



**SNEAK  
PEEK**

Chapter 1

# SO, YOU WANT TO BE LIKE CHRIST?

EIGHT ESSENTIALS  
TO GET YOU THERE

CHARLES R.  
SWINDOLL

So, You Want to Be Like Christ?



PUBLICATIONS BY CHARLES R. SWINDOLL

BOOKS FOR ADULTS

<i>Active Spirituality</i>	<i>Killing Giants, Pulling Thorns</i>
<i>Bedside Blessings</i>	<i>Laugh Again</i>
<i>Behold . . . The Man!</i>	<i>Leadership: Influence That Inspires</i>
<i>The Bride</i>	<i>Living Above the Level of Mediocrity</i>
<i>Come Before Winter</i>	<i>Living Beyond the Daily Grind, Books I and II</i>
<i>Compassion: Showing We Care in a Careless World</i>	<i>The Living Insights Study Bible, general editor</i>
<i>The Darkness and the Dawn</i>	<i>Living on the Ragged Edge</i>
<i>David: A Man of Passion and Destiny</i>	<i>Make Up Your Mind</i>
<i>Day by Day</i>	<i>Man to Man</i>
<i>Dear Graduate</i>	<i>Marriage: From Surviving to Thriving</i>
<i>Dropping Your Guard</i>	<i>Moses: A Man of Selfless Dedication</i>
<i>Elitjah: A Man of Heroism and Humility</i>	<i>The Mystery of God's Will</i>
<i>Encourage Me</i>	<i>Paul: A Man of Grace and Grit</i>
<i>Esther: A Woman of Strength and Dignity</i>	<i>The Quest for Character</i>
<i>The Finishing Touch</i>	<i>Recovery: When Healing Takes Time</i>
<i>Five Meaningful Minutes a Day</i>	<i>The Road to Armageddon</i>
<i>Flying Closer to the Flame</i>	<i>Sanctity of Life</i>
<i>For Those Who Hurt</i>	<i>Simple Faith</i>
<i>Getting Through the Tough Stuff</i>	<i>Simple Trust</i>
<i>God's Provision</i>	<i>So, You Want to be Like Christ?</i>
<i>The Grace Awakening</i>	<i>Starting Over</i>
<i>The Grace Awakening Devotional</i>	<i>Start Where You Are</i>
<i>The Grace Awakening Workbook</i>	<i>Strengthening Your Grip</i>
<i>Growing Deep in the Christian Life</i>	<i>Stress Fractures</i>
<i>Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life</i>	<i>Strike the Original Match</i>
<i>Growing Wise in Family Life</i>	<i>The Strong Family</i>
<i>Hand Me Another Brick</i>	<i>Suddenly One Morning</i>
<i>Home: Where Life Makes Up Its Mind</i>	<i>Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations and Quotes</i>
<i>Hope Again</i>	<i>Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back</i>
<i>Improving Your Serve</i>	<i>Victory: A Winning Game Plan for Life</i>
<i>Intimacy with the Almighty</i>	<i>Why, God?</i>
<i>Job: A Man of Heroic Endurance</i>	<i>Wisdom for the Way</i>
<i>Job: Interactive Study Guide</i>	<i>You and Your Child</i>
<i>Joseph: A Man of Integrity and Forgiveness</i>	

MINIBOOKS

<i>Abraham: A Model of Pioneer Faith</i>	<i>Moses: A Model of Pioneer Vision</i>
<i>David: A Model of Pioneer Courage</i>	<i>Nehemiah: A Model of Pioneer Determination</i>
<i>Esther: A Model of Pioneer Independence</i>	

BOOKLETS

<i>Anger</i>	<i>The Lonely Whine of the Top Dog</i>
<i>Attitudes</i>	<i>Make Your Dream Come True</i>
<i>Commitment</i>	<i>Making the Weak Family Strong</i>
<i>Dealing with Defiance</i>	<i>Moral Purity</i>
<i>Demonism</i>	<i>Peace . . . in Spite of Panic</i>
<i>Destiny</i>	<i>Portrait of a Faithful Father</i>
<i>Divorce</i>	<i>The Power of a Promise</i>
<i>Eternal Security</i>	<i>Prayer</i>
<i>Forgiving and Forgetting</i>	<i>Reflections from the Heart—A Prayer Journal</i>
<i>Fun Is Contagious!</i>	<i>Seeking the Shepherd's Heart—A Prayer Journal</i>
<i>God's Will</i>	<i>Sensuality</i>
<i>Hope</i>	<i>Stress</i>
<i>Impossibilities</i>	<i>This Is No Time for Wimps</i>
<i>Integrity</i>	<i>Tongues</i>
<i>Intimacy with the Almighty</i>	<i>When Your Comfort Zone Gets the Squeeze</i>
<i>Leisure</i>	<i>Woman</i>

# So, You Want to Be Like Christ?



Eight Essentials To Get You There

CHARLES R. SWINDOLL



THOMAS NELSON  
*Since 1798*

NASHVILLE DALLAS MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO



With great love and deep respect,  
I dedicate this book to my granddaughter,

HEATHER NELSON.

Even though only sixteen years old,  
Heather wants to be like Christ  
as much as anyone I know—  
in fact, more than most I know.



© 2005, Charles R. Swindoll

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning, or other—except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Published in Nashville, TN, by Thomas Nelson. Thomas Nelson is a registered trademark of Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Published in association with Yates & Yates, LLP, Attorneys and Counselors, Orange, California

Thomas Nelson, Inc. books may be purchased in bulk for educational, business, fundraising, or sales promotional use. For information, please email [SpecialMarkets@ThomasNelson.com](mailto:SpecialMarkets@ThomasNelson.com).

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New American Standard Bible (NASB). © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1973, 1975, 1977 by The Lockman Foundation, La Habra, California. Used by permission.

Other Scripture references are from the following sources:

The New King James Version (NKJV), © 1979, 1980, 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers.

THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE (Amp.), Old Testament © 1965, 1987 by the Zondervan Corporation. The Amplified New Testament © 1958, 1987 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

The NET Bible ® (NET) © 2003 by Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C. [www.netbible.com](http://www.netbible.com) All rights reserved. Used by permission.

The Moffatt Bible (MOFFAT), © 1913, 1924.

ISBN: 978-0-8499-1352-5 (trade paperback)

ISBN: 978-0-8499-1731-8 (hardcover)

*Printed in the United States of America*

09 10 11 12 QW 14 13 12 11 10



# Contents

## *Deepening Our Lives*

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
<i>Introduction: The Gymnasium of the Soul</i>	xi
1 Intimacy: Deepening Our Lives	3
2 Simplicity: Uncluttering Our Minds	27
3 Silence and Solitude: Slowing Our Pace	53
4 Surrender: Releasing Our Grip	79
5 Prayer: Calling Out	101
6 Humility: Bowing Low	123
7 Self-Control: Holding Back	147
8 Sacrifice: Giving Over	169
<i>Endnotes</i>	189





## Acknowledgments

### *Deepening Our Lives*

No book worth reading is the result of only one person's work. It is the combined effort of many that enhances the final product, as each contributor adds his or her expertise to the process.

Mike Hyatt of Thomas Nelson Publishers and David Moberg of Thomas Nelson Publishers first urged me to write on this subject. I have both of them to thank for their encouragement, commitment, and loyal friendship through many years.

I also express my profound appreciation to the one with whom I have worked the closest, Mark Gaither, who has taken my original words (usually handwritten) and breathed fresh life into them with his editorial skills and creative turn of a phrase. Thanks, Mark, for a job very well done!

And finally, I must mention my longtime friend Mary Hollingsworth, along with her outstanding staff of fellow workers at Shady Oaks Studio. Mary and her efficient team not only provided much-needed attention to detail in editing and putting the finishing touches on the final copy of my manuscript, but they also researched and



## *Acknowledgments*

secured all the rights and approvals to the quotations and other illustrative material I have used in each chapter.

Hats off to all of you fine folks who have worked behind the scenes, seeing this volume to completion. My gratitude to each of you knows no bounds.



## Introduction: The Gymnasium of the Soul

I had the great privilege of getting to know the late coach of the Dallas Cowboys, Tom Landry, while he served on the Dallas Theological Seminary board. He was a humble man of quiet strength and dignity, and when he chose to say something, an entire room would stop and lean in to hear what he had to say. Once during a breakfast with a group of men, someone asked how he was able to forge a team out of individuals so that they would win, something he managed to do every year for twenty-nine years. I'll never forget his answer. The table grew silent as he paused for a moment, and then said, "My job is to get men to do what they don't want to do in order to achieve what they've always wanted to achieve."

The something that those men wanted to achieve was a victory at the Super Bowl. What they didn't want to do was the grueling work it would take to get them there. Achieving anything requires discipline—determined, deliberate, definable actions with a clear goal in mind. A good coach will help the team achieve its goal by outlining

## *Introduction*

the exercises and motivating the players to stick to the plan. Facilitating and encouraging discipline in order to win—that’s what coaching is all about. With your permission, I hope to do a little of that in this book.

Tom Landry was distinctive in one other respect. In a professional league led predominately by overweight coaches—many just one cheese fry away from a major heart attack—Coach Landry looked like he could still suit up and play. Well into his sixties, he never asked his team to do anything he wasn’t willing to do. What I want to share with you in the pages that follow are insights, perspectives, and strategies that I have developed during my years in ministry. Some come naturally now. Others still require all the discipline I can muster. But in every case, I can honestly say that I am more consistent now than last year, and vastly improved over my rookie season. In short, I suggest nothing in this book that I don’t require of myself.

Many centuries ago, Paul coached Timothy, his son in the ministry, with the words, “Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness” (1 Timothy 4:7). Timothy was the pastor of the church in Ephesus, a Las Vegas sort of city near the Mediterranean coast in present-day Turkey. This city was a busy cosmopolitan crossroad, buzzing with the commerce of a world empire. It was a judicial sanctuary for criminals and hucksters awaiting trial. The temple of Artemis—one of the wonders of the ancient world—drew worshippers from every corner of the empire, which created a volatile mix of the occult and money. Ephesus was a busy, rich, sensual place to be a Christian. Sound familiar?

Paul wanted his son in the ministry to be a good servant of Jesus Christ as he coached others in the same way he had been coached, nourishing himself on the words of the faith and sound doctrine

## Introduction

(v. 6). But the apostle knew by his own experience that it wouldn't be automatic, it wouldn't be easy, and it doesn't come quickly, especially in a place like Ephesus. Timothy would need to discipline himself.

*Discipline.* Such a hard word to read, isn't it? It drips with sweat. So unpleasant. It calls to mind those grueling days I spent in boot camp after I joined the Marine Corps. I also think of the endless hours a football player must endure on the practice field and in the weight room. When I see the word *discipline*, I think of punishing workouts that produce results everyone admires . . . and no one enjoys.

Then when I see the word applied to the Christian life, I think, *Oh, Great. That's all I need is another chore!* So in writing a book on the "spiritual disciplines," I run the risk of standing in line behind your dentist, who scolds you for not flossing, and your cardiologist, who callously pokes your expanding gut. I don't want to shame you into walking a spiritual treadmill, nor do I want to convince you that a no-fun checklist of spiritual tedium will somehow pay dividends in eternity. On the other hand, I don't want to suggest that becoming like Christ will be easy. Seeking intimacy with the Almighty requires focused determination, demands specific changes in attitude and behavior, and will come with a number of heartbreak and setbacks.

In other words, I'm not selling an exercise program. I'm not asking you to turn a new leaf starting with this book. This is merely an invitation to live life as Christ intended, which includes difficult choices, some hard work, and an increasing capacity to enjoy all the goodness God offers those who come to Him.

Paul chose carefully when he selected the Greek term *gumnazo*. (Most English transliterations spell it *gymnazo*, from which we get our word *gymnasium*.) The New American Standard Bible renders it "discipline." Look at how several other translations present Paul's command:

## Introduction

Keep yourself in training for a godly life. (GNT)

Exercise yourself toward godliness. (NKJV)

Exercise daily in God—no spiritual flabbiness, please! (MSG)

Train yourself for godliness. (NET Bible)

Train yourself to be godly. (NIV)

Spend your time and energy in training yourself for spiritual fitness. (NLT)

Take the time and trouble to keep yourself spiritually fit. (Phillips)

Paul has in mind the word picture of an athlete preparing for the day of competition. I would prefer to translate it “Condition yourself,” which raises two points:

*First, conditioning involves repetitive training exercises* so that the athlete’s mind and the appropriate muscle groups learn to work together reflexively and automatically. Conditioning combines endurance and skill. Conditioning turns game-winning abilities into habits.

*Second, no one can condition someone else.* An athlete can seek out a coach to help him with conditioning, but he cannot hire someone to do the work for him. *Condition yourself.* Check the Internet, look through the *Yellow Pages*. If you ever find “Lease-a-Dieter” or “Rent-a-Runner,” let me know. I want the number!

Conditioning is between you and God.

Notice also that Paul has a goal in mind for the conditioning. Runners condition themselves by running. Weightlifters condition themselves by lifting weights. Each trains for a specific skill to compete in a specific event. Paul’s event is godliness. “Condition yourself toward godliness.” Paul uses the Greek word for godliness ten times in his writings; eight of them appear in 1 Timothy. Godliness is central to Paul’s advice to Timothy.

## Introduction

Ask people around the coffee pot at work what “godliness” means and see what kind of answers you get. Some picture a monk removed from the challenges of the world, studying, praying, meditating, humming hymns behind the walls of a monastery. Others see a squeaky-clean, Bible-toting, do-gooder. Naïve, moralistic . . . annoyingly innocent. One scholar defines the word this way:

Christian [godliness] is not moralistic, for it is rooted in the Christ event (1 Timothy 3:16). It is not just outward worship, nor a mere concept of God, nor a virtue, nor an ideal. Over against a [Gnostic philosophy of self-deprivation] that regards creation as bad . . . true [godliness], born of faith, covers everyday conduct in honoring God as Creator and Redeemer, even though it may expect persecution from the very orders of God which it respects.<sup>1</sup>

A “godly” person is one who ceases to be *self*-centered in order to become *God*-centered. Christ became a man and, as a result of His earthly ministry, we see how God intended for humans to behave. Jesus is our unblemished example of godliness. Therefore, a godly person is a Christlike person.

Our goal as Christians is to become like Christ.

Some well-meaning, yet tragically misguided leaders seem to think that becoming like Christ means that we should strive to be perfect . . . like Christ. For them, the disciplines are like pushups and sit-ups, spiritual exercises to beat their bodies and minds into submission. They’ll even twist Paul’s use of that image in 1 Corinthians 9:27 to make their point. Unfortunately, they are more Gnostic than Christian. While master of the body is important, and spiritual calisthenics *will* make the soul stronger, these are minor issues when it comes to the Christian view of spiritual activity. If you merely want to

## *Introduction*

have more control over your lusts, or become more serene, any meditative religion will do.

Christianity and its goal, Christlikeness, have a person in mind: Christ! What sets Christian spiritual activity apart from all other religions is that they have knowledge of Christ as their goal; not moral perfection (although you will become more moral), not tranquility (although your life will become remarkably more peaceful). And because of the grace you have in Christ, the disciplines will do nothing to make you more accepted by the Father. You cannot be more accepted than you already are in Christ, since He has already done it all for you!

So why exercise spiritual disciplines? To know Jesus Christ. They are simply a means by which you come to know Him experientially. By imitating Him, by sharing His experiences, by living life as He lived it, allowing the Holy Spirit to shape you by the disciplines from the inside out, you will become more like Him.

Don't believe me? Look at how Paul described his spiritual activity to the church in Philippi. This will be a key verse for us. We'll return to it often to remind us of the goal—why we are doing the things we're doing.

[For my determined purpose is] that I may know Him—that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding [the wonders of His Person] more strongly and more clearly, and that I may in that same way come to know the power outflowing from His resurrection [which it exerts over believers]; and that I may so share His sufferings as to be continually transformed [in spirit into His likeness even] to His death, (Philippians 3:10, *The Amplified Bible, Expanded Edition*)

## Introduction

When you pray, pray so that you may know Him. When you seek to simplify, do it as a means of knowing Him more. When you surrender, or behave with humility or sacrifice, do it with the sole purpose in mind to know Him.

As you read the following chapters, keep in mind that each “essential” that I present is both a means *and* an end. Each is a distinctive mark of godliness that Christ modeled with perfection and, for that reason, each is worth imitating. Do them, and you will be like Christ. But they are also a means to knowing Him. For instance, intimacy with the Almighty, the subject of our first chapter, is the focus of all Christian activity—including those beyond the handful I discuss in this book. But intimacy is also the means by which we achieve our ultimate objective: transformation to His likeness. This is our primary goal, isn’t it?

So, you want to be like Christ? Me too. But that kind of godliness won’t just happen by hanging around a church or thinking lofty thoughts three or four times a day or learning a few verses of Scripture. It will take more—much more. Disciplining ourselves will require the same kind of focused thinking and living that our Master modeled during His brief life on earth.

Everything starts in the gymnasium of the soul. Since this is true, let’s commit ourselves to these eight spiritual disciplines. I am now convinced that they are essential ways to help us get there. To borrow words from Coach Landry, these disciplines will enable us to do what we don’t want to do in order to achieve what we’ve always wanted to achieve.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chuck Swindoll". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "C" at the beginning.

—CHUCK SWINDOLL

*Dallas, Texas*







Intimacy:  
*Deepening Our Lives*

*We live in a society that tries to diminish us to the level of the antheap so that we scurry mindlessly, getting and consuming. It is essential to take counteraction. . . . Every one of us needs to be stretched to live at our best, awakened out of dull moral habits, shaken out of petty and trivial busy-work.<sup>1</sup>*

—EUGENE PETERSON



## Intimacy: *Deepening Our Lives*

Several years ago my wife and I took a journey. We traveled 250 miles south and over forty years back in time—back to Houston, Texas. Our roots run deep there. Roots that are personal and, in many ways, spiritual. Decades had passed since our last visit, so we were in for a lot of surprises.

We drove by houses where each of us had once lived and high schools we had attended. We did it slowly, revisiting the years that fill our memories. Everything felt so much smaller. If you've ever traced your roots, lingering over places steeped in nostalgia, you know what I mean.

My boyhood home on Quince Street, on the east side of Houston, was tiny compared to the memories I keep. I remember scootin' down that sidewalk toward the Methodist church on a skateboard scooter I made from scrap lumber and a roller skate that had lost its mate. As we drove to the end of the street, I remembered endless days of my boyhood playing sandlot football with Bruce and a bunch of buddies. I swelled with pride any time he picked me to be on his team, because if

## So, You Want to Be Like Christ?

you were on Bruce's team, you always won. I realize now that Bruce was a high school dropout who just hung around the vacant lot at the end of Quince to play football. He probably should have been in college when most of us were in ninth or tenth grade. But at the time, none of that mattered. I just remember the fun we had throwing passes and having Bruce lead the blocking as I carried the football across the goal line of that sandy lot with odd patches of grass growing here and there.

I drove the route from our home on Quince Street to Milby High School, and I recalled what a martyr I thought I was for having to walk that distance. It's only about a ten-block stroll, but back then it seemed much farther.

Cynthia's childhood memories took her through a junior high school and then her years rooting for the fighting Yellow Jackets of Galena Park High School. She, too, lived near her school. She remembered her classmates, the school chorale, boys she dated, and church activities she faithfully attended. We laughed and sighed together as we dug our way through those years when life moved slowly and days were simple and easygoing.

We lingered in front of the first little house she and I bought for \$9,995. It was a brand-new framed house in Channelview, a suburb of Houston. We sat in front of churches where we had once worshiped and served. We drove through neighborhoods where we had grown up as we followed roads we had traveled before meeting each other and then later as a young married couple.

The whole time we reminisced over friends we knew, stores where we shopped, neighbors we liked, and decisions we made. We recalled celebrations and tragedies we had shared, pain we had known, and the many joys that healed them for both of us. So many of those places that time had now passed by were meaningful to us. We were there again, feeling those long-ago feelings. Familiar, yet very strange. They were

## Intimacy: Deepening Our Lives

random remnants of experiences created by what felt like a different Chuck and Cynthia.

As we pulled away and I watched the places of our memories disappear in my rearview mirror, Cynthia and I came upon two giant realizations.

First, *how necessary is change*. We're so grateful we're not where we once were more than fifty years ago, not only geographically but also spiritually and personally. Growth *is* change but, as we will see later, not all change is growth.



Growth is change,  
but as we will see  
later, not all change is  
growth.

Second, *how essential is perspective*. Life seemed so complicated, so difficult while living it back then. But glancing back over our shoulders, more than five decades down a highway leading away from Houston, things looked very different because *we* were different.

### GROWING BEYOND EARLY LOVE VERSUS LEAVING IT

Let's shift gears from the geographical and the physical realms to the spiritual and the personal. In doing so, let me remind you of an ancient church that you and I would probably have attended had we lived in that city at the end of the first century. It was among the best churches of that era. The church is named simply "the church in Ephesus" (Revelation 2:1). This is what the Lord Himself had to say about this church as He sized it up:

I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false.

—REVELATION 2:2

## So, You Want to Be Like Christ?

Here is a church that worked diligently and was known for its zeal and discernment. They would have nothing to do with apostolic pretenders. This discerning group of believers formed a church famous for its doctrine. It was biblically sound and probably had strong leaders, with many courageous people willing to take a stand in opposition to wrong. They gave no time to folks who were phony. They were zealous and firm and relentless in their pursuit of truth. So far, so good. Who can argue with orthodoxy? However, all was not well in the Ephesian church.

Verse 4 begins with what linguists call a particle of contrast: *but*. For three verses we read of nothing but commendable things, attributes of a local assembly of believers that would have drawn you and hundreds of other first-century worshipers like you to the church at Ephesus. “But I have this against you,” the Lord says with a sigh. “You have left your first love.”

A. T. Robertson, in his *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, writes, “This early love, proof of the new life in Christ . . . had cooled off in spite of their doctrinal purity. They had remained orthodox, but had become unloving.”<sup>2</sup>

John R. W. Stott, in a small but wonderful work entitled *What Christ Thinks of the Church*, adds these thoughts about the Ephesian believers:

They had fallen from the early heights of devotion to Christ which they had climbed. They had descended to the plains of mediocrity. In a word, they were backsliders. . . . Certainly the hearts of the Ephesian Christians had chilled.<sup>3</sup>

I can't speak for you, but it puts a shiver up my back when I see the word *chilled*. What an indictment! What a horrible way to describe the

## *Intimacy: Deepening Our Lives*

heart of a Christian! I think of death when I hear that word used to describe a heart.

A little later Stott continues, “Their first flush of ecstasy had passed. Their early devotion to Christ had cooled. They had been in love with Him, but they had fallen out of love.”<sup>4</sup>

How much had changed since Paul had penned his last comment to that church in his letter to the Ephesians: “Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ *with incorruptible love*” (Ephesians 6:24, emphasis added).

In that benediction, I feel a longing in the great apostle’s heart that the Ephesian Christians experience no waning of love. By the time John wrote the book of Revelation thirty years later, Paul’s dreams were dashed. Jesus said, in effect, “You left that love. You once had a love that was incorruptible, but you abandoned it. You once enjoyed a devotion that was consistent, meaningful, satisfying. In fact, the warmth of your love transformed your thinking and your attitudes; it revolutionized the way you related to Me, to your heavenly Father, and to your brothers and sisters. But you have cooled off.”

John Stott aptly portrays the scene:

The tide of devotion had turned and was ebbing fast. They toiled with vigour, but not with love. They endured with fortitude but without love. They tested their teachers with orthodoxy but had no love in their hearts.<sup>5</sup>

Just as Cynthia and I returned to our roots and came away with a valuable perspective, I invite you to do that now. It won’t take long. The mind is an amazing thing. In a matter of seconds, your mind can transport you to scenes you thought you had forgotten. And all it takes is a little bit of time and some honest reflection. Cynthia and I did it



## So, You Want to Be Like Christ?

again and again as we drove by the familiar haunts of our childhood, teenage, and young adult years.

Let's go on a brief spiritual pilgrimage together.

Journey back in your mind to your first days as a brand-new believer in Jesus Christ. Return to that time when your love was budding and emerging into full bloom. Remember when you would speak of Christ and it would ignite your heart with an exciting burst of zeal and delight? Remember when prayer was new and untried, and you felt its power as you communed with the Almighty? Remember when the Bible was that delicious Book of truth filled with delectable insights you had never known before? Remember when sharing Him with someone else represented the highlight of your week? Remember when your devotion was consistent, fulfilling, enriching . . . deep?

What happened to all of that? When you ponder those questions—not just in passing, but taking time to concentrate as you ponder them—perhaps you feel like one of the Ephesian Christians whom Jesus urged, “Remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first” (Revelation 2:5).

Remember, we said earlier that growth is change, but not all change is growth. Cynthia and I would never choose to return to those early days, not even to when our love was in springtime, delightfully new and fresh. Those were wonderful days and wonderful feelings, but our love has grown. The love we enjoy now is deeper, characterized by a comfortable ease and a profound sense of security that nearly fifty years of life shared together has earned.

Not so for the Ephesians! And perhaps not so for you in your relationship with God. Look again at what Jesus commanded. Your spiritual life may be in need of some major changes. A new perspective is essential in order to rekindle that first-love kind of relationship where God is real again, where you and He are on much closer speaking

## *Intimacy: Deepening Our Lives*

terms. The kind of intimacy that doesn't require a stirring message from the pulpit and doesn't depend upon a great worship event or concert but simply exists as a natural part of your walk.

### INTIMACY WITH GOD REQUIRES ACTION

Distance from God is a frightening thing. God will never adjust His agenda to fit ours. He will not speed His pace to catch up with ours; we need to slow *our* pace in order to recover our walk with Him. God will not scream and shout over the noisy clamor; He expects us to seek quietness, where His still, small voice can be heard again. God will not work within the framework of our complicated schedules; we must adapt to His style. We need to conform to His way if our lives are to be characterized by the all-encompassing word *godliness*.

Godliness is still our desire as believers, isn't it?

But the great question is, how? How do busy people, living fast-paced and complicated lives, facing relentless pressures, consistently walk with God? Whatever would be included in the answers, we can be assured that they will not come naturally, automatically, quickly, or easily. I do not think a person on this earth has ever been automatically godly or quickly godly or easily and naturally godly. "This world is no friend of grace to help us on to God."<sup>6</sup> Everything around us is designed to make us dissatisfied with our present condition.

Henri Nouwen said that while he was driving through Los Angeles on one occasion, he felt like he was driving through a giant dictionary—words everywhere, sounds everywhere, signs everywhere,



*Distance from God is a frightening thing. God will never adjust His agenda to fit ours.*

## So, You Want to Be Like Christ?

saying, “Use me, take me, buy me, drink me, smell me, touch me, kiss me, sleep with me.”<sup>7</sup> He found himself longing to get away from all those words, all those giant signs and sounds. Why? Not because there was something innately wrong with those things—some, but not all. He grieved that it was all so empty, so devoid of God.

So how do we pull it off? How, in a world bent on distracting us from growing deeper in our first love, always enticing us to pursue the pointless, do we find closeness with God? How do you and I become more godly?

This question has led me back to a word that I used much more in my early days in ministry than I have in recent years. The word is *discipline*. The secret lies in our returning to the spiritual disciplines.

### DISCIPLINE YOURSELF FOR INTIMACY WITH GOD

Pause long enough to read the following scripture slowly. It is Paul’s advice to Timothy, his son in the faith:

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.

In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. But have

## *Intimacy: Deepening Our Lives*

nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. *On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness*; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

—1 TIMOTHY 4:1-8, emphasis added

Paul was sitting alone in a dungeon when he wrote this letter to Timothy. His younger friend was serving as the pastor of a church—interestingly, the church in Ephesus. This instruction came sometime after the letter Paul wrote to the Ephesians and before the letter Jesus wrote to that same church in Revelation 2.

Consider Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of that passage in *The Message*:

The Spirit makes it clear that as time goes on, some are going to give up on the faith and chase after demonic illusions put forth by professional liars. These liars have lied so well and for so long that they've lost their capacity for truth. They will tell you not to get married. They'll tell you not to eat this or that food—perfectly good food God created to be eaten heartily and with thanksgiving by Christians! Everything God created is good, and to be received with thanks. Nothing is to be sneered at and thrown out. God's Word and our prayers make every item in creation holy.

You've been raised on the Message of the faith and have followed sound teaching. Now pass on this counsel to the Christians there, and you'll be a good servant of Jesus. Stay clear of silly stories that get dressed up as religion. Exercise daily in God—no spiritual flabbiness, please! Workouts in the gymnasium are useful, but a disciplined life in God is far more so, making you fit both today and forever.

—1 TIMOTHY 4:1-8 MSG

## So, You Want to Be Like Christ?

I think verse 7 represents the climax of Paul's instruction to Timothy. Don't miss this advice: "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness." In other words, "Timothy, get serious about your walk with God! It's time to step up, young man . . . godliness won't *just happen*."



*It is so easy to get  
religious instead of  
godly.*

Guess what, churchgoing men and women: religion won't cut it! We live in a spiritual hothouse where we talk religious talk and send religious letters and write religious pamphlets and do religious Bible study guides and answer religious phones (religiously) and deal with religious concerns. It is so easy to get religious instead of godly. And all the while, a chilling religion slowly cools our hearts. Ironical, isn't it? The general public may have this marvelous

idea about how godly we are, when if the truth were known, many of us would have to say, "I am stagnant, and I have been that way longer than I want to admit."

What's missing? Stop and think. It's that "first love," the great fountain that both generates the spiritual disciplines and feeds on them. Yet I find it absolutely amazing that in the process of doing spiritual things (not religious things, but truly *spiritual* things), we can fail to "discipline" ourselves "for the purpose of godliness." I can, and I have.

Therefore in recent months I have sensed a genuine need—in my own life first (before I ever speak or write to someone else, I have to address it in my own life)—for the cultivation of intimacy with the Almighty. Those words are carefully chosen. They are put forth in deliberate contrast. The almighty, awesome God loves it when we are intimate with Him. So, our goal is intimacy, and, according to Scripture, intimacy with God requires spiritual disciplines. In this book I will address eight disciplines that are essential in our pursuit of godliness.

## *Intimacy: Deepening Our Lives*

### INTIMACY WITH GOD CULTIVATES WISDOM

While rummaging through an old bookstore some time ago, I came across Dallas Willard's excellent work *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. Bedside reading, it is not. This convicting piece of literature is not something you plop down on the sofa and read alongside *People* magazine. Willard's words require you to think with him. For example:

The modern age is an age of revolution—revolution motivated by insight into the appalling vastness of human suffering and need. Pleas for holiness and attacks on sin and Satan were used for centuries as the guide and the cure for the human situation. Today such pleas have been replaced with a new agenda. On the communal level, political and social critiques yield recipes for revolutions meant to liberate humankind from its many bondages. And on the individual level various self-fulfillment techniques promise personal revolutions bringing “freedom in an unfree world” and passage into the good life. Such are modern answers to humanity's woes.

Against this background a few voices have continued to emphasize that the cause of the distressed human condition, individual and social—and its only possible cure—is a *spiritual* one. But what these voices are saying is not clear. They point out that social and political revolutions have shown no tendency to transform the heart of darkness that lies deep in the breast of every human being. That is evidently true. And amid a flood of techniques for self-fulfillment there is an epidemic of depression, suicide, personal emptiness, and escapism through drugs and alcohol, cultic obsession, consumerism, and sex and violence—all combined with an inability to sustain deep and enduring personal relationships.

So obviously the problem *is* a spiritual one. And so must be the cure.

## So, You Want to Be Like Christ?

But if the cure is spiritual, how does modern Christianity fit into the answer? Very poorly, it seems, for Christians are among those caught up in the sorrowful epidemic just referred to. And that fact is so prominent that modern thinking has come to view the Christian faith as powerless, even somehow archaic, at the very least irrelevant. . . .

There is a deep longing among Christians and non-Christians alike for the personal purity and power to live as our hearts tell us we should. What we need is a deeper insight into our practical relationship with God in redemption. We need an understanding that can guide us into constant interaction with the Kingdom of God as a real part of our daily lives.<sup>8</sup>

“The Kingdom of God as a real part of our daily lives.” I want that. I want that for you more than any other thing. I want that for every soul reading this book. But the hardest thing in the world, it seems, is for God to have our full attention so that intimacy with Him glows from within and can be seen by others as a passion that is authentic. He



*I want fulfillment in my walk with Christ, not just talk about fulfillment.*

wants no mere show of religion but a passionate spirituality, where God still does miraculous things through His people—often in spite of us—where God reveals His will in ways that are full of mystery and surprise and wonder. A humble spirituality that leaves us, the clay, willingly soft and malleable in the hands of the Potter, our sovereign God. I repeat, I want that for me and I want that for you.

Again and again and again the words *deep* and *deeper* appear in Willard's book. I want depth; I don't want heights. I want substance; I don't want speed. I want fulfillment in my walk

## *Intimacy: Deepening Our Lives*

with Christ, not just talk about fulfillment. I want to be able to think theologically and biblically, not be entertained with theological theories and biblical stories. I believe *you* want that, too, or you wouldn't be reading these pages.

Richard Foster's meaningful work *Celebration of Discipline* includes these words: "Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people."<sup>9</sup>

Don't suspect for a moment that our environment makes us deep. In my current involvement at Dallas Seminary, I can be as superficial and shallow as a man could be and still be the chancellor of that great school, lacking depth all the while. Hanging out at church hoping it will transform you into a deep Christian is only slightly less foolish than expecting enough time in a garage to turn you into a car. Our environment—even a spiritually nurturing one—won't change us. The Spirit of God working on our volition changes us. Furthermore I am now convinced that we become more malleable in the hands of the Spirit when softened by the disciplines. Inevitably God works through those disciplines to create people with depth—people with a greater capacity for wisdom.

### WITH WISDOM COMES CHRISTLIKENESS

We need wisdom, not just knowledge. God is willing to give wisdom, but not on our terms. As we go deeper, He begins to entrust us with more and more of His mind. In the process we become more and more like Christ.

When tragedy strikes, we don't need more intelligence. We don't need a greater number of skills. We need depth, the kind of depth Job



## So, You Want to Be Like Christ?

had. When the bottom dropped out of his life, Job had the wisdom to say:

But He knows the way I take;  
When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.  
My foot has held fast to His path;  
I have kept His way and not turned aside.  
I have not departed from the command of His lips;  
I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.

—JOB 23:10-12

We need the depth of Paul, who, after praying three times for the horrible stake in his flesh to leave (the word often translated “thorn” means a pointed instrument, like a sword), and three times the Lord said no. In response, Paul said, “Most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:9 NKJV). That’s depth. That’s an example of wisdom at work. Rather than throw a pity party for himself, Paul boldly declared, “I choose to embrace my affliction so that I can have the privilege of experiencing even more of Christ’s power over me.”

What depth of character. What intimacy with the Almighty these men had. I want that too. I want what they had, so that my walk is such that I walk in step whether I feel good or not. Whether I get a yes or no to my prayers, I walk consistently, even when I don’t get my own way.

### WISDOM IS CULTIVATED ON GOD’S TERMS, NOT OURS

God often does His best work in us when He catches us by surprise and introduces a change that is completely against our own desire.

## *Intimacy: Deepening Our Lives*

A couple of years after Cynthia and I were married, I had an obligation to fulfill in the military, so I joined the Marine Corps. I endured boot camp and advanced infantry training, which I completed at Camp Pendleton. I then received orders to serve my tour of duty in San Francisco. Cynthia and I were elated. Other guys were going to hot deserts, like Barstow, California, and lonely places like Okinawa, out in the middle of nowhere. Some were assigned to guard duty aboard a ship and would have to be at sea for six months at a time.

Not me. My assigned duty was at 100 Harrison Street in San Francisco, an enviable, plum assignment. We bought a new car and took off on our first road trip through the Sierras to that beautiful and romantic city on the California peninsula. It was fabulous! While we were settling into our little studio apartment in Daly City, we got connected with a fine church located south of us, Peninsula Bible Church. That's where I met Ray Stedman for the first time. I even attended a Bible conference at Mount Hermon. Two years into marriage, everything was working and life was charming. Candidly, we had it made.

Then . . . an unexpected letter came in the mail. At first I didn't even bother to open it; it was one of those form letters the military sends out by the truckloads. I sat staring out into the San Francisco bay in front of a little electronics firm waiting for Cynthia to finish work. I could see Alcatraz, straight ahead. Eventually I pulled the letter out of my pocket, sliced it open, and immediately noticed the printed signature at the bottom: Dwight D. Eisenhower, the president. It was a speed letter containing the official order for me to change from San Francisco to Okinawa. And, of course, I did what anybody would have done. I checked the envelope to make sure it was sent to the right person. No mistake. It was mine. Immediately my whole frame of reference changed.

## So, You Want to Be Like Christ?

Cynthia and I wept ourselves to sleep that night. Early on in our marriage, that tour of duty would take me sixty-five hundred miles away from her for no fewer than sixteen months. It felt like our world had spun off its axis and come to an end.



What I considered to be the most God-awful letter became the most God-ordained statement for me.

Little did I realize how that one small sheet of paper would change my entire life. What I considered to be the most God-awful letter became the most God-ordained statement for me. It opened doors I would never have otherwise passed through. It forced me out of my familiar, somewhat pampered existence and into a world of stretching opportunities that laid the groundwork for a ministry I would never have known or pursued. But at that moment—the moment it began—I could not imagine anything good coming from such a shocking disappointment.

Before I left, my brother shoved a book in my hand titled *Through Gates of Splendor*, the story of five missionaries who were martyred in Ecuador and their widows, who went on to evangelize the same Auca Indians who had murdered their husbands. On that troop ship, during the seventeen days between California and Okinawa, I discovered a whole new frame of reference. For the first time since I received the speed letter, my mind stopped resisting. For the first time I stopped focusing on myself. For the first time I began to think, *Maybe there's a divine plan at work here.*

I met a man named Bob Newkirk on the island of Okinawa. And one of the first things Bob gave me was a newly released translation of the New Testament—really, a paraphrase—called the *Amplified New Testament*. When I opened to read that paraphrase of the Scriptures

## *Intimacy: Deepening Our Lives*

for the first time, I found that Bob had marked only one verse: Philippians 3:10. I read that volume through at least three times before I left the island, but this verse kept coming back to me:

[For my determined purpose is] that I may know Him—that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding [the wonders of His Person] more strongly and more clearly, and that I may in that same way come to know the power outflowing from His resurrection [which it exerts over believers]; and that I may so share His sufferings as to be continually transformed [in spirit into His likeness even] to His death.

—PHILIPPIANS 3:10 AMP

That's it! That's why I wound up on Okinawa! Humanly speaking, I never would have met Bob Newkirk in the safe haven of Houston or during our idyllic honeymoon in San Francisco. But halfway around the world, away from all the crutches, separated from all of those things that made me comfortable, I was given a chance to see God at work cross-culturally like never before. And the government paid my way! For the first time I would spend time in a missionary home. For the first time I would be surrounded by another culture and baffled by another language. For the first time in my life *I* would be the foreigner. And I found myself again and again and again having to look to heaven and learn a whole new way of walking. And best of all, my first love really began to bloom.

“My determined purpose [perhaps Paul means ‘my focus’] is *that I may know Him*.

## So, You Want to Be Like Christ?

### INTIMACY WITH GOD MUST BE INTENTIONAL

I will be using two important terms that need defining as we move through the chapters that follow. The first is *intimacy*. The second is *discipline*.

Intimacy is the state of being intimate, belonging to or characterizing one's deepest nature. Intimacy is marked by a very close association, contact, or familiarity. Relationally, intimacy is a warm and satisfying friendship developing through long association on a very personal and private level.

Cynthia and I met in the region of East Houston, near that ship channel area of southeast Texas. We dated and got to know each other better. We grew closer as we dated. Soon we became engaged. Eighteen months later, we married. After we married, we grew to know each other even more intimately. Now, after nearly fifty years of marriage, we have the most intimate of earthly relationships. Ours is a warm and satisfying, ever-developing closeness.

As I was preparing to preach on marriage at the Dallas Theological Seminary chapel, I came to the twenty-fifth verse in Genesis 2: "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." The thought hit me: *That's the best description of intimacy*. It includes being emotionally naked and unashamed. You can be physically naked and unashamed with your partner in marriage. You can be so personally unguarded, you're able to share your deepest fear, your most guarded secret, or your most frightening thought, and you have no shame. That's intimacy.

But the ultimate is not an intimacy with one's partner in life; it is intimacy with the living God. Paul says, in effect, "My determined purpose is to be inwardly naked yet unashamed before Him, understanding the wonders of His person and the mystery of His will." Such divine intimacy is rare.

## *Intimacy: Deepening Our Lives*

How distant are you from God right now? Has your closeness with Him chilled? Could that be why your worship has become so perfunctory? Do you sing the songs while thinking about something else? Are you so critical of your brothers and sisters in God's family that you sound just like an unbeliever, even though you know your place after death will be with God in heaven?

Paul would respond this way: "My determined purpose is for that never to be true of me. I will pursue a relationship with Him that becomes so close, He and I will walk consistently together through whatever pressures that occur." That's intimacy. That's our goal.

Now, for the second word: *discipline*. This is the means for having intimacy with God.

Discipline is training that corrects and perfects our mental faculties or molds our moral character. Discipline is control gained by enforced obedience. It is the deliberate cultivation of inner order.

So how are intimacy and discipline connected? Let me repeat, if intimacy is the goal, discipline is the means to that end. Remember, intimacy is never natural, automatic, quick, or easy. Show me someone who is intimate with God, and I'll show you someone who can be compared to a beautiful garden without weeds. Because all gardens grow weeds, you can bet that someone has taken time to cultivate the good plants while rooting out the bad ones. People who are close to God cultivate a personal intimacy with Him like a good gardener cultivates beautiful flowers.

So intimacy is both a discipline and a goal—much like humility and prayer and sacrifice, and any of the other disciplines. Our great



*But the ultimate is  
not an intimacy with  
one's partner in life; it  
is intimacy with the  
living God.*

## So, You Want to Be Like Christ?

tendency in this age is to increase our speed, to run faster, even in the Christian life. In the process our walk with God stays shallow, and our tank runs low on fumes. Intimacy offers a full tank of fuel that can only be found by pulling up closer to God, which requires taking necessary time and going to the effort to make that happen. Remember, Paul said that his “determined purpose” (the discipline) was that he might “know God more intimately and personally” (the goal). Intimacy and discipline work together—and in the process, in a very real way, the means (discipline) leads to the very satisfying end (intimacy).

Discipline is the key.

After spending many months thinking about this, I have arrived at eight essential disciplines that lead to godliness:

1. Intimacy: Deepening Our Lives
2. Simplicity: Uncluttering Our Minds
3. Silence and Solitude: Slowing Our Pace
4. Surrender: Releasing Our Grip
5. Prayer: Calling Out
6. Humility: Bowing Low
7. Self-Control: Holding Back
8. Sacrifice: Giving Over

Notice that the first four disciplines have to do with getting rid of something, creating room in your life. The next four contribute vitality and authenticity to your spiritual life. We’ve already seen the value of the first essential.

Of course there are many other disciplines we could consider. And

we could credibly argue for a shorter or longer list. I don't claim to have the definitive path to intimacy with the Almighty. But I can say that after forty years of ministry, having prescribed these to others and having applied them to my own life, these eight disciplines fall into the category of essentials.

Cultivate these disciplines, and your relationship with the Lord will flourish. More significantly, these will become paths that will lead you to becoming more like Christ.



*Cultivate these  
disciplines, and your  
relationship with the  
Lord will flourish.*



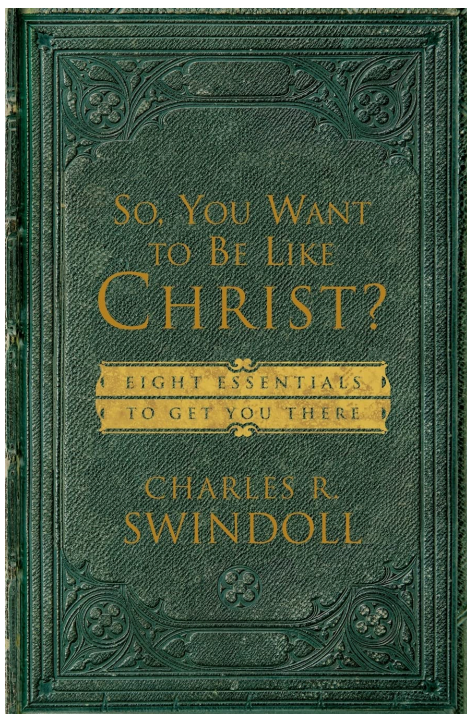
WE HOPE YOU  
ENJOYED A

# SNEAK PEEK

FROM  
SO YOU WANT TO BE  
LIKE CHRIST

BY CHARLES R.  
SWINDOLL

BUY  
NOW



amazon

audible

Spotify

BARNES & NOBLE

TARGET

Walmart

Christianbook

BAM!  
BOOKS-A-MILLION

faithgateway

church source

N NELSON BOOKS