



FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
SPARTANBURG

This way forward

BE LIKE CHRIST: IN MIND

1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 2:5-11

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Dr. Thomas E. Evans

Sometimes I dream

That he is me

You've got to see that's how I dream to be

I dream I move, I dream I groove

Like Mike

If I could Be Like Mike

Like Mike

This catchy jingle from the 1990's was a feel-good commercial featuring Michael Jordan dunking, dribbling, laughing, and smiling, while other everyday men, women, boys, and girls did their best to play that part. Everyone from that era who played basketball aspired to be him – with his passion and love for the game, his fierce competitiveness, and his winning smile (and his endless millions of dollars) and you are left wondering... who *wouldn't* want to be like Mike! If your goal is to be the greatest basketball player, then imitating Michael Jordan would be the best place to start.

It is said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery and, as good a role model as Mr. Jordan was, our world is flattering all the wrong people. The Kardashians are a billion-dollar business! Billion! It is all based on the shallowest of values and, in the process, has elevated sexual allure, fashion, and attitude to absolutely ridiculous, idolatrous heights. Such obviously over-the-top examples are easy to avoid, but others are more pernicious because they are subtler. We know the wrong sneaker brand or fashion designer can cause a student to feel like an outcast. As adults, we are tempted to imitate those lovely homes, even if we cannot afford it. Keeping up with the Jones is a real thing.

But there is a way out of this trap of failing to be satisfied with our lot in life. There is a path to become the disciple we want to be. Imitate Christ.

But before we dive too far into this concept, there are a few provisos. We cannot be Christ and should not feel ashamed when we fail. Whereas, eventually someone *can* be the next Michael Jordan, no one will be the next Christ. This is more a process of formation than it is a literal striving.

Next, Christ had a very specific calling – to save the world. His calling led him to wander from town to town with no home, profession, or roots. That is not our task. Our calling is to shine the light on his light. Not to be him. So, don't worry; I am not asking for us all to be martyrs to the calling.

But there are good reasons to imitate Christ. Being human, he showed us how we can be fully human. Being found in human likeness, yet without sin, his path can help us steer from temptation. In Corinthians, Paul tells us to be imitators of me as he imitates Christ. I think he oversold himself on this one! Nevertheless, his point is well taken. Christ was the ideal human whose pattern of living sanctified life for each one of us.

For the month of September, we will explore how, through imitating Christ, we can live a richer, more centered, and faithful life, filled with purpose and meaning.

Today we begin with the mind. Paul tells us in Philippians, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus." If we are to obey God's Word, then we need to understand what Christ's mind was, in fact, like! Philippians characterizes this mind as one filled with radical self-denial and self-giving. It is one filled with humility and service.

Jesus decided in his mind that he would not live an earthly life of glory, though as the Son of God he surely deserved this. In our country, we spend a great deal of time insisting upon our individual rights. But Jesus made up his mind to relinquish his

divine rights, to abdicate his own best life, in order to be of service to others.

To imitate his mind is also to fill it with good things.

His mind was not filled with junk food. Just as we are tempted to overindulge in Nacho Cheese Doritos, ice cream, or whatever your weakness is, the same is true for our mind. There is nothing wrong with a little bit of those treats, but too much quickly clogs our arteries with loads of chemicals and turns our blood sugar into a rollercoaster ride. It is the same with *People Magazine*, talk shows, and gossip.

Fill your mind with things of substance. The secret rests in committing yourself to speak the way he speaks. Jesus tells us this is critical. In a debate with the Pharisees about purity laws he says, "It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles." As you may recall, being in a right relationship with God, in those times, required certain ritual observances such as not touching a corpse and abstaining from eating certain foods. The disciples, obtuse as ever, don't understand what Jesus means so he tells them,

But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.

In Jewish tradition, the heart describes what we call the mind today. The Jewish Encyclopedia tells us,

The three special functions, knowing, feeling, and willing, ascribed by modern psychologists to the mind, were attributed to the heart by the Biblical writers... The heart [is] the seat of thought...[and] the seat of volition.

When Jesus speaks of the heart it includes our concept of the mind. Jesus is telling us that we can have a mind like his, if we can control our speech. For speech not only discloses what is on our mind, but it can actually shape it over time. To imitate Christ, to grow into being more Christ-like, means speaking about things of value.

Use your words to uplift others and you will be uplifted. Use your words to love others and you will know love.

A mind like Jesus' can discern things of true value because it is attuned to setting priorities and knows when to jettison them. There were times in life when Jesus was on mission but allowed himself to be pulled in a new direction.

On his way out of Jericho, Jesus had a large crowd following him; many people were seeking his wisdom. A lone man, whom we know as Bartimaeus, called out to him. Jesus stopped in his tracks, despite the urging of others, and took the time to give him the gift of sight.

Racing through the subway is the quintessential example of the rush of modern life. Thousands race to the station hoping to catch the train, in order to avoid waiting just 7 more minutes for the next one. People pack in like sardines, never looking at those sitting next to them, afraid they will have to make conversation or, worse, incur the ire of an especially cranky or unhinged traveler. The halls are dirty, the air is stale, and you are almost certain that the time in those tunnels is turning you into an otherworldly humanoid like those in the 1951 episode, "Superman and the Mole Men"!

The L'Enfant Plaza Metro Station in DC, on January 12, 2007, was like any other crowded day; thousands of commuters rushed by in about 45 minutes. As they did so, an earnest violinist played, trying to make a few extra dollars through plying his skills.

After a few minutes, he received his first dollar – a woman walking by who didn't have the time to stop. Another man leaned against the wall for a moment, but checked his watch and quickly moved

on. A three-year-old boy paid more attention than anyone else, but he couldn't stay as he continued to look back while his mother dragged him past. In that whole time, only six people stopped for more than a brief moment. He collected \$32.

Some of you know already that it was Joshua Bell, world renowned violinist, playing sublime Bach masterpieces on a 1713 Stradivarius violin worth \$3.5 million.

Of this event someone asked, "If we do not have a moment to stop and listen to one of the best musicians in the world playing the best music ever written, how many other things are we missing?"

The truth be told – we are missing God. We are missing the best show ever and it is all because we chose to let our mind be distracted.

Granted, this sounds like the overly pious claptrap of a Sunday morning preacher, but think about it for a moment.

The Bible speaks to at least 25 different occasions that Jesus prayed. On several it tells us he went alone. Jesus made a conscious decision to spend time alone with God.

This was not just about getting strength for his mission or guidance in an important decision. It was about refusing to miss a supreme opportunity to delight in sublime beauty. It was to take time to do that which gives meaning to existence in and of itself. It was about taking time each day to live for what you and I were created for – to glorify God and enjoy God forever! Enjoy, relish, treasure, immerse yourself in the most beautiful reality in all existence.

When Catholics receive the Eucharist it is with deep awe, reverence, and sometimes ecstatic joy.

St. Thomas Aquinas says,

This Bread of Angels, containing in itself all delights, satisfies by an admirable virtue the taste of all those who receive it worthily and with devotion; it satisfies better than the manna of the desert and

surpasses the relish of all sensual pleasures.

The priests are instructed to celebrate the mass as if it is their first mass, as if it is their last mass, as if it is their only mass.

Choose to experience every moment as if it were the only moment. Never miss a chance to treasure that connection to God. Jesus didn't.