



Discipleship 101
New Believer Lesson #12
Becoming A Good Person
Based on the Book,
The Divine Conspiracy,
by Dallas Willard



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Introduction:

“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good-- except God alone.”

Mark 10:18

The command, “Be ye perfect” is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command.

C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

The Foundation - Love:

The only solid and lasting foundation in a relationship is love. This includes our relationship with our Creator God. We cannot even call it a relationship if love is missing. Christians ought to be models of love for the world to see. Indeed, the bible tells us how non-believers should view us:

“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”
[John 13:35.](#)

Sadly, many of Christ’s apprentices have fallen short of this ideal, and the world, watching closely, has noticed. Christ-followers are seldom seen as models of natural, genuine, sacrificial love, as people overflowing with compassion and grace. Instead, those who are not followers of Jesus too frequently perceive us as judgmental, harsh, and aloof from the needs of the world. When they consider what they have witnessed as ‘Christian behavior,’ love is not the first word that comes to their minds.

Contemporary western Christianity has become what Jesus calls the “righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees,” – lives characterized by cold outward manifestations only: rules, do’s, don’ts, and external standards like church attendance and boycotts of ‘immoral’ products. There is much emphasis on spotless doctrine and denominational creeds and but not so much on matters of the heart like selfless service to our fellowman, help for widows, and assistance to the most helpless in society. “I’ll pray for you,” is fine, but “Let’s pray together, then tell me how I can help,” is far better. We have become known more for what we are **against** than what we are **for**.

Being Good People:

Yet, God wants his children to be good people. That should not be a surprise, but this means more than just trying to act good. When God prepares you as a true apprentice, a disciple,

you really will be good; he will transform you from the inside out. You cannot be good by simply doing things on the “good” checklist; “do’s and “don’ts” aren’t sufficient. Goodness grows out of the soil of our hearts, and the good soil of our hearts originates in authentic loving care of God, other people, our world around us, even ourselves. God is teaching us and shaping us into good people, but this process will take our entire lives. Stick with it – he is sticking with you.



How would you describe a good person? How would you describe a person who freely loves others? Who do you know who can be described this way?

In the discourse Jesus gave in Matthew chapters 5-7 called the “Sermon on the Mount,” is a set of teachings on how love expresses itself in life. Love is the fundamental power in the relationships you have with everyone you influence, those whose lives you actually effect with the presence called the “kingdom of God” travelling wherever you go.

How would Jesus describe a “good” person? A good person to Jesus would be the kind of person who naturally does what is right, honorable, and noble, because of what is in and flows out of their hearts. Just as the kingdom of God is around us all the time, impinging on our world to the degree to which we acknowledge and interact with it, so too does a good person affect the world immediately around him or her. Some might call it an anointing or a spiritual presence. It is something that others perceive but can’t identify, a ‘feeling’ that someone is nearby who is ‘different.’

Mark chapter 12:28-34 teaches us how we love others and are good to those around us. Jesus called this passage the greatest commandment ever given for us to follow.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” [Mark 12:30](#)

As Jesus points out, you can’t care for the good of others around you unless and until you are completely caught up in love with God. Love for God will dispel a host of human emotions that foul every relationship they inhabit: anger, lust, sexual immorality, lying, revenge, etc (found itemized in Matthew 5:21-42).

When your love for God takes root, then you can become good to your fellowman.

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” [Mark 12:31](#)



Describe how you show love for God. Describe how you show love for your neighbor. Can you see how the first enables the second?

Why is the purity of our hearts so critical to our being Jesus' apprentices? Why should we truly want to be genuinely good people? We must exhibit true goodness as apprentices of Jesus because unless someone sees, in the flesh, the life and actions of a truly good person, they can't understand. It can't be taught without it being seen in person, genuinely on display. Jesus teachings constantly bring us back to what goodness is, which is why so many of his words focus on the kingdom of God, a reality that can be ours and will make us look more like him every day as we change on the inside.

The Chain Reaction of Love:

In Matthew chapter 5 verse 20, Jesus tells his hearers of the standard of the day they were expected to keep - the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. They were the religious and political leaders of the Jesus day. So when he tells the crowd on the hill that there righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, he shocked them.

“For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus isn't setting the bar too high for his hearers – us included. He is changing the bar! It's a completely different bar!

Righteousness is not doing more of something to become more spiritual than someone else, like the scribes and Pharisees of our day. Righteousness is simply:

- 1) ***“ . . . love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”*** [Mark 12:30](#)
- 2) ***“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*** [Mark 12:31](#)

Knowing that God loves you is the enabler that allows you to love him, and love others. Without God's love, the rest of [Matthew chapter 5](#) is impossible. And without understanding his great love for us, we can't even begin to make sense of the words Jesus speaks here. Let's review briefly Matthew 5:21-48 and see what an apprentice must learn, and what the kingdom of heaven can enable.

[Matthew 5:21-26 – Anger:](#) The old law prohibited murder. Jesus new command of kingdom righteousness draws the line at anger. Improper anger will make us guilty in God's kingdom court. Remember that the primary function of anger is to alert you to an obstruction of your will. You can't have your way. There are just reasons for anger and there are unjust, and we must sort them out and determine if we are going to indulge it or not. Once you see this powerful emotion for what it is, you then move past animalistic reaction to the point of choice. There is nothing done with anger that cannot be done without it. You're not simply

good because you don't kill someone; you become good when you reign in anger and turn it into seeking the best for everyone you come into contact with.

I must tell you that there is almost nothing incredibly stupid, unkind, or regretful I ever did in life that was not predicated by anger. I'm one-half Sicilian for goodness sake, and am therefore an expert on anger!

[Matthew 5:27-30 – Sexual Lust:](#) In dealing with improper sexual lust, Jesus uses the prop of adultery from the Ten Commandments and tells us not to even lust with our thoughts. It seems easy to deduce that a good person, an apprentice of Jesus, would not contemplate sexual intercourse with someone and still be comfortable in the kingdom of heaven.

Merely to be tempted sexually requires that we think of sex with someone we are not married to. Temptation is not wrong all by itself, but it becomes improper for an apprentice of Jesus when we entertain that thought and carry it out initially in our thoughts. It is a short trip next to actions. These thoughts do not belong in the kingdom of heaven.

[Matthew 5:31-32 – Divorce:](#) The intent of marriage is to unite two people in a bond stronger than any other union on the planet – stronger than parents to children, children to siblings, even battlefield comrades. The married man and woman are to become the mystical and unique “one flesh.” There can be bad marriages and justifiable reasons to divorce, but they should be approached carefully, not flippantly. A good person, an apprentice of Jesus, will take great care to cultivate a strong, healthy marriage, and the kingdom of heaven stands ready to assist in keeping it so.

[Matthew 5:33-48 – Making oaths, turning the other cheek, and loving your enemies:](#) People make oaths to impress others with sincerity. A truly good person will not need to impress others, nor would he want to. It is unlike God to be untruthful, and standing in the kingdom of heaven makes this unnecessary.

Retaliating for what someone has done to you is next. It is important here to recall the lesson Jesus is teaching and know that it's order is crucial to abiding in the kingdom of God. Once anger is absorbed, desire is negated, and they don't run our lives. Now, when we are injured by another, we can see it with a larger viewfinder, a biblical worldview. This injury that has hit us has been imposed on us by someone created in God's image (Lesson #1), and who probably is in a fallen state (Lesson #2). Even though they may not know it, they are under God, and he therefore, is aware of the action. How can we then get mad at God and retaliate towards the other? Remember Jesus words on the cross dying for what you and I did to him:

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” [Luke 23:34](#)

A good person seeks the good of others, even if they wrong him. Give him your clothes if he needs them. Walk with him and help him. Do anything that the kingdom of heaven can absorb.

When we deal with our enemies, Jesus tells us that his apprentices ought to respond with the highest act of love – prayer. His apprentices will offer prayer for those who hate us and for their healing. We are to display the nature of the kingdom of the heavens – the nature of our father in heaven. God himself sheds rain and sunshine on the lives of those who are genuinely good, and also on those who hate him, so we try and imitate that kingdom action.

In everything you do, you should be one-step away from asking the question: “How would I be doing this if I was doing it as an act of love?” Be honest in your assessment of this question and consider the gap between where you are right now, and where God wants you to be – the gap between “I am here” and “I ought to be there.” Don’t dwell on this gap too long, and don’t aim for perfection in performance, or you’ll get unduly discouraged. God expects us to work on reducing this gap continually until we see him in heaven, but doesn’t expect us to be pure in all our actions – only in our hearts.



What is a negative attitude or pattern that you still struggle with, and how might your fellow apprentices or mentors pray for you as you seek a kingdom transformation?

Jesus says some difficult things in this portion of his lesson for apprentices, but his words are simply illustrations of what a “kingdom person” will act like, one who is truly good, and he wouldn’t ask what he didn’t think was impossible.

See you in [Lesson #13!](#)

[Note – This lesson can be downloaded in PDF format for printing or sharing]