

Study Guide
Series: The Wesley Challenge
“The Greatest of These”

Sunday - Do I thank God that I am not like others? - Colossians 3:12, Luke 18:9-14. We can draw many insights from Jesus' story in Luke 18. Chief among them is this: We are not to compare ourselves to others. Comparing our situation to others' is not healthy. Whether thanking God for not being like others, or wishing God would give us what others have, we are discrediting God. We need to come before God in a similar spirit as the tax collector in Jesus' story. To whom do you most often compare yourself? Is there one particular person, or group of people, that most often draw this tendency out in you? Why is that the case? When you compare yourself to others, are you more likely to find yourself lacking in some way, or do you tend to feel superior and grateful that you are not like them? Identify the “triggers” for the times you compare yourself to others. Perhaps certain Facebook posts leave you feeling somewhat self-satisfied, or conversely feeling inferior to others. Perhaps a club you're involved in causes you to feel “less than” others in some way. Remove these triggers from your life for a period of time, and assess the result. Does not comparing yourself to others impoverish your life, or make it better? Ask God to help you to see others as God sees them—through a lens of love, compassion and mercy.

Monday - Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am better than I am? In other words, am I a hypocrite? - Philippians 2:5-8, 2 Timothy 1:6-9. This is a hard question to ask yourself, but Wesley prompted it for a very good reason. Faking it—pretending to be better than we are—actually keeps us from knowing who we are and how we are doing. You don't need to create an impression that you are better than you are. God's grace says that you, as you are, with all your cracks and flaws and blemishes, are amazing. Who do you have in your life who knows the real you? Seek one or more trustworthy people who can know you honestly and caringly, and give you honest feedback and guidance. Also remember that you need to do all you can to know the “real you”. Write a letter to yourself identifying three areas of your life you would like to see grow. Seal it and save it for a future time. Are there particular environments where you feel as though you have to fake it? What are the factors that make you feel that you have to hide some part of the real you in those settings or relationships? Identify two or three steps you could take to be more real with people, either in seeking different settings or in challenging some of your own inner fears.

Tuesday - Do I confidentially pass on to others what was told to me in confidence? - Proverbs 11:11-13, Daniel 6:3-4. We know that trust is fundamental to establishing and sustaining strong relationships. So why do we feel the need to break trust by sharing matters told to us in confidence? Usually we feel the urge to relay private information because information is power. Humans love to let others know that we have access to powerful information. But when as Christians we cannot keep secrets or hold confidential matters private, we sabotage the very sense of community Jesus came to create. Has anyone ever betrayed your confidence? What happened after you discovered that your trust was broken? How did that experience affect that specific relationship, other relationships and your overall willingness and ability to trust others? Have you ever betrayed someone's confidence? What were the circumstances? If you have ever betrayed someone's confidence, how did you feel after you shared that person's confidential

information? Are you still in a relationship with that person? Why or why not? If you have never betrayed someone's confidence, how was this principle of trust instilled in you? Ask God to help you to control your desire to reveal information that is told to you in confidence.

Wednesday - Am I jealous, impure, critical, irritable, touchy, or distrustful? - 2 Corinthians 7:1, Proverbs 14:29-32. The behaviors John Wesley named in this question live inside all of us. We don't like that we possess these types of behavior, but we do. We work on becoming less of all of the above, because when we express them, they have an adverse impact on our life and the lives of others around us. That's why God calls us to grow in our capacity to live above and beyond the above these characteristics. Do you know people who "fly off the handle?" What drives their behavior? Do you have a close relationship with anyone who displays any of these behaviors regularly? What is the impact of that person on you when they behave in these ways? How do you manage your interactions with them? Which of the characteristics John Wesley calls out in today's question do you struggle with the most? The next time you find yourself reacting irritably, or feeling jealousy towards another person, take the time to question yourself and understand what is triggering your negative responses. Then identify healthy outlets for your negative feelings—like exercise (even a quick walk around the block), breath prayers, meditation, a gratitude journal, or playing with your dogs.

Thursday - Am I honest in all my actions and words or do I exaggerate? - Colossians 3:9-11. Wesley's question can help you be true to your identity in Christ, remembering that Christ loves you for who you are as a child of God, not for what you do or have. And it can challenge you to reflect on your character, to discover how free you are to be content, be grateful, be you—and live inspired by your heavenly worth! The next time you are tempted to lie or exaggerate, stop to notice what is driving this temptation. Are you intimidated by the group or person you are with? Do you feel less than them in some way? Are you trying to impress someone? Is there a truth about yourself that you need to tell someone? Is there something you need to "come clean" about, some exaggeration or falsehood that takes more and more energy to maintain? Set aside some private time with that person or group, confess your truth honestly, and set yourself free.

Friday - Is there anyone whom I fear, dislike, disown, criticize, hold resentment toward or disregard? - 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. Today's question covers a lot of ground. Taking into account the people we fear, those we feel disdain or indifference towards, and the people we resent can add up to a few people, or for some of us, many. We cannot fully live the Christian life, as Jesus meant us to, until we are at peace not only with God and our self, but also with others. Have you created or kept separation between yourself and another person because you simply don't like them? If so, ask yourself what is driving this dislike. More broadly, would you say you are at peace with God, self and others? Why or why not? Read Romans 12:9-17. Reflect on how living out those Scriptural principles can produce a positive response to today's question. As first steps, sometime in the next week, if the occasion presents itself, speak with a person who "rubs you the wrong way." Find a moment today to say something kind to someone you dislike or have intentionally steered clear of.

Saturday - When did I last speak to someone about my faith? - Matthew 28:19-20. When John Wesley challenges us with this question, he is directly encouraging us to take up the challenge Jesus gave his disciples in Acts 1:8, to be his witnesses or storytellers. In Matthew 28:18-20,

Mark 16:15-16, Luke 24:46-49, and John 20:21-22, we also read that Jesus challenged his followers to continue the mission and message of God's work. To respond faithfully to Wesley's question is to live a life of going, obeying and listening to the Holy Spirit, realizing that each one of us is sent into the world to be the hands and feet of Jesus. When did you last speak to someone about your faith? Do you show your faith more through your words or deeds? How can you balance both of those sides of the Gospel "coin" in your day-to-day life? Think through your story of personal transformation. How has your faith in God changed your life and made you a better person, who has a better effect on the lives of others? Spend some time writing your story down. Ask God to give you the courage to share story and your trust in him with others when the opportunity comes.

*Mainly drawn, or slightly adapted, from *The Wesley Challenge: 21 Days to a More Authentic Faith*, by Chris Folmsbee*