

How to be an Imitator of Jesus Christ

Rich Nathan

May 15-16, 2004

The Holy Spirit: Riding the Wave of God's Spirit Series

Acts 9:32-43

One of the more bizarre moments during this year's presidential campaign took place in a Southern state when one of the presidential contenders was attempting to display to a Southern crowd, mainly made up of Baptists, how religious he was. He said that he read his Bible almost every day. So someone asked him, "Well, what is your favorite Bible book?" His response was, "My favorite Bible book is the New Testament book of Job, only I didn't like the way it ended."

Unfortunately, for this presidential candidate, the book of Job is not a New Testament book. It is an Old Testament book. And it ends with Job being extraordinarily blessed by God. The Lord gives Job twice as much as he had before. He gives him seven beautiful daughters and three strapping sons. In fact, it says nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job's daughters. Job lives to see his great great grandchildren born. There wasn't a lot about the ending of the book of Job not to like.

Unfortunately, the word "Christian" in America has gotten so watered down, that almost anyone who can pronounce the word "Bible" will claim to be a Christian. A person might reason: Well, I'm not Jewish and I'm not Muslim or Hindu, so I guess I'm a Christian. After all, this is America. It is interesting that the word "Christian" hardly

appears in the New Testament. We use the word all the time, but the word “Christian” only appears in the New Testament three times. Do you know what followers of Jesus Christ are most called in the New Testament? They’re not mostly called “Christians.” Nearly 300 times they are called “disciples.”

Now, in the contemporary church, we reserve the word “disciple” for people who are really, really serious about their faith. They are the special forces Christians. But for the regular Army, who are average Joe and Suzie Church-goer, they are Christians. We believe in the modern church that it is very possible for you to be a Christian without being a disciple. But that idea would not be supported by any verse of the New Testament. Anyone who claims to be a follower of Jesus Christ must, according to the New Testament, be a disciple.

Our church has a dear friend, who has come here on numerous occasions to preach. His name is Don Williams. Don is 67 years old. He recently retired from his position as senior pastor of the Coast Vineyard in San Diego, California. He’s actually doing more teaching and traveling than men half his age. About 40 years ago Don did his Ph.D. work on the meaning of discipleship in the ancient world, and specifically, the meaning of discipleship with the apostle Paul.

Don wrote that in the ancient world, a person did not become a disciple in a classroom. Discipleship wasn’t a matter of reading some books, taking some exams, being able to spit back answers on a final. Instead, discipleship took place through a personal relationship with a teacher. The student would attach himself or herself to a

wise teacher, to a rabbi. And the student would listen to this rabbi's teaching, ask questions, and listen to him expound his answers. The student would answer the rabbi's questions. Often a student would actually live with his rabbi. Most of all, a student would imitate the habits of their rabbi. All of the rabbi's life was considered to be instruction from God, not just what the rabbi said, but what he did. Discipleship was a matter of following a teacher, a rabbi's example.

There is a famous story told by Rabbi Akiba, who followed every action of his teacher down to the slightest detail. He scrutinized every detail down to the slightest detail. He scrutinized everything that his rabbi did and then imitated that. In fact, Rabbi Akiba once told his students that he followed his Rabbi Joshua in to the bathroom. One of his students said, "How could you be so disrespectful?" Rabbi Akiba answered and said, "What I did was not disrespectful. I consider everything my rabbi did as being part of the Torah, part of the instruction of God that I needed to learn." And then he added, "And while he was in the bathroom I learned three things that I have put into practice."

Now, I have no idea what those three things were. Wash that whole image from your mind. But my point is that for Jews in the ancient world, and also for Greeks, discipleship was part of an intimate relationship between a student and his teacher. And the teacher, or in Judaism, the rabbi, became the student's model. He became the student's guide, the pattern, the mentor. Disciples shared life together with their teachers and imitated their teachers.

Now, if you ask the average Christian in America today what does it mean to be a good Christian, you would probably hear a brief list of things that a good Christian does and a brief list of things that a good Christian doesn't do. A good Christian doesn't get drunk. A good Christian doesn't swear. A good Christian doesn't have sex outside of marriage. A good Christian attends church weekly. A good Christian prays. A good Christian reads their Bible. A good Christian tithes. But I would venture to say that it would be the rare person who would say: Well, basically a good Christian imitates the pattern of life modeled for us by Jesus. You want to sum up what a good Christian does? A good Christian is basically a good imitator of the life of Christ.

That's what the Bible teaches. That's what it means to be a disciple. And do you know that one of the most popular books in the history of Christianity, next to the Bible and *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan, is a book written back in the 15th century by a Dutch Christian named Thomas á Kempis titled "The Imitation of Christ." It is a wonderful devotional book. I would highly recommend it if you are looking for fantastic devotional reading. We have it available in our bookstore. I think every mature follower of Jesus ought to read this book. But Thomas understood what the New Testament writers taught, that being a Christian essentially is imitating Christ.

Today, as we continue our series in the book of Acts, learning to ride the wave of the Holy Spirit, I want to talk about how to be an imitator of Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

The disciples in the book of Acts saw themselves as continuing the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth. We considered this when we looked at the very first verse in the book of Acts, Acts 1:1 where Luke, the author of Acts, writes:

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In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach...

The book of Acts is all about what Jesus continues to do and to teach from heaven, by the Holy Spirit, through the church.

The early Christians understood that being a Christian involved the imitation of Christ. It is not just religious activities like going to church, paying a tithe, or reading your Bible. Discipleship meant imitating Jesus' example and patterning your life after Christ's pattern.

So, for example, Paul writes in 1 Cor. 11:1

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Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

The apostle Peter states in 1 Peter 2:21

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To this you were called because Christ suffered for you leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.

Discipleship means following the example of Christ. So, here's the \$64,000 question: What was it about Jesus' example that the early disciples sought to imitate? And more importantly, what does it mean for us in the 21st century to imitate the example of Jesus in our world? If you want to be a disciple and imitate Jesus, how do you do it in Central Ohio in the 21st century?

One thing following Christ means in the 21st century is that we who call ourselves disciples are to imitate Christ's love including love for our enemies. We read in Ephesians 5:1,

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Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Christ loved us. Christ loved his enemies. Therefore, if I want to be Christ's follower, I must love my enemies too. If you want to be Christ's follower, you must love your enemies too. Who are the enemies you should love?

You know, our enemies are not just terrorists living 8000 miles away from here in Afghanistan, or in Iraq. Christian, it is most likely that your enemy right now will turn

out to be someone you know intimately – a member of your family, your mother or father, your sister or brother, your spouse or ex-spouse, your boss or co-worker. Your enemy is almost certainly going to be someone in your close circle who has really hurt you – someone who got near enough to you to betray your trust, to disappoint you, to abuse you. Someone whose opinion you care about, who said something horrible about you. Your enemy is someone who likely stabbed you in the back, someone who may be suing you in court or someone who broke up with you or broke your heart.

Being an imitator of Christ means that you are constantly having to ask God to give you the power to not indulge in revenge fantasies. Do you have any of those revenge fantasies? You are lying in bed at night and thinking about the absolute zinger, the classic put-down that you could have responded with to this person who hurt you. You are indulging your fantasy concerning how you could hurt this other person, how you want to see them lose, and how you want to see them suffer. Being a disciple of Jesus means you are often asking God to give you the power not to indulge in revenge fantasies. A disciple says: “Lord, give me the power to not fight fire with fire. Lord, help me to not pay them back. Help me to not rejoice when my enemy is doing badly. Lord, help me to not grieve when my enemy seems to be getting off the hook.”

Certainly, the imitation of Christ at least involves imitating the love of Jesus Christ, not only in what I do and say, but also in what I think and fantasize about. Have you learned that lesson?

Being one of Jesus' disciples also means that we imitate Jesus' beliefs – his beliefs about God, people, life, eternity, money, heaven, hell, men, and women. When you are forming your beliefs, what should you believe? When you as a Christian are forming what we call our “doctrine,” our belief system, the disciple of Christ can never say: “Well, I know what Jesus taught about heaven or hell, or some other subject, but I just don't agree. After all, I live in the 21st century.” We're so advanced when it comes to our understanding of psychology or human behavior and medicine that we just can't follow Jesus in terms of this particular viewpoint. When you are forming your beliefs, a Christian disciple asks: “Well, what did Jesus believe about that? What did Jesus teach? My view of life, the world, truth, as a Christian, needs to be shaped by Jesus.”

A Christian disciple has the attitude of saying: “I'm allowing Jesus Christ to form my thinking and my beliefs about everything.” A Christian disciple says: “I am not a follower of a O'Reilly; I am not a dittohead of Rush Limbaugh; my views are not determined by Fox News' fair and balanced reporting, or by CNN, or by the Administration's latest press release, or what the critics of the administration say.”

See we Christians, we followers of Jesus Christ, we reject the options presented to us by contemporary American politics as if these were the only options for our beliefs and our viewpoints of the world. We Christians say: You know, I am really trying hard to look at life and look at the world the way Jesus looked at it. I try not to look at the world simply the way the average American looks at it. I try not to look at the world the way those who are force-fed by mass media look at it. I try not to look at the

world as a conservative or liberal, a Republican or Democrat. I make it my aim to look at the world the way Jesus would look at it as if he were in my body and living in my situation.

I'll tell you, this gives you, follower of Christ, a wonderful independence of mind, a real liberation and creativity in your thinking. It is so good if you cannot be pigeon holed as merely being a Democrat or people are surprised is because you, follower of Jesus, march to the beat of a heavenly Drummer. You aren't saying what everyone else is saying. You aren't thinking what everyone else is thinking. You are not valuing what everyone else is valuing. You are an imitator of Jesus Christ. Do you imitate Jesus' beliefs?

But you know, being a disciple of Jesus is even more than imitating Jesus' ethics or doctrine. We have Protestants and Catholics, who say being a disciple means imitating Jesus' ethics. Evangelicals, the more conservative wing of the church, would say being a Christian means imitating Jesus' doctrine, believing as Jesus did. If there is one aspect of discipleship that is neglected by most people in the church today, imitating Jesus also involves doing what Jesus did, not just believing what he believed or loving the way he loved. Imitating Christ means doing what Jesus did.

As I said before, the early Christians saw themselves as continuing the ministry of Jesus. How did they continue the ministry of Jesus? Well, they went around preaching the gospel.

Acts 8:25

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When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

There are dozens of verses like this in the book of Acts. The way the disciples imitated the Lord was by going around and preaching the gospel. They called people to repent, to turn in faith to Jesus Christ, who died for their sins, and rose from the dead.

See, when you are telling your friend that they need to trust in Christ, when you say to a friend: “You know, I know you feel bad about what you’ve done. I know you feel guilt because of the mistakes you’ve made. The only way you are going to be able to ever resolve your guilt is to turn to Jesus. He alone offers you forgiveness so that you can start your life with a clean slate. You do not constantly have to drag around the sin and all your mistakes from the past. You don’t have to live that way.” When you tell a friend that they can live without constantly feeling ashamed and condemned by turning to Christ, who paid for those sins. When you tell them that they can really be forgiven, that they could really be cleansed, you are imitating Jesus.

When you tell a friend that they do not have to live in continual anxiety about life, about the future, that if they turned to Christ in faith, trusting him for their future, they can be rescued from the problem of anxiety, you are imitating Jesus Christ. When you bear witness to Christ, when you tell people what Jesus Christ has done for you

personally, you are imitating Christ. When you share the gospel, it is an act of discipleship. You are doing what Jesus did.

And in the book of Acts, we read about a woman who did what Jesus did. Acts 9:36

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In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor.

Joppa is modern-day Jaffa. It is a suburb of Tel Aviv in Israel. It is the closest port to Jerusalem. We read about a woman named Tabitha. That was her Hebrew name. In Greek, her name was Dorcas. Her name means “gazelle.” Like a gazelle, she was a lovely and graceful person. For Tabitha, being an imitator of Christ meant that she went around doing good and helping the poor with the skills she had.

Tabitha was an imitator of Jesus Christ because she went around doing good, especially for the needy. You see, this is what Jesus did. I want you to see this because Tabitha was an imitator of Christ. In Acts 10:37-38, Peter is telling the story of Jesus and says,

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You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy

Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

Jesus went around doing good. Tabitha imitated Jesus by going around doing good. And there are hundreds of people in this church who are imitating Christ by going around and doing good. Let me just mention a few of them to you.

1. Diana Shoaf, a VLI student volunteers every week for The Zone after school program. She tutors kids and also supervises kids that are playing. Diana goes around doing good for needy children.
2. Debra Peterman oversees the Bridge Builder ministry she started that ministers to anyone with disabilities – autism, hearing disabilities, learning disabilities. Debra is going around doing good.
3. Hassan Sadaat helps to oversee our food pantry every Saturday morning. Hassan is doing good. He is imitating Christ by bagging groceries and giving food out to the poor.
4. Brian Heursberger is a lawyer that coordinates lawyers who serve at the Single Parents Fair and give legal advice at the fair.
5. There are several doctors, Tim Kubacki, who started our medical clinic and who serve there every week – Mark Montoney, Harry Kareen, and other doctors who serve at the Clinic.
6. Steve Diesan is a mechanic who owns his own business, he serves at the single parents fair by changing oil for single parents. Steve is going around doing good.
7. Robin Kirbie-Cole mentors young single moms in crisis pregnancies.

I could mention hundreds of other people who are doing good. They are imitating Christ. Let me ask you a personal question: In what way are you specifically going around doing good? I'm not asking you if you like to think of yourself as being a good person. I'm not even asking you if you've stopped doing bad stuff – you've stopped

sleeping around, you've stopped lying, you've stopped fighting with your parents, you've stopped getting high, you've stopped gambling. It is wonderful that you've stopped doing bad stuff. I'm not even asking you if you've internally changed, if you've had victory over your own anxiety or depression, or your perfectionism. It is wonderful if you have personally changed. I'm just asking a much simpler question of you: In what specific ways are you going around doing good for others? You say you are an imitator of Christ, are you doing what Jesus did? How are you, by your life and activities, adding to the net amount of good in this world? And not just for your family, but for others, for those in need?

Well there is a wonderful book by Rodney Stark called *The Rise of Christianity*. It is a great book about the way Christianity spread in the first few centuries from 11 disciples, the 12 minus Judas Iscariot, to eventually encompassing and conquering the Roman Empire. And one of the points that Rodney Stark makes in *The Rise of Christianity*, which we have in our bookstore, is that Christianity spread because the early Christians went around doing good, especially during times of international crises.

Now, this is really critical because we are living in a time of international crisis today. There were two major epidemics in the Roman Empire, one that lasted for about ten years from 165 AD on and the second nearly a century later in the year 251. It is estimated that during the first epidemic somewhere between a quarter and a third of the Roman Empire died. During the second plague, historians said 5000 people a day died in the city of Rome alone. 5000 people a day died.

Now, the non-Christian response to the epidemic was to flee the cities and head to the countryside. The non-Christian response was to save their own skins. In fact, the most famous doctor in the Roman world was a doctor named Galen. What did he do? He ran out of Rome as quick as he could and went to his country estate. The only people who stuck around in the cities nursing the sick, caring for the dying, burying the dead even at the risk of their own lives, were Christians. Christians believed that not only did Jesus Christ love people, but they were called to imitate Christ by loving people as well, and doing good to everyone.

In the 4th century, the Emperor Julian decided to start a pagan charity. It was sort of a United Way of the Ancient World and it failed miserably. He complained to one of the pagan priests. He said: Why is it that we can't motivate our people to go around doing good like those blasted Galileans [that's what he called the Christians]. They support not only their poor, but ours as well. While everyone can see that our people lacked aid from us. The Christians are making us look bad. They aren't only helping their own kind, they are helping our kind.

The result of Christians staying and nursing the sick was that a number of Christians also caught the plague and died. But many people were nursed to health. And many people who were nursed to health became Christians. Do you understand the impact of Christians simply imitating Jesus by doing good?

A couple of years ago a man, who I'm going to call Bill, went in for an eye appointment at our medical clinic. He called to cancel the appointment because he didn't believe he was going to be around much longer. He had asthma. He had no place to live, no family in Columbus to support him. He was contemplating suicide. Well, when Bill called and talked about his contemplated suicide, Del Wilhelm, who helps to oversee our free medical clinic, talked with Bill. He talked about life and God. Del asked Bill if he had ever surrendered his life to Christ. Bill said he hadn't. They prayed together. Bill's spirit was immediately lifted. Del gave him a Bible and over the next year they met together to talk and to pray. They discussed different Bible stories together. Bill grew as a Christian.

About a month ago Bill called Del and said: I finally got my own place. He was able to get out of the shelter. Del asked Bill if he needed anything. Bill said: No, I'm doing great. He had a few broken down things in his apartment. Folks from the church filled Bill's apartment with furniture. He now has a home. Bill has hope for his life. He's going in for job training to find himself a job.

Friends, do you understand the impact that you could have on the life of an individual if you just imitated Christ by going around and doing good?

The imitation of Christ also involves Jesus' ministry of healing. Again, disciples do what their master does. Disciples ask the question: what would Jesus do, if he were in my body now? I want you to see how closely Peter followed the example and pattern of his Master.

In the story of the healing of Aeneas we read:

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As Peter traveled about the country; he went to visit the saints in Lydda. There he found a man named Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years. “Aeneas,” Peter said to him, “Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat.” Immediately Aeneas got up.

I love the radio preacher Chuck Swindoll’s comment about these verses. He said: “This is truly a miracle. Most of us can’t even get our teenager out of bed.” Peter was able to do this with a paralyzed man.

But you see, Peter had seen Jesus heal a paralytic man, who was also lying on a mat. In fact, the incident probably happened at Peter’s home in Capernaum. What did Jesus do on that occasion? We read in Mark 2:11,

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Jesus said to the paralytic, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” He got up and took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God saying, “We have never seen anything like that.”

Most of Jesus’ healings resulted from Jesus issuing a command. To a blind person, Jesus once said: “Receive your sight.” To a deaf person, he spoke to the man’s ears

and said: “Be opened.” To a woman, who was bent over and couldn’t straighten up, Jesus said: “Woman, be set free of your sickness.” Most of Jesus’ healings were the result of Jesus exercising authority over an illness and commanding it to go.

So Peter, as a faithful disciple, who was imitating his Lord, does not just pray: “Lord, raise Aeneas up. Please, Lord, strengthen Aeneas’ legs. Make his paralysis go away.” Peter sees himself as a conduit of Jesus’ presence in the world and his authority, so Peter says to Aeneas: “Jesus Christ heals you, get up and take up your mat.” Immediately Aeneas got up.

See, the picture of healing prayer in the New Testament is different than the picture we have. Often we pray to God and we ask God to heal the person. But the picture of healing in the New Testament is often that Christ delegates to people his authority to heal. And then as Christ, by his Spirit, manifests his power in the moment, Christ’s people speak to the illness and they command it to leave.

Now we absolutely see the imitation of Christ even more explicitly in the raising of Tabitha from the dead.

Acts 9:36-41

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In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor. About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. Lydda was

near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!" Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them. Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive.

Notice Peter does three things in healing Tabitha.

1. Peter sends everyone out of the room.
2. He gets down on his knees and prays.
3. He says: "Tabitha, get up!"

Now where did Peter, the disciple, get this model of raising the dead from? He got it from his Master Jesus. See, if we go back to the gospel of Mark, that is based on Peter's eyewitness account, we read the story of what Peter saw Jesus do when Jesus raised the dead. It is interesting that some of the details in Peter's eyewitness account aren't recorded in the other gospels. But they're present in Peter's memory and they are present in his eyewitness account in the gospel of Mark. So look back with me at Mark 5:35. Here's what we read,

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While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. “Your daughter is dead,” they said. “Why bother the teacher any more?” Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.” He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead, but asleep.” But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha koum!” (which means, “Little girl, I say to you, get up.”). Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished.

Notice what Jesus did. First, Jesus made all of the mourners leave the room and he only brought into the room a few of his disciples and the girl’s parents. The second thing Jesus did was that he spoke to the little girl in Aramaic and he said, “Talitha, koum!” (which means, “Little girl, get up!”). Again, when Peter faced the same situation, a woman named Tabitha had died. What does he do? He tells all of the mourners to leave the room. And then he would have said in Aramaic, “Tabitha, koum!” just one letter different than Jesus’ statement, “Talitha, koum.” Peter said: Tabitha, get up. He is imitating Jesus’ model of healing.

And just parenthetically, there is a wonderful reason why Jesus and Peter wanted to pray with just a few people, rather than a room full of mourners. One of the things that you see when you minister in healing is the importance of a healing environment. When you are in a hospital room and you are trying to pray for a sick friend, but the nurse keeps interrupting because she has to adjust the IV, or she is propping up pillows and talking about the medical procedures that need to be done, there are parents and relatives in the room, all the folks in the room are not people of prayer, it is virtually impossible in that kind of chaotic unbelieving environment to see healing take place.

But when the atmosphere in the room is full of faith, hope, and expectation, you are going to see many people get healed. It is far easier to see someone healed at a worship service or a conference where people have been worshipping God for 30-40 minutes and where there are lots of people with open hearts to God. It is far easier to pray for healing when we've invited God to be with us and we sense the Spirit's presence. It is easier to see healing when at least a few people, the people praying, or the person receiving prayer, or other people in the room, believe God for healing. It is far easier to see healing when there is an atmosphere and environment of faith as opposed to a room full of cynicism, unbelief and despair.

Now listen. Imitating Jesus also involves imitating Jesus' healing ministry. If you want to be a disciple, it means imitating Christ in all that Christ did, short of his unique redemptive work on the cross. This is where a lot of modern Bible commentaries jump ship. They say: "Yes, we will imitate Jesus' ethics. Yes, we'll

imitate Jesus' doctrine and beliefs. Yes, we'll imitate Jesus' going around doing good. But clearly in the modern world, we don't go around trying to heal the sick. Yes, we believe Jesus healed the sick. Yes, we believe the early church healed the sick. But surely, our discipleship can't involve going around praying for people for healing."

It is interesting at the very moment when many Christians refuse to follow Jesus' example of healing, the scientific community is coming up with more and more evidence that there really is something to healing prayer. Back in the 1980's a researcher named Randolph Byrd decided to evaluate the scientific evidence for the effect of intercessory prayer on patients at a coronary care facility at the San Francisco General Hospital. Byrd studied 400 patients. He divided the patients into two groups of 200 each. The people who were receiving prayer didn't know that they were receiving prayer. They were prayed for from a distance. The people who prayed for them were not permitted to get in touch with them. So Dr. Byrd eliminated any of the other possible natural reasons for healing – knowing that someone cares about you, being touched, receiving counsel.

What he discovered was there was a marked difference between the 200 patients who were receiving intercessory prayer that was specifically directed to Jesus, not to any higher power, but to Jesus. Then those patients who were specifically prayed for, at least by his group, had fewer incidents of congestive heart failure during recovery. They had to use fewer diuretics. They were less frequently intubated. They experienced fewer cases of pneumonia, fewer cases of cardio-pulmonary arrest.

There are quite a number of scientific studies done in the last 15 years on the positive effect of Christian healing prayer upon patients in a hospital. Dr. Dale Matthews, who is a Christian and who prays for his patients, has written extensively on this subject. Here is his summary conclusion:

Scientific knowledge has demonstrated the positive benefits of religion. I can say as a physician and a scientist, not just as a Christian, that scientifically, prayer is good for you. The medical effects of faith on health are not a matter of faith, but of science.

I want to share with you the prayer for healing on a guy in our congregation named Steve Fogle. Steve had pain in his hands for many years, and was diagnosed with carpal tunnel syndrome. He received surgery for it, but the pain in his hands became even worse after the surgery than before. His hands were so badly damaged that he couldn't do anything with them. He developed a torn ligament and arthritis and his condition worsened so much that his wrists actually began to deteriorate and shrink. He would have to take an hour in the morning to stretch and warm up his hands so that he could function minimally. The most he could do was write a personal check. He had been prayed for many times and he had pretty much given up hope. His wife convinced him to go to John Cook's healing class, but he didn't want to go.

VIDEO

Now, if you desire to imitate Jesus in his ministry of healing but you feel like you don't know where to start, you'd love to see some sick people around you healed, you'd love to see some of the things I've been talking about in your life and in your world, we've put together a training seminar that's going to be offered this Thursday and Friday night here at the church. Open up your bulletins and inside there is a flier for you to sign up for this seminar. I'm going to ask many of you to go as home groups this week.

You see, my passion as a pastor is to have a church equipped and committed to imitating Jesus in everything—his prayer, his kindness, his love for his enemies, his beliefs, his viewpoints, his going around doing good, and his healing ministry. Let's pray.

How to be an Imitator of Jesus Christ

Rich Nathan

May 15-16, 2004

The Holy Spirit: Riding the Wave of God's Spirit Series

Acts 9:32-43

- I. Imitating Christ's Love (Eph. 5:1,2)
- II. Imitating Christ's Beliefs
- III. Imitating Christ's Deeds
 - A. Doing Good (Acts 9:36; 10:38)
 - B. Healing the Sick
 - 1. The Healing of Aeneas (Acts 9:32-34; Mark 2:11, 12)
 - 2. The Raising of Tabitha (Acts 9:36-41; Mark 5:33ff)