

Imperfect, But Beautiful

On Sunday we took our third deep dive into I Thessalonians chapter 1. This time we focused on verse 6, which talks about the process of discipleship.

1. Warm-up Question: As you survey your spiritual life, what's something you've gotten better at over time?
2. As followers of Jesus, we're supposed to be the kind of people who are in the process of becoming. We're determined – little by little, no matter how long it takes – to become the most beautiful version of ourselves possible. That process is what the New Testament calls “discipleship” – living an aspirational life of intentional spiritual growth. Verse 6 of I Thessalonians 1 helps us better understand how discipleship is supposed to work. Let's read the chapter once again: I Thessalonians 1:1-9.
3. Verse 6 begins by saying, “You became imitators of us and of the Lord.” Discipleship is, first and foremost, about imitation. Tell us about a time when you admired someone who was really good at some ordinary, non-spiritual life skill – and you consciously began to imitate them because you wanted to be like them. How did you do? Did you become like them – or at least get better?
4. If discipleship is about imitation, that raises the question: imitate who? Verse 6 gives two suggestions, the first being rather obvious: “You became imitators of . . . the Lord,” meaning Jesus. As followers of Jesus, we're supposed to imitate him. As Jesus said in Luke 6:40, “A disciple . . . who is fully qualified will be the like the teacher.”
 - a. Since Monday was the day we celebrate the legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., on Sunday we focused special attention on Jesus' commitment to social justice. One of the most striking characteristics of Jesus was how he pushed the envelope of social justice in his culture. He challenged his culture's view of women, of the poor, of children, of the Samaritans, etc., etc. Why do you think Jesus cared so much about the status and treatment of women, children, Samaritans, and the poor?
 - b. Some would argue that you can't be an authentic follower of Jesus without being passionate about social justice. Do you agree or disagree?
 - c. On Sunday, Jeff gave the example of Congressman John Lewis, recently deceased. At the age of 25, Lewis led 600 marchers across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, on Bloody Sunday. Lewis stood his ground and was beaten, suffering a skull fracture. Take a look at the pictures shown on p. 3. How do you think Lewis felt before the attack occurred? During the attack? After?
 - d. Can you imagine yourself choosing to participate in the march on Bloody Sunday, knowing the danger they faced? Why or why not?

- e. What's the boldest thing you've ever done on behalf of social justice?
5. Jeff said, "I can't help but be struck by the contrast between what Lewis and his marchers did and what rioters did a couple weeks ago in Washington, DC. It was devastating to see people caring the Christian flag and Jesus banners breaking doors and windows, calling for the hanging of the Vice President and Speaker of the House, dragging and beating police officers, in partnership with rioters caring Confederate flags and wearing Nazi paraphernalia proclaiming "6 million Jews wasn't enough" – assaulting the ultimate symbol of American democracy while trying to disrupt our Constitutional process." How did you feel about the assault on the United States Capitol Building? How do you think Jesus wants us to respond?
6. According to I Thessalonians 1:6, Jesus is not the only person we're supposed to imitate as we grow into faithful disciples. Verse 6 says, "You became imitators of us and of the Lord." Note the "us" part. That's a reference to Paul, Sylvanus, and Timothy, the spiritual mentors of the Thessalonians. Sometimes we need someone "with skin on" to show us, in very practical ways, what it looks like to be a follower of Jesus, right now, right here, in the time and place where we live. So God sends special people into our lives to show us the way. How would you answer the following questions: Who is one of the most beautiful examples of Jesus you've encountered in your life? What's the greatest lesson you learned from them? Are you living that lesson?
7. Not long after the Thessalonians began imitating Jesus and their spiritual mentors, circumstances tested them. Verse 6 says they encountered persecution. Jesus warns us that it's inevitable that "trouble or . . . the cares of this world and the lure of success" will try to knock us off our discipleship path. Matthew 12:21-22.
- a. In your life right now, what trouble, care, or temptation most threatens to distract you and disrupt you on your discipleship path?
- b. I Peter 5:8 says, "Keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour." What do you think that means and how should we respond?
8. In your own life, who is someone that might be looking to you as a spiritual mentor and example to imitate? How do you feel about that? None of us is perfect, but what's something important they might be learning from your example?

"Let your light shine so that others seeing your good works will give glory to God in heaven." Matthew 5:16.

