

## Session 1: IMITATE

*'You became imitators of us and of the Lord... and so you became a model to all the believers. The Lords message rang out from you... Your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it.'* (1 Thess 1 v 6-8)

The Thessalonian influence had spread beyond what any of them could have imagined and probably beyond what any of them were even aware of. *This is the power of imitating.*

Leadership is primarily about influence. What we witness in the lives of these believers should inspire us in our own Christian journey. How many of them had positions or titles or responsibilities, how many had public gifts, how many had full time professional ministries? Yet their leadership influence was so far reaching.

How aware are we of our own leadership potential? How aware are we of the extent to which our lives can influence others? How far reaching is our impact going to be?

Our leadership influence will be directly related to the degree to which we ourselves are already effective and diligent followers. **Before you can lead well, and serve as a model for others to follow, you've got to be following well.**

Our ultimate ambition should be to follow and imitate Christ.

Jesus said, *'I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.'* (John 15 v 5)

To follow Jesus involves words like surrender and sacrifice and selflessness and suffering. Following Christ is a full and costly commitment. (Luke 9 v 23, 62; 14 v 33)

**How do we ensure we are effective followers? How do we continue to grow on this journey of imitating Christ?**

### 1) Self-leadership

On this theme of Self-leadership Bill Hybels makes the following comment;

*'Nobody – I mean nobody – can do this work for us. Every leader has to do this work alone, and it isn't easy. In fact, because it's such tough work most leaders avoid it. We would rather try to inspire or control the behaviour of others than face the rigorous work of self-reflection and inner growth.'*<sup>1</sup>

But if we want to be effective followers if we want to imitate Christ then it is going to take our full and complete cooperation and involvement. And the decision regarding the extent of that cooperation and involvement is down to you. It's your call.

What things are contained within self-leadership?

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<sup>1</sup> Hybels, B, Courageous Leadership, Zondervan, 2002, p184

**1.1) Spiritual disciplines:** Allowing your life to be informed, influenced and inspired by Jesus. It's the journey of knowing, loving and obeying Jesus more and more.

One definition is *'any activity that can help me gain power to live as Jesus taught and modelled it.'*<sup>2</sup> The focus is on our effort helping us to be in a place where we can receive the gracious work of the Spirit to make us more like Christ.

*'Train (discipline/exercise) yourself to be godly.'* (1 Tim 4 v 7) You won't drift into spiritual maturity.

John Ortberg says *'spiritual transformation is not a matter of trying harder, but of training wisely.'*<sup>3</sup>

How wisely are you training?

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We need a long-term, gradual, disciplined plan to build spiritual strength and health. E.g. The Marathon Runner.

**Main disciplines:** What are some of these spiritual disciplines?

**Prayer:**

*'When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.'* (Matt 6 v 6)

*'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.'* (Matt 7 v 7-8)

*'Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives.... In prayer, real prayer, we begin to think God's thoughts after Him: to desire the things He desires, to love the things He loves.'*<sup>4</sup>

Reflect upon and assess how you are doing in the spiritual discipline of Prayer:

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Remember God always meets us where we are and slowly moves us along into deeper things.

What step/s can you take to grow in this area?

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<sup>2</sup> Ortberg, J, The Life you've Always Wanted, Nelson, 2003, p53

<sup>3</sup> Ortberg, J, p47

<sup>4</sup> Foster, R, Celebration of Discipline, Hodder & Stoughton, 1978, p30

**Bible reading and reflection:**

*'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.'* (Psalm 119 v 105)

*'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.'* (2 Tim 3 v 16)

Put these two truths together and I hope you can see you cannot afford to live without the ongoing presence of the word. *'God's Word, the Bible, is crucially important to our everyday lives. And don't think obscure religious knowledge here. Think food. Think water. Think air.'*<sup>5</sup>

*'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom...'* (Colossians 3 v 16)

This talks about having the Word deeply rooted inside of you, which indicates the constant exposure and consistent meditation on the Word.

Reflect upon and assess how you are doing in the spiritual discipline of Bible reading & reflection:

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What step/s can you take to grow in this area?

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**Journaling:**

Do you have a means and a method of recording what God is saying and doing?

This is about recording, remembering and responding to the word and work of God in your life. This is where you can constantly be assessing where you are, consider where you want to be, respond to challenges, ponder encouragements, signpost significant moments – all of which have been important activities for the people of God throughout history.

The bottom line is our memories and our ability to reflect and evaluate on life's busy journey will need all the help it can get.

Reflect upon and assess how you are doing in the spiritual discipline of Journaling:

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Remember God always meets us where we are and slowly moves us along into deeper things.

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<sup>5</sup> Cordeiro, W, The Divine Mentor, Bethany House, 2007, p44

What step/s can you take to grow in this area?

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**Praise & Thanksgiving:**

Make this a regular habit and attitude.

*‘Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.’*

**(Colossians 3 v 16)**

*‘Praise the Lord, O my soul. I will praise the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.’ (Psalm 146 v 1-2)*

*‘Praise the Lord. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise Him!’ (Psalm 147 v 1)*

Reflect upon and assess how you are doing in the spiritual discipline of Praise & Thanksgiving:

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Remember God always meets us where we are and slowly moves us along into deeper things.

What step/s can you take to grow in this area?

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**Fasting:**

*‘But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.’ (Matt 6 v 17-18)*

Fasting is a demonstration of devotion to and dependence upon God where we reveal that God is our treasure and that we are not being mastered by anything or anyone else.

*‘The weakness of our hunger for God is not because he is unsavoury, but because we keep ourselves stuffed with ‘other things’ Perhaps, then, the denial of our stomach’s appetite for food might express, or even increase, our soul’s appetite for God.’<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> Piper, J, A Hunger for God, desiring God through fasting and prayer, IVP, p10

**Why fast?** As a sign and expression of our hunger and longing for more of Jesus (Matt 9 v 14-17); To humble ourselves before God (Ps 35 v 13); To draw near to God, it reveals the desire and intent of our heart (James 4 v 8); To find God's will and direction for your life (Ezra 8 v 21-23); To seek God's intervention in situations of crisis (2 Chron 20); To intercede and pray on behalf of others (Est 4 v 16).

Reflect upon and assess how you are doing in the spiritual discipline of Fasting:

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What step/s can you take to grow in this area?

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**Simplicity:**

We have to fight for this in our culture, if you want to imitate Christ you can't get loaded down with baggage, the discipline of simplicity combats materialism and the lusts of the eyes and the boasting of what we have.

**Matt 6 v 31-33:** <sup>31</sup>*So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'* <sup>32</sup>*For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.* <sup>33</sup>*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.'*

The discipline of simplicity is found in living in obedience to these words of Jesus. Seek first His kingdom and righteousness – and then everything necessary will come in its proper place and order, and you no longer need to be weighed down, distracted by or enamoured with possessions.

Simplicity sets us free to receive the provision of God as a gift that is not ours to keep, and that can be freely shared with others. As soon as we try to hold onto stuff, become overly protective and attached to stuff and lose a generosity of spirit with our stuff, then we are no longer living a life of simplicity.

Some outward expressions of simplicity:<sup>7</sup>

- Buy things for their usefulness rather than their status.
- Try buying only what you need.
- Wear your clothes until they are worn out. Stop trying to impress people with your clothes and impress them with your life.
- Reject anything that is producing an addiction in you: Include Television and coffee in that.

<sup>7</sup> Foster, R, Celebration of Discipline, p78-83

- Develop the habit of giving things away, including money, often.
- De-accumulate. Most of us could get rid of half our possessions without any serious sacrifice.
- Resist the temptation to have the latest this or that, if the old one works be content with that.
- Learn to enjoy things without owning them.
- Shun whatever would distract you from your main goal of seeking first His kingdom and righteousness.

Reflect upon and assess how you are doing in the spiritual discipline of Simplicity:

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Remember God always meets us where we are and slowly moves us along into deeper things.

Consider which of the above expressions of simplicity you might need to work on? Tick the boxes you will seek to take action on.

**Solitude:**

The seeking out of a solitary place was a regular practice with Jesus, if it was important for Jesus, it will be important for us. Extended time alone with God the Father needs to be part of our life. It helps us de-clutter our mind, refocus our goals, refresh our spirits, and realign our hearts.

*<sup>1</sup>Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. (Eccl 5 v 1-2)*

When was the last time you spent enough time before God, alone, just reflecting upon and re-orientating your life's goals?

Reflect upon and assess how you are doing in the spiritual discipline of Solitude:

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Remember God always meets us where we are and slowly moves us along into deeper things.

What step/s can you take to grow in this area?

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Remember you're training for a marathon. What's your training schedule like for the greatest race of all, the race of Christian discipleship? (Phil 3 v 12-14) **What other activities could and should form a helpful part of your training plan?**

**1,2) Prioritizing:**

Putting the big rocks in first; nobody but you is going to make sure your priorities are in the right place, so if you don't put them in place and guard them, you'll just do what life demands that you do when life demands it.

The rocks are the important things in your life, things which if everything else was lost and only they remained, your life would still be full.<sup>8</sup>

The sand is the small stuff, which if you put in first leaves you no room for anything else.

**What are the big rocks?**

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The rocks reflect God's priorities for our lives.

**What is the sand in your life?**

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**What steps can you take to better prioritise?**

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**1.3) Learning:** A commitment to learning and growing in your Christian life.

*'Teach me, O Lord, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end. Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart. Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight. Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain. Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word.'* (Psalm 119 v 33-37)

How much is this attitude a reflection of your life?

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<sup>8</sup> Lawrence, J, Growing Leaders, Bible Reading Fellowship, 2004, p112

God has not only given us His word but he has used men and women throughout history to teach and inform and instruct and help others understand and apply His Word.

'Growth in godliness and wisdom involves mental renewal that cannot happen without learning.'<sup>9</sup> **(Romans 12 v 2)**. How much do you want to learn and grow? Do you have a heart that knows you need to learn, that wants to learn, and that is humble and teachable so that you are able to learn?

What are you reading? \_\_\_\_\_

What are you listening to? \_\_\_\_\_

"But all this takes time!" is the cry. Which is why you need to train wisely?

## **What makes self-leadership so difficult?**

### ***a) It is so long-term and results are often very gradual:***

We want what we do to have instant results and immediate benefits.

We don't have our minds and hearts on the longer term goal and vision of becoming a person of increasing influence in the mission and kingdom of God.

### ***b) We lack faith in the word of God:***

So many of the promises that we read and receive in the Word of God come to us with conditions that involve and invite our cooperation. To act on them consistently demonstrates our faith in God and His word. To not act on them either reveals ignorance, apathy or unbelief!

Our response to God's Word is integral to our growth, without it we stagnate, we decay, we plateau, we remain immature and ineffective.

### ***c) No one else sees much of what we do in the realm of self-leadership:***

The discipline of self-leadership is not usually on public display, no one else sees what we do in the quiet places of our own lives. So there are no accolades or appreciation societies congratulating us or commending us on our efforts and disciplines.

Unless our motives are right, we will find it very difficult to keep up our self-leadership practice.

### ***d) Other activities seem more appealing:***

A lot of the activities of self-leadership take time, effort, thought, discipline, perseverance, and these words are not always that appealing in our pleasure seeking, lazy, self-indulgent society.

Too often, we opt for the easy, relaxing, mind numbing activities and this robs us of our greatest joy and blessing.

<sup>9</sup> Whitney, D. S, Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life, Navpress, 1991, p227

Or, often, we like to get busy, to be about the work, we think it all depends on us and will fall about round our ears if we don't keep on doing the work, we like that feeling of accomplishment and importance. But our own self leadership is squeezed out.

## 2) The example of others

We will learn to imitate Christ as we observe and learn from the lives of those that are already doing this well.

This is what Paul says to the Corinthian church; 'follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.' (1 Cor 11 v 1)

### ***How do we learn to imitate Christ from others?***

*<sup>10</sup>You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, <sup>11</sup>persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured....*

*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, <sup>15</sup>and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (2 Tim 3 v 10-15)*

**2.1) From their teaching:** You know all about my teaching...

**How are you learning to imitate Christ from other peoples teaching? What could you do?**

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Make a habit and practice of being taught by leaders and disciples who are imitators of Christ.

**2.2) From observing their way of life:** You know all about... my way of life...

**Phil 3 v 17** *'Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.'*

**Heb 13 v 7-8** *'Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.'*

Watch them closely, inquire, ask questions, see how they respond to things, see how they organise their lives and prioritise, see how they speak to people, consider how they relate to you, and learn valuable lessons and implement steps to imitate them.

We need to have people in our lives that we can watch and learn from. **Who fulfils this role for you? If no-one, think about who could?**

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**And this leads to;**

**a) Developing accountable relationships that challenge and disciple you:**

*'As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.'* (Prov 27 v 17)

Do you have relationships in your life that are of real spiritual benefit?

Friends with whom you can freely and regularly share your heart with, wrestle through discipleship issues with and pray together. These kinds of relationships are not as common as they should be; much of our relational activity can be very superficial, even in the church. **What can you do to change that? Is there someone you can begin to develop this kind of accountable relationship with?**

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**b) Participation in Community:**

God's design is that we live and grow and flourish in family and in relationships. If we are going to learn from one another and inspire one another and encourage one another and disciple one another we have to participate frequently in community. The church was never meant to be a once a week activity.

**How can you do community better?**

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**2.3) From their experience:** You know all about... my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings – what kinds of things happened to me...

We can learn how to imitate Christ from other peoples' experiences in life.

*'If you're going to be the person or the leader you need to be in the twenty-first century, you must find out how to learn from the experiences of others. We urgently need people who have wisdom beyond their lifetime, wisdom beyond their own experiences!'*<sup>10</sup>

**How can you better learn from the experiences of other godly Christians?**

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<sup>10</sup> Cordeiro, W, The Divine Mentor, p31