

ChristStyle



*Eight Elements in the Lifestyle
of Jesus Christ*

by Dan McGee & Katie Cook

The following is a discussion of eight elements in the lifestyle of Jesus Christ, conceived by Dan McGee a number of years ago. He and Katie Cook wrote about this interpretation of a Christ-ordained lifestyle in a series called ChristStyle in the "Taproot" department of Seeds Magazine. The two have also presented these ideas in various retreat and seminar settings. The "eight deadly virtues," as one church group dubbed them, are taken from Matthew 5: 1-16, with particular attention to the Beatitudes.

ChristStyle

Eight Elements in the Lifestyle of Jesus Christ

by Dan McGee and Katie Cook

Everybody in our culture desires to be "in style," depending on what that term means to our particular peer group. Typically, we try to be in style because our dress and our style tells others who we are. They reflect the community with which we wish to be identified. They often reflect what we want out of life, what we are trying to achieve.

For example, think of the idea of "dressing for success." There are expert counselors, books, and seminars to tell you how to be in style for "success." We hear people refer to "power dressing," wearing clothing that reflects their understanding of what they are about and how they intend to achieve it.

If our mode of dress reveals this much about us, how much more does our way of living reveal?

Our lifestyles reflect our deepest values, our commitments, our goals and our purposes of mind.

Lifestyle goes far deeper than the moral laws we have agreed to obey, is more profound than the dogma or theology we are willing to adopt, and involves far more than intellectual agreement to a set of ideas or beliefs. Lifestyle involves basic attitudes, actions that grow naturally out of those attitudes, and the consequences of those actions. It includes, if you will, matters of the heart, the head, and the hands.

So, for the Christian, it seems appropriate to think of our lifestyles in terms of the lifestyle of Christ, and the way of life that Christ called for in his teachings. Here we are reminded of the once very popular movement within American Christianity, of people

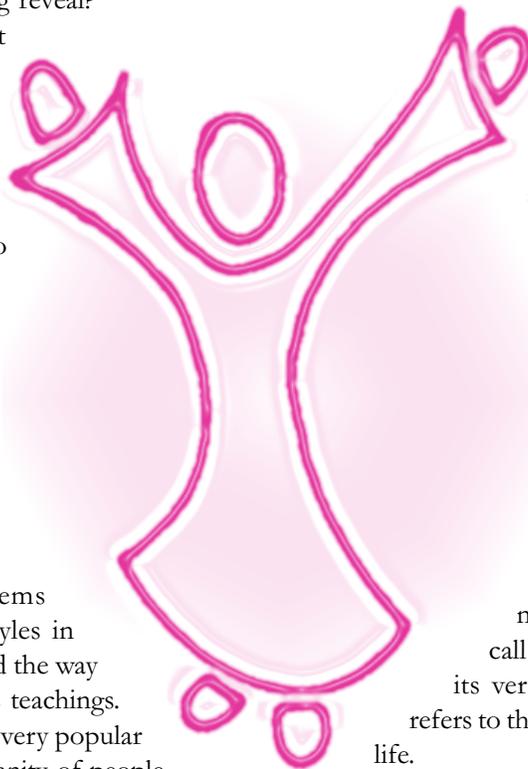
who followed an idea that came out of a book written by Charles M. Sheldon in 1986. Sheldon centered the book, *In His Steps*, on 1 Peter 2:21:

For this you have been called, because Christ has suffered for you, leaving for you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

This movement involved people who followed Sheldon's proposition that, if one is truly to follow Christ, that one will ask of any major activity, "What would Jesus do in this situation?" A movement came about recently in which people wore bracelets and other accessories that bore the initials "WWJD." Although many questioned the validity of mass-marketing such "Christian gear," we maintain that the original premise was sound.

The idea of Christlike lifestyle that we are introducing is similar to this premise. ChristStyle is essentially taking on the way of life that Christ embraced. Author and speaker Anthony Campolo also speaks of this kind of discipleship, as exemplified in his sermon/speech "Would Jesus drive a BMW?"

In this series, we intend to call ourselves and our readers to an examination of how we live, because that will reveal to us the extent to which Christ really is the center of our lives. If we are to call ourselves Christian, we should take on Christ's way of life. If we do not choose to live in that way, we should call ourselves something else. Lifestyle by its very linguistic construct reveals that it refers to that for which you're willing to give your life.



art by Rebecca S. Ward

1. Gratitude

The first dimension of ChristStyle deals with a matter of the heart, with the inner self. It is essentially a motive or attitude—a particular perspective on life. It is the perspective of gratitude. The words "blessed are the poor in spirit" reflect exactly that dimension.

We think that many Christians have misunderstood this verse. We challenge you to put aside the traditional pietistic interpretation you have heard all your life (conjuring images of weakness and passivity), and read the verse in this way: *Blessed are those who are like the poor in that they recognize their need.* There's no sense among the poor that they are "self-made." Indeed, it is that recognition of grateful dependence that most prepares them to sense the presence of God in their life and in the world.

This is the most elementary element of the ChristStyle—recognizing the presence of and our dependence upon a gracious and loving God. Without that sense, it is not likely that we can move into the other dimensions of this way of life.

We live in a culture, however, that tends to teach us to begin our living with other motives and other sentiments. Our culture is largely informed by social Darwinism. We receive constant messages, from all around us, that this is a survival-of-the-fittest world and our job is to be the fittest. This is clearly borne out by the various *Survivor* programs we can see on our televisions several times a week.

If we are to call ourselves Christian, we should take on Christ's way of life. If we do not choose to live in that way, we should call ourselves something else.

These transmissions tell us that our souls must be fired by fear and greed. We are taught that life is essentially a battle. We must be, they say, the strongest, the most distrustful, and the most ambitious—because that is what prepares us emotionally to be a survivor.

In contrast to the dominant cultural tradition, we contend that a significant number of the central biblical passages dealing with lifestyle begin with the teaching that our existence and well-being come from God, alone. As early as the Decalogue, for example, this teaching emerges. The prologue begins: *I am the God who brought you out of the*

land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thus, the very first recognition is this: *You are dependent for your very existence upon a gracious God who came to you when you had no claim to make. Therefore, you are asked to follow these commandments.*

We further contend that this is the same point that Christ was making when he said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." He was referring to those who recognize that life comes as a gift.

There are many other biblical references to this attitude. For another example, look at the book of Romans. The first eleven chapters consist essentially of the story of Christ redeeming the world. Then, in chapter twelve, the text says, *Present yourselves, therefore, by the mercies of God.* That use of "therefore" refers to this sense of gratitude. Christ has redeemed you in this way, and you respond out of thankfulness. What has to precede the living or acting out of one's faithful response to God is the recognition of the mercies of God.

2. Single-Mindedness

A second dimension of this lifestyle is single-mindedness. Christstyle is marked by a single-minded loyalty to God. This grows naturally out of the earlier recognition of dependence. There is single-mindedness because there is no confusion about the source of one's existence and the reason for one's being.

It is no accident, we think, that immediately following the prologue of the Decalogue, *I am the God who brought you out of Egypt*, is the call, the commandment, *You shall have no other god before you.* This becomes the shaping loyalty of the believer's life: loyalty to God.

If we believe that there is more than one source of our existence and the good things that come to us, then our loyalties will be divided among those sources. We will have a lot of little godlets around—not unlike the early Hebrews, who had a god for everything: a god of war, a god of fertility, a god of the harvest, a god for the planting, and so on.

It is no accident that the most shocking dimension of Christ's message to his followers was that they must leave their family and their wealth, and find their security only in God. The traditional sources of security in their culture were to be subsumed, Christ said, under an absolute dependence upon God.

Again in our society, the dominant culture stands in opposition to this kind of thinking. Power—and money is always inextricably linked with power—is the center of our world, the key to our lives. Employees jump when the boss speaks, citizens follow blindly where governments lead, everyone trembles (indeed, some seem to bow in worship) when weapons are displayed. And now, as in Jesus' day, if a

person questions these powers, deep and violent emotions are often unleashed toward that person.

Christ's teachings call us away from all that, to discover a new kind of power, to be able to stand against the dominant culture because of a quiet confidence in God as one's only source of life and strength.

It is instructive at this point to look at Christ's life—particularly the last few weeks—to observe the swirl of motives and forces, interest groups and castes, that were constantly swirling around him. The gospels show us, in his actions, a man who was not caught up in that vortex. While Caiaphas, Herod Antipas, Pilate and others—even Judas—vacillated and bargained and made their deals, Jesus stayed clear-eyed, calm, and committed to his purpose.

Pilate, on that fateful Thursday night, was apparently disconcerted by this criminal who, he thought, obviously didn't understand what was going on, and said to him, "Do you not know that I have the power to release you, that I have the power to crucify you? Do you not understand what could happen to you?" And Jesus simply told Pilate that he

We receive constant messages, from all around us, that this is a survival-of-the-fittest world and our job is to be the fittest.

had no power except the power that comes from God. (John 19:10ff)

Two thousand years later, most of us still don't understand. We still seek our security in political, military, and economic power. Paradoxically, however, the more powerful we become in the world's terms, the more insecure we become. We wallow in a culture of fear.

Jesus' words still speak directly to that insecurity:

Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap; they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! ... Consider the lilies, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will God clothe you—you of little faith! (Luke 12:22-24, 27-28)

That is the kind of understanding that gives true strength to the single-minded.

Christstyle is marked by this confident knowledge that we dare trust no one else, that we cannot trust the world's power, and that we find our security only in single-minded loyalty to God. "Blessed are the pure in heart."

3. Simplicity

Singleminded loyalty leads to a third feature of Christstyle: simplicity. Confidence in God alone leads to a simple life. There is no need for the clutter of things or activities that we otherwise accumulate in our lives. In Luke 12:15, Christ says that a person's life does not consist of the abundance of possessions. Ownership is no longer important to my followers, he says; materialism is no longer a god for you. Why? Because our lives now consist of meaningful relationship, contentment, and fulfillment with the only God we need.

This stands in sharp contrast to the American ideal of "the good life." Our ideal is the conspicuous consumer. Shopping is a major recreational activity in our culture. We see hundreds of things, seductively displayed, and even though we may not buy everything that we like, we covet everything that we like. Ours is a world filled with gadgets, our closets are filled to overflowing. We spend our lives amassing things, storing them away, putting them on display, or wearing them.

Certainly this does not achieve simplicity. This is what we will call "the complicated life." Indeed, in direct contrast to the words of the gospel, our lives consist of the abundance of possessions.

The source of that all-consuming need to accumulate, we contend, comes from a lack of confidence in God. We collect all of those possessions in a frantic, endless search for the newest status symbol, the newest style, to give meaning and purpose to our lives.

Before we are tempted to fall into this pattern, we should look closely at the Biblical witness, which calls attention to some of the dangers inherent in the "complicated life." In the first epistle to Timothy, we read the following warning:

Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. (1 Timothy 6:6-9)

Not only do we not need all these things, the passage

warns that there is spiritual danger imbedded in our constant search for more “stuff.”

The epistle of James spells this out even more specifically:

You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder; you kill. And you covet something and cannot obtain it, so you engage in disputes and conflicts; you wage war” (James 2:4).

The biblical witness, then, is clear that, not only are we to cultivate this simple lifestyle because it brings contentment, but we are to beware of the complicated lifestyle. It gets us into trouble. It nurtures the distractions and desires that dissipate and destroy lives. Much of human turmoil, the social ills of any era, can be traced to this passion for grasping (and holding onto) more things.

Usually when we think of simplicity, we think only of possessions; we readily understand that we must not clutter our lives with material objects. Most of us have heard this before; many of us claim to live, at least in some measure, by this standard.

But there is more to the simple life than the lack of things. It also calls for a simplicity of schedule. We often pursue the complicated life, not only by amassing things, but also by trying to amass activities, events, experiences. We collapse at the end of the day, not from all of the possessions that we’re burdened with, but from a frantic, hectic schedule.

The single-minded and simple life can, truly, be a busy one, if our events and activities exhibit integrity or continuity—if they make sense, if they fit together toward a common purpose under God.

But even there, all of us do-gooders must be warned that real confidence in God will cause us to accept the fact

All of us do-gooders must be warned that real confidence in God will cause us to accept the fact that God might actually get through the day without our doing everything.

that God might actually get through the day without our doing everything. Many of us don’t believe this. Our minds and lips may say it, but our actions reveal what we really believe.

When we allow ourselves to be frantic in our activities, when we say to ourselves, “If I don’t do it, it won’t get done,” we show no confidence in God. But if we relax, and know that God has been before us and God will also be behind us, then we don’t feel so compulsive about our busyness. Thus, the truly simple life evokes in us a sense of peace and tranquility.

4.

Servanthood

The gospel of Matthew says, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). This is often misunderstood and rejected by the dominant culture of our society.

Jesus Christ was, by his own definition, a “Suffering Servant,” and those who follow him are to be marked by servanthood. And we should note that, in his day, the notion of servanthood was every bit as scandalous as it is today—especially coming from a young, ambitious rabbi claiming to be Messiah.

Everybody knew that a rabbi who was going somewhere would look very regal and act in a kingly manner, and remind everybody of David, the mighty warrior-king. So this notion of servanthood was an absolute outrage, especially when he suggested that it was the mark of his leadership. That was no leadership, according to society in Palestine.

We can see this attitude reflected in the disciples, who jockeyed for position even in their relationships to him. But he introduced this new leadership style to them in this way:

You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all (Mark 10:42-45).

This new understanding of leadership was based on the kind of God Jesus represented. After all, this was the Maker of the universe, “who, though he was in the form of God...emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” (Philippians 2:6-7) to come and dwell among us. The incarnation itself was an act of servanthood. The Creator was humbled and clothed with humanity, and all the limitations that go with humanity, and lived as a servant among us—not a God coming to flaunt political power, but a God coming to serve through what the world sees as weakness. What this reveals to us is that the true nature of God is love, not power.

So Christ came. Folks expected him to conquer the Romans with a Roman-style power game, to deliver them

in the way that Judas Maccabeus had done, by driving the evil occupation forces out of Palestine. But Christ came, wimp-like, talking to and paying attention to...would you believe children, Samaritans, and even women! (He obviously didn't understand the power structure.)

Servanthood is not popular in our culture, either. It is seen as a sign of weakness and inadequacy. Typically, success is marked by the number of people we control. Governmental leaders are judged by the power and people they control. The business person's achievement is measured by the number of people who will do what they say. How often have we heard a mother say proudly, "My Johnny has twenty-two people under him"?

Under him. That is the model we admire, and for which we strive. The one who is above others.

Even the church has adopted this style, and evaluates ministers by the size of their staffs. One of the tragedies of our age, as in other ages, lies in religious leaders displaying a "pit-bull" style of leadership, measuring influence in their church by the amount of fear they can create in their staffs and congregations.

Into this kind of world, Christ comes and wraps a towel around his waist, takes a basin of water and does the servant's task. He washes his followers' feet. (John 13:1ff)

Likewise, in our world of social, economic, and political climbers, Christians are called to descend to Christ's level. We are not called to be "upwardly mobile." We are to become the opposite.

We are to take a towel as Christ did, and wash people's feet. What this means is that his followers will be marked by all those little tasks that others forget to do or feel is "beneath" them. This is how we become servants of all.

This journey, however, is not marked by banquets and promotions; it is marked by a tremendous amount of hard work, and being surrounded by people who misunderstand what you are about. They will expect you to "achieve more."

But the way of servanthood is clearly and unmistakably the style that Christ has taught us.

5. Justice

This leads us to the life of justice. This is really an aspect of servanthood, but it is a distinctive feature of the ChristStyle servant. Our service is drawn first and foremost to those who are characterized by having the greatest need. Throughout the Hebrew scriptures, justice or *tapsim* (*mispat*) is called for by the people of God, and justice is expressed in a recurring formula, an example of which is Isaiah 1:17:

Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

The oppressed, the orphan, and the widow are those who, in that society, were without protectors, the most vulnerable, the weakest.

Again, in Proverbs 31:9 we read: "Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy."

We see this habit, that of standing up for those whom the world has forgotten, in the ministry of Christ. Early in his ministry, Christ explained what he was doing, what his ministry was all about, in the synagogue in his home town. He personalized the words of Isaiah 61, saying, in essence,

Into this kind of world, Christ comes and wraps a towel around his waist, takes a basin of water and does the servant's task. He washes his followers' feet.

This is why I am here: The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, the recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18-19)

Christ came serving the poor, the captives, the blind, the oppressed—and announcing that "the acceptable year of the Lord" had arrived. The Jewish folk of that day understood that he was announcing the arrival of the Jubilee year. [See *Leviticus 25:25-28*.] That was a special year for the Hebrew people, in which all debts were to be erased and all captives were to be freed. It was a year of starting over again, after the forty-ninth year, for those who had fallen to the bottom of the structure and who had little chance of ever getting out of that status.

It was a year in which now all of those burdens that had been laden upon the poor, the oppressed, the captives, those who had come into difficult times in life—would be lifted. And God would do for them what God had done for the Hebrew people at their birthing during the Exodus.

This announcement of Christ—of what his ministry was about and what the Kingdom of God was about—was followed by a style of ministry in which he very quickly puzzled and irritated a lot of folks because he started going to the kind of people that most "good people" avoided.

He visited the despised tax collectors, sinners of all types, adulterers, and whores—and he compounded these mistakes by opening up his life and his ministry to an adulterous, and Samaritan, woman! Now, in most cases,

three strikes mean you're out. Any one of those characteristics of this human being—adulterous, Samaritan, or female—by itself, would have been quite adequate, in those circumstances, for any self-respecting person to have avoided her.

It would also have been adequate reason for assuming that she didn't deserve to have contact with him. She wasn't important. No respectable religious leader or political leader would have wasted his time or risked his reputation by being caught with a Samaritan woman—especially one with her reputation.

Yahweh was known by the company Yahweh kept with a ragtag group of slaves crossing the desert. Christ was known by the company he kept with the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed. So are we known by the company that we keep.

Such associations, sought out deliberately by Christ, made him suspect. His answer to accusations about them went to the heart of his life, his purpose, when he said:

Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.' [Matthew 9:12-13]

This is justice. As understood in the Biblical tradition generally, and in the life of Christ, it is acting in behalf of those disadvantage, deprived, oppressed, forgotten, disenfranchised, whose only claim to fame is that they are very needy. Justice was modeled by the God of the Exodus who heard the cries of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt, at a time when no other ears in the universe were hearing their cries—when they were a “nobody” people—no status, no nothing. Justice was modeled by the man Jesus of Nazareth who, in a supposedly Messianic ministry, was drawn to life's rejects at the pool of Bethesda.

People in our society, as in the societies of the biblical stories, are known by the company that they keep. Yahweh was known by the company Yahweh kept with a ragtag group of slaves crossing the desert. Christ was known by

the company he kept with the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed. So are we known by the company that we keep. If we live in Christstyle, our company will be composed primarily of those who need help.

The Christian reputation is not built on hanging out with the Beautiful People, or on the big names that we can drop, or whose autographs we have. The Christian lifestyle should be linked with the “little people,” the unattractive, the dull and ignorant, the needy, the unknown.

6. Mutuality

Another feature of ChristStyle is what we will call mutuality. The Christian is known as someone who is different, as we noted above, but never as someone who is isolated. That is an important difference. The life lived according to ChristStyle is not that of the Lone Ranger in a kind of splendid independence from others—not the strong silent hero figure who only occasionally needs a Tonto, to get through life. “Looking out for Number One” is not the watchword of this life.

Rather, ChristStyle is deeply immersed in, committed to, and dependent upon others. We need them, and they need us. Christian growth is marked by an increasing interdependence, and by an expanding community. The business of creating community is a major feature of this life, and that is characterized by the task of reconciliation.

We see this task throughout the biblical witness as a feature of God's work and the work of God's people. Look at the miracle of Pentecost, the birth experience of the Christian community. We are told that gathered there on that day was a motley crew, a crowd described primarily by their diversity, speaking languages from all nations. There they were, with all of those tongues; and when the miracle of Pentecost occurred, they understood each other.

We contend that this story of the church's birth, found in Acts 2, was understood by the early church as God's final answer to the tower of Babel event [see *Genesis 11:1-9*]. At the tower of Babel, human sin expressed itself in the arrogance of humanity to want to build a tower to reach up into God's presence, so that humans could look at God “eyeball to eyeball.”

This led to the Babel experience. A human community who had been united by language was now divided by language—one of the most primitive and basic of human activities. They could no longer communicate. The attempt to be community as voiced in an attempt to speak and hear had been seriously damaged. And now we on earth were a fractured, confused mob—not a community.

Then Pentecost happened, the creation of the church. This event shows us that the miracle that created that kind

of community from that fractured, confused mob points us toward the purpose and mission of the church, and the task of those who comprise the church.

ChristStyle, then, is marked by the life that is known for the strength of its friendships, the depth of its loyalties, and the breadth of its community. This is not easy in our world—particularly in the American culture, where independence, freedom, individualism, and competition are the marks of the “good life.” This is a culture in which survival of the fittest is understood to be the rule by which politics, business, and much of human affairs are ruled. By this rule, other people exist to be beaten, conquered, or used.

God calls us to a lifestyle that has a radically different perception of others. In the second Genesis creation

Therefore, the only way to be a child of God is to be a peacemaker, and anyone who is a peacemaker is truly a descendant of this God of creation, this God of the Exodus, this God of incarnation.

account [*Genesis 2:4-25*], after all of the animals had been created and after a full week of work, God was just about to knock off work for the week and end this creation project. But God looked at Adam, the man who had been created earlier in the week, and saw sadness there. Adam had a major flaw; he was alone, and as such he was incomplete. So God finished the week’s project by creating community for Adam. The last act of creation was the making of mutuality among humans. When Adam and Eve looked at one another they made the most important discovery that any human makes—the discovery that each of us is completed only in others.

This is what God did for us in the incarnation, coming to us in human flesh and binding God’s life with our humanity—creating an unthinkable kind of community in which God became blood of our blood and flesh of our flesh. That is the event which reconciles us to God and to each other.

This reconciling purpose and power of God is a major feature of the authentic Christian life. We are to be known

as ones who specialize in healing broken relationships. We are to look upon others as important and complementary dimensions of our own existence. And, as described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12, we are to become a community in which all of the members have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, then all suffer together. If one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Christ, in his Sermon on the Mount [*Matthew 5-7*], pointed specifically to this, in the beatitude of Matthew 5:9: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.”

Behind this call to be peacemakers is an understanding that making peace, or reconciliation, is probably the most comprehensive way to describe the work of God. There are many others—liberation, adoption, sanctification, etc.; but reconciliation seems to be the most comprehensive. Therefore, the only way to be a child of God is to be a peacemaker, and anyone who is a peacemaker is truly a descendant of this God of creation, this God of the Exodus, this God of incarnation.

7.

Integrity

Christ’s life was marked by a profound sense of wholeness, completeness, and consistency. This quality, which we will call integrity, should also be a part of our lives if we are to follow his way.

If we are to live in a Christlike manner, there is a distinct sense of sincerity which should characterize our lives—sincerity without any brokenness, without any fractures. A helpful illustration might be the way in which the hull of a ship is described. If the hull is said to have integrity, it is whole; it has no breaches or holes. There is no place where water can seep in.

We are to be as sound as the hull of a ship that is seaworthy (or spaceworthy.) If this is true of us, our deeds will match our words, and our words will match our thoughts. Our Mondays will match our Sundays, and our work will match our worship. Our yesterdays, todays, and tomorrows will be consistent with each other. Our lives will tell a coherent and harmonious story. Furthermore, our relationships with our neighbors will be similar to our relationship with God.

The opposite of integrity is inconsistency and hypocrisy. Without integrity, we live compartmentalized lives. Some of the most severe criticisms we find in the teachings of Jesus, as well as those of the Old Testament prophets, have to do with this kind of segmentation. In one example from the book of Amos, the infuriated prophet points his finger at people who have blatantly mixed the worship of God with injustice to their impoverished neighbors:

*...because they sell the righteous for silver,
and the needy for a pair of sandals—
they who trample the head of the poor
into the dust of the earth,
and push the afflicted out of the way;
...they lay themselves down beside every altar
on garments taken in pledge;
and in the house of their God they drink wine
bought with fines they imposed.
Amos 2:6-8*

Amos was describing people who had taken cloaks—probably their only outer garments—from poor people in pledge on loans, and these loan sharks were kneeling on those coats before the altar to worship God. Brazen

**If this is true of us, our deeds
will match our words, and
our words will match our
thoughts. Our Mondays will
match our Sundays, and our
work will match our
worship.**

inconsistency such as that was scathingly renounced by the prophets.

In that same tradition, Christ rebuked the scribes and Pharisees of his day for their duplicity. “Woe to you,” he said,

For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth. So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (Matthew 23: 27-28)

The opposite of integrity is also revealed by a fragmentation of self. In our religious lives we are often fractured. We sometimes reveal such elements of confusion and conflict within our selves, but the Christlike life is free from this. A life of integrity is spiritually and emotionally healthy, because the elements of our personhood are not at war with each other.

This kind of wholeness is exhibited when we continue to be the same persons with consistent values, no matter where we are or what we are doing. Whether we are at home, at work, at play, at church, or at a political rally—no matter what our setting is, we are the same.

If we possess this kind of authenticity, we will be consistent in all matters, big and small. Sometimes we are

tempted to save our Christian living for when something “really important” comes along. So with these little matters we don’t expect ourselves to be necessarily Christian. We wait, saving up all our spirituality, so that we can be Christian on that “really important” occasion.

This, we submit, is not integrity. Some ancient sage said, “He who would steal an egg would steal an ox.” The small things do matter. We should be able to say, like the early Christians in Hebrews 13:18, “Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things.”

One of the most seductive traps for followers of Christ’s way is legalism. It is extremely easy to fall into a rigid list of dos and don’ts—and we repeat this mistake. (For example, most of us have repudiated the attitude we call “Holier Than Thou,” and have since developed a whole new legalism which someone has called “More Socially Sensitive Than Thou.”)

However, Christlike integrity stems only from the core of our being. It is rooted in the single-mindedness that we discussed earlier. That purity of heart maintains itself through integrity.

8. Activism

As our style of life flows from our inner selves into our public lives, we are called to “be” first of all. But we are also called upon to act. The mandate is clear from the beginning of the biblical story to the traditions of the early church: we are to be doers of the word.

In the history of the Church there have always been some who view the Christian life as so radically different from that of the rest of the world that those who commit themselves to that life must be kept apart from the world. They conclude that the only place they can achieve that distinctiveness is in some quiet isolation away from the main traffic of human beings. This pure life can be achieved only in quiet solitude or hidden caves.

These people act as if they believe that the radical life is too fragile or impractical to really work on Main Street, so they must design an almost xenophobic lifestyle to protect it. They seek refuge from the hurly burly of human existence. They treat spirituality like an uncommon treasure to be sheltered from the threats of worldly life. Sometimes they bring the precious qualities of this pure life out for display in such places as the pulpit. You can admire it up there, they think—at least, you can admire its description.

We must never forget, though, that Christ did not come asking for admirers or cheerleaders; he called forth disciples. Doers. Not those impressed by the beauty of his life, but those who would share the nitty gritty of his work.

He said in the Beatitudes, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for my sake.” We must not miss the point that you don’t usually get persecuted for what you think, but for what you do. This is a clear message to us: that which is rooted in inner strength, and flows out in joyous gratitude, is finally and consistently expressed in concrete action.

**We must never forget,
though, that Christ did not
come asking for admirers
or cheerleaders; he called
forth disciples.**

The gospel of Mark tells the story of a man who came to Jesus asking how to secure eternal life. When Jesus told him to obey the commandments, the man said he had done that from his youth. And Jesus, “looking upon him, said to him, ‘you lack one thing; go sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me.’” (Mark 10:21)

Sell. Give. Follow.

How often as Christians we are tempted to lack this one crucial thing in our lives! Our hearts are strangely warmed, our dogmas and ideas are orthodox, our church attendance record is perfect. All of that is in place. We’ve done everything but act out our faith in concrete deeds.

But Christ said,

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. (Mark 8: 34-35)

We must join Christ on the streets, where he walks, and lives, and serves. We really do find our life by losing it in concrete acts of service. As we discover in the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1-9), in the end it is the fruit that counts.

—Dan McGee is a retired professor of Christian ethics from Baylor University, where he taught from 1966 to 2006. He served for 15 years as the president of the Seeds Council of Stewards. Katie Cook edits the Seeds of Hope publications Hunger News & Hope and Sacred Seasons, as well as Baptist Peacemaker (the magazine of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America) and the Caritas Newsletter (for Caritas of Waco.)

Note: The translations summarized here are from the Revised Standard Version and the New Revised Standard Version. All other biblical passages cited in this study are taken from the New Revised Standard Version and are used with permission from the American Bible Society.

Benediction

by Katie Cook

Go in peace,
and may the spirit of God
drench all of us,
so that the blind will receive sight
the lame will walk
lepers will be cleansed
the deaf will hear
the dead will be raised to life
and the good news will
be proclaimed to the poor--
and, everywhere we go,
no one will go hungry,
no one will cower in fear,
and no one will shiver with cold.

Amen.

—taken from Luke 7:22 and an Elosian prayer

From Seeds of Hope Publishers: 602 James Avenue; Waco, TX 76706; Phone: 254/755-7745;
Fax: 254/753-1909; E-mail: seedseditor@clearwire.net; Web address: www.seedspublishers.org.