

“I Want to be Like Joe”  
Ephesians 4:1, 14

Imagine you're 8 years old again. Now, finish this sentence: “I want to be like . . .”

Who was your hero when you were 8 years old? Who did you look up to when you were a kid? What was it about him or her that was so attractive? And be honest, didn't you start trying to look like them? Dress like them? Act like them? You did all that - we did all that - because you wanted to be like them. “I want to be like . . .”

One of my early heroes was Al Kaline - right fielder for the Detroit Tigers. Billy Martin called Al Kaline, “Mr. Perfection,” but most of the players called him “Six.” Al Kaline played for the Tigers his whole career - all 22 years - and was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame on his very first ballot. He batted and threw right-handed . . . and so did I. He wore the number “6” on his jersey . . . and so did I. His first name was Albert, but he went by Al . . . and so did I (at least with my friends). He made lots of money playing baseball . . . I liked trying to play baseball. And so on. When I was 8 years old, I wanted to be like Al Kaline. But now I want to be like Joe.

Our heroes, the people we look up to and admire, influence how we live our lives. They shape our very existence, even though most of the time they don't even know our names. We tend to become like the people we admire most.

The apostle Paul had that notion in mind when he wrote to the Christians in the city of Ephesus. They were relatively young in their faith and it showed in their fractured relationships with each other. The Ephesians needed to become more unified, with both God and each other. Willard Taylor says, "Paul's central theme is the reuniting of all things to God through Christ Jesus." (*Ephesians*, *Beacon Bible Expositions*, Vol. 8, 1981, 114.) Those Early Christians were not where they could be - yet.

So, the fourth chapter of Paul's epistle begins this way: "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." (v.1) Then he describes the ways that the Spirit of Christ makes living "worthily" possible, ending with what that looks like in verse 13, "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

As usual, Paul's words fall all over themselves in trying to express the idea here, as well they should. He is trying to describe the indescribable.

How does one explain all of whom Jesus is? In an explanation of how to translate the last phrase, one writer put it this way: “The fullness of Christ is indicated by stature, maturity, perfection, completeness, or whatever else best fits the context of the language.” (Bratcher & Nida, *A Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians*. New York: UBS, 1982, 104.) Grab whatever words you can in order to begin to get at all of whom Jesus is. Give it your best shot and you’ll still fall short.

A song from some years ago said it this way:

For He’s more wonderful than my mind can conceive  
He’s more wonderful than my heart can believe  
He goes beyond my highest hopes and fondest dreams.  
He’s everything that my soul ever longed for  
Everything He’s promised and so much more  
More than amazing, more than marvelous  
More than miraculous could ever be  
He’s more than wonderful, that’s what Jesus is to me.

© 1982 Lanny Wolfe Music (Admin. by Gaither Copyright Management)  
Lanny Wolfe CCLI License No. 704446

Paul was able to point the Ephesians in the right direction. Some of them even took what he wrote to heart. I wish I could write things like him. In fact, I used to want to be like Paul, but now I want to be like Joe.

A second thing that’s being said in this passage is that “the fullness of Christ’ is the standard for the body, the church.” (Bratcher & Nida, 104.)

“Attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” isn’t the exception; it’s the rule, expected of - and accessible to - all.

The kind of Christian maturity Paul is promoting here is different from just believing in Jesus Christ, or even belonging to Jesus Christ. He is urging them, and us, to be like Him, to be like . . .

“The Word [who] became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together.” (Colossians 1:15-17)

Again, the point here is not just about believing in Him or belonging to Him, but it’s about being like Him. One of the popular choruses that’s sung today illustrates what I’m trying to say. The song says:

Lord I lift Your name on high  
Lord I love to sing Your praises  
I'm so glad You're in my life  
I'm so glad You came to save us

© 1989 Maranatha Praise, Inc. (Admin. by Music Services)  
Rick Founds CCLI License No. 704446

Having Jesus in our life is not what we’re called to. Having Jesus be our life is. We become what matters most to us. We become like the people

we admire most. “Attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” will leave us more like Him.

One of the great saints of the Church, Thomas a Kempis, wrote of his devotion to Jesus Christ in his classic work, *Of the Imitation of Christ*. The purpose of the writing was to spur people along in their relationships with Christ. Toward the end of the book, Thomas a Kempis lets the reader glimpse just a bit of the depth of this admiration for Christ. He writes:

WITH greatest devotion and ardent love, with all affection and fervor of heart I wish to receive You, O Lord, as many saints and devout persons, most pleasing to You in their holiness of life and most fervent in devotion, desired You in Holy Communion.

O my God, everlasting love, my final good, my happiness unending, I long to receive You with as strong a desire and as worthy a reverence as any of the saints ever had or could have felt, and though I am not worthy to have all these sentiments of devotion, still I offer You the full affection of my heart as if I alone had all those most pleasing and ardent desires.

Yet, whatever a God-fearing mind can conceive and desire, I offer in its entirety to You with the greatest reverence and inward affection. I wish to keep nothing for self but to offer to You, willingly and most freely, myself and all that is mine.

(*Imitation of Christ*. Fourth Book, Chapter 17, n.p.  
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/kempis/imitation.FOUR.17.html> )

Thomas a Kempis' words begin to capture the devotion and admiration that Jesus is due. And Kempis' life reflected the life you'd expect of one who admired Jesus Christ so deeply. Remember, we tend

become like the people we admire most. And though I'd like to be like Thomas a Kempis, I'd really like to be like Joe.

I first read about Joe in a book by Michael Frost titled *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture*. It's a book that's been challenging me and my notions of ministry. It's a book that's pushing me to consider who and what it is that I truly admire. It's asking me, "Who do you want to be like? What do you want your ministry to be like? And what are you going to do about it?" And in the middle of this soul-searching book, I came across the following:

Tony Campolo tells the story of a reformed drunk, Joe, who was marvelously converted at a Bowery mission. Joe had been an incorrigible wino, and no one who met him ever expected him to be anything other than a homeless drunk. So the transformation that occurred after his conversion stunned everyone who knew him. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Joe became the most caring person that anyone associated with the mission had ever known. He spent his days and nights at the mission serving both the homeless and the drunk, as well as the Christian workers. He considered no job beneath his dignity, whether it was cleaning up vomit or scrubbing the toilets after careless men left the bathroom filthy. Joe did what was asked with a soft smile on his face and with gratitude for the chance to help. He could be counted on to feed feeble men who wandered in off the street, and to undress and tuck into bed men who were too inebriated to take care of themselves.

One Sunday in the mission, an evangelist was delivering his evening message to the usual crowd of still and sullen men. When he made his regular appeal for people to come forward to accept Christ, one repentant drunk shuffled down the aisle to the altar and knelt to pray, crying out to God for help. The penitent sinner kept shouting, "Oh God, make me like Joe!"

Make me like Joe! Make me like Joe!” The director of the mission leaned over and said to the man, “Son, I think it would be better if you prayed, ‘Make me like Jesus!’” The man looked up at the director with a quizzical expression on his face and asked, “Is he like Joe?” (*Exiles*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006, 199.)

That’s why I want to be like Joe - because Joe is like Jesus.