be Like Jesus”  
Philippians 4:8-9

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Scripture: Philippians 4:8-9

Sermon:

**\*\*Read Scripture first: Phil 4:8-9**

What does it mean to be Christlike? What does it mean to be like Jesus? Does it mean we have to dress in robes and sandals all the time? Maybe it means we need to grow a beard and talk in stories?

Of course not! To be like Jesus means to love people; to be primarily concerned with the well-being of others instead of our own well-being like most people are. In the first video we watched, the idea of stopping the cycle of hurting people was brought up. This is Jesus-like. **We have the power to affect people and change their day just by being kind to them instead of mean or ignoring them.** In our second video, we heard of a young man with CP who was treated kindly by a girl from school. She was Christ-like. She treated him kindly, included him with her other friends, and treated him like she would treat her best friends, whereas most people made fun of him or ignored him.

Today we think of Jesus as having reached hundreds, even thousands of people. When we ask ourselves about how to be like Jesus, we may be intimidated by the range of people Jesus reached. But, if you read the Gospels carefully, you will find that although Jesus did often speak to crowds, he also frequently reached out to one person, one individual. Like our video, you can have a profound impact by just reaching one person. That is why one of our three areas of vision focus for the next few years is “**Reach One.**” **We want to equip and train Priory people to intentionally choose one person that they can reach out to for Christ.**

One thing that can make it hard to be like Jesus is the pressure around us to be like the world. Our culture around us is increasingly un-Christian. Not that long ago, most people held Christian values, even if they didn’t know Jesus. Now, however, our culture has slid away from holding Christian values to great degree. The slide has been slow, though, and many of us don’t realize just how un-Christian the culture is around us and how much we have bought in to our un-Christian culture’s ideas. These ideas affect the way we behave and live day to day. Often we are unaware of how much we’ve been influenced by our culture in a negative way, until we are challenged to be like Jesus and we find it so hard!

We need to think about and examine what we set our minds on. We have to think about what we think about. As the saying goes, “**Garbage in- garbage out.**” [**incl pic**] If you fill your mind with a whole bunch of garbage, then a whole bunch of garbage is going to come out in your speech, your actions, your attitudes, your desires, your relationships with others, and, in general, in your life.

Another way to put this is, “If you eat a lot of fat, greasy food, you’ll become a fat greasy dude!” If we consume a lot of greasy, fatty, unhealthy ideas, images, words and behaviours, our behaviour will become fatty, greasy and unhealthy. **What you let into your mind affects what you believe. What you believe affects how you live.**

I have another video clip (3 videos in one service is a new record for us at Priory!) that helps illustrate this problem. Think of your mind as a sponge. We soak up what is around us. That affects what comes out of us. Watch this clip from Peppa Pig in which the Pig family is washing their car.

[**video**]

[**pic**] George drops his sponge in a muddy puddle. Before he does this, what is he able to do? [**\*\*Ask the congregation- he’s able to clean the mud off the car**] Once he’s dropped his sponge in the puddle, though, what happens? [**\*\* Ask the congregation- the sponge doesn’t work anymore, it gets the car dirtier.**] What happens when he cleans the sponge off in the bucket of soapy water? [**\*\*Ask the congregation- the water gets dirty, so when Peppa tries to clean the new mud on the car, it gets the whole car dirty.**]

If we allow our minds to “fall into a muddy puddle,” if we allow our minds to get filled with dirty things, mean things, cruel things, greedy things, selfish things, it affects everything we do. Even when we think we’re helping people, we will be adding more dirt. It’s a mess!

What, then, should we fill our minds with if we want to be like Jesus? Paul tells us in Philippians 4:8-9.

We read these verses at the very beginning. Paul says to set our minds on certain things. He says we should let our minds “dwell” on these things. It’s not enough to just occasionally think about these things. It’s not enough to know what they are. It’s not enough to just know these things are good. We need to let our minds dwell on these things. It’s the difference between living somewhere and visiting somewhere. [Halford E Luccock, *More Preaching Values from the Epistles of Paul*, p. 211]

Our family was blessed to visit a friend’s cottage this summer. We just visited. We don’t live there. It was a nice place to visit for a week, but it’s not our home. It’s now where we dwell. When it comes to wanting to be like Jesus, we have to set our minds on certain things. We have to let our minds dwell on these things, not just visit them for a week, once a year! “It’s a law in life that if a man thinks of something often enough, he will come to the stage where he cannot stop thinking about it.” [William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians*, p. 79] If we let our minds dwell on these things, we will grow to the point that we can’t help thinking about them and letting them penetrate our minds and lives.

What, specifically, does Paul say we should set our minds on? Things that are true, things that are noble, things that are right, pure, lovely and admirable. What do these terms mean? Paul was writing to Christians who, like us, lived in a very un-Christian culture. They, too, wondered how they were to be like Jesus in an un-Jesus-like world. Should they completely separate themselves from non-Christians? Or was it ok to be part of their culture? What should they do? Paul tells them to fill their minds with the good things in their culture. As citizens of heaven, living in our world, they do not have to completely abandon or reject this world. Rather, “as believers in Christ they will embrace the best of that world as well, as long as it is understood in light of the cross.” [Gordon Fee, *Philippians*, p. 416]

What is it in the surrounding culture that we can latch on to? What areas are there for us to connect to our culture in order to be Christ-like to the people around us?

The first thing Paul says is “truth.” “Whatever is true...” he begins. **In our culture there has been a great attack on truth.** Many people today think and believe that truth is whatever one chooses it to be. Our culture no longer believes in objective truth, or truth that applies to everybody. We live as if truth is a choice. This is one way in which our culture has slipped very far away from Christianity. You see, there is such thing as objective truth, truth that is true for everybody, because God is objective. In fact, it’s not just that God knows what is true, God himself determines truth.

God created the universe and he wrote into our universe certain laws or truths that are binding on everyone. Some of these laws are physical laws, like the law of gravity. Others are spiritual laws, like the result of sin being a break in our relationship with God and one another. **Truth, then, is determined in light of God and the gospel.** We may not always get it right when it comes to what God says is true, but truth does exist. We can and should continue to seek it out, which is very different from what our culture says- that it doesn’t even exist so you shouldn’t bother looking for it.

Paul also says we should have our minds live or dwell on what is noble. These are things that are worthy of respect, like hard work, honesty, integrity, gentleness, caring for others, serving others and the like. There are people in our culture, and agencies in our cultures, that work towards these things. These are great ways for Christians to connect with our culture and demonstrate being like Jesus in non-religious situations.

Paul also says we should let our minds dwell on what is right. This word is tricky to translate. We use the word “right” to mean the same as “true.” “That answer is right” means the same thing as “That answer is true.” But this word also carries with it the idea of relationship, of relationships between people. **So what is right has to do with what keeps us in right relationships with one another.** This includes things like justice and fairness. I think it also includes things like forgiveness and reconciliation. These are things that almost everyone values and are other ways that Christians can engage our culture and be like Jesus outside of a church service. This is a great way to “Reach Out” into our community, partnering with others to clean up our city and reflect Jesus to it.

The next term Paul uses is “pure.” This is another tricky word to translate. It’s best to think of it in terms of “pure motives.” Sometimes this word is translated “sincere” or “sincerity.” I think we’ve all been in situations in which a person wanted to help us, but we suspected, or even found out, that their motives were not sincere. They had ulterior motives for trying to help us. This is what Paul is warning against. When we find sincerity, we should embrace it. When we find people or agencies that have pure motives, let our minds engage

them. We, ourselves, are to be pure in this way, not having mixed motives when we do things.

The last two terms are similar, lovely and admirable. Lovely things include things that are enjoyable and beautiful, like a great symphony or masterful art. It also includes things that are admirable and moral, like the work of Mother Teresa in Calcutta, India. These are things that evoke strong, positive emotions in people. These things draw people to them. Christians can and should let their minds dwell on these things.

These are the kinds of things we are to set our minds on. These are the places we are to let our minds dwell or live so that we get to the point where this is what we automatically think of. This is how we clean the mud out of the sponge of our minds.

But we must also remember that **we have to filter all these things through the lens of Christ**. We can't just think about these things and forget Jesus if we are to be like Jesus. Rather, we are to view these things in our culture through Jesus. We are to see how they can be used to glorify God and proclaim Christ.

When we set our minds on these things, Paul says, the God of peace will be with us. Peace, in the Bible, is more than the absence of violence. **Peace is a relationship word and relationships matter**. The God of peace will be with us, meaning we will have a good relationship with God, as well as a good relationship with other people. If you read the OT thoughtfully, you will notice that a lot of the religious devotion was focussed on God dwelling with his people. [Fee, p. 421] This was the significance of the Tabernacle and the Temple. God dwelt in these places with his people. Here, Paul says God will be *with* us, he will dwell with us when we have our minds dwell on these things, allowing them to shape us and our relationships.

How, then, are we to be like Jesus? We are to embrace what is good in our immediate context or culture. But we are to do so in a discriminating way. We are to do so through the lens of Christ. Two people can do the exact same action but one can be doing it for Jesus and the other for themselves. This makes the two actions completely different in their meaning, even if they appear to be the same on the surface. So as we set our minds on the good things around us, we must always remember Jesus and the model he gave us of obedience to God, self-sacrifice and putting the needs of others, in particular their spiritual needs, on the top of his list of priorities.

When we use Jesus as our template [Fee, p. 421] we can engage our culture in its goodness and model Jesus to our fallen world. But we must be careful to always keep Jesus as our filter. If we don't, we may miss the fact that we are falling into our culture's traps, like materialism, relativism and individualism. We are always in danger of absorbing the bad things in our culture, because our minds are a sponge and our culture is a muddy puddle. But with Jesus as our filter, we can tap into the good things in our culture and help to clean it up without becoming part of the problem or being stained ourselves.

So when you go to school, or to work, or to the grocery store, or chat with your neighbours over the fence, look for the good. Look for what is true, noble, right or just, what is sincere, lovely and admirable. Look for it in the people you encounter. Look for it in your conversations. Look for it in what you read, what you watch and what you say. Look for the good in a person, in particular if they are lonely or unpopular. Reach out to the goodness, nobility, sincerity and loveliness in them and you will Reach One for Jesus. Treat the cashier like a brother or sister. Respect your classmates as valuable people. Treat your employees, coworkers or bosses like beautiful, lovely people, even when they don't deserve it. And the God of peace, relational peace, will dwell in you as your mind dwells on these things. Amen.