

SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND ST. PAUL AS SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR: DETERMINING THE PRIMARY AIMS.



VICTOR COPAN

Palm Beach Atlantic University (West Palm Beach, FL)

Abstract. Dallas Willard makes the claim that spiritual formation “refers to the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself.”¹ Can this claim be substantiated and stand up to close scrutiny, or is Dallas Willard selecting an idea of his own fancy and making this the cornerstone of his understanding of spiritual formation? How can this claim be tested and anchored?

In this article we will seek to answer these questions by looking at the Apostle Paul in his function as spiritual director. Although it is patently anachronistic to speak of Paul as spiritual director, can we legitimately understand him in this role? We will propose a generative understanding of spiritual direction and then proceed to examine the Apostle Paul and his aims based on that generative understanding. We will also argue that at the core of Paul’s functioning as a spiritual director lies a strong appeal to examine and imitate his life and character and to follow his ways. This appeal by Paul for others to imitate him is anchored in Paul’s own imitation of Christ himself. Paul’s call to imitation thus provides a window into discovering how Paul understood his role as spiritual director and also provides us the means to discern his goals in spiritual direction.

THE IMPACT OF DALLAS WILLARD

Dallas Willard’s writings have had a profound effect on my life in two ways. First, they helped me overcome personal and spiritual blockages in my life that had plagued and debilitated me for years. Second, and as a result, it shaped in part my choice of dissertation topic. My copy of the book, *Renovation of the Heart*, has been underlined, highlighted, and marked

¹ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 22.

up—with notes, questions, and comments lining many of the pages of this book. Over the past six years, I have introduced scores of students to this book in my classes on spiritual formation. It has been gratifying to see the lights come on and students begin to grasp and apply the concepts of spiritual formation laid out in the book. It is with deep gratitude that I offer this article as a contribution to this special issue.

INTRODUCTION

This article seeks to accomplish four things. First, it explores certain challenges regarding defining spiritual direction and proposes a resolution to it. Second, it argues that the power and effectiveness of Paul's functioning as spiritual director was rooted in his personal *ethos*—the power of an authentic, integrated life that was exclusively christocentrically oriented—and it is this that he called others to imitate. Third, it presents Paul's call to imitation as a window into discovering how Paul understood his role as spiritual director, thereby allowing us to discern Paul's goals in spiritual direction. Finally, implications of this study are drawn out for the practice of spiritual direction today.

The subtext of this article, however, has to do with Dallas Willard's claim that spiritual formation "*refers to the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself.*"² This claim of Dallas Willard's is not so much argued as it is asserted in *Renovation of the Heart*. This article seeks to substantiate, corroborate, and confirm this claim and to place it on a methodologically solid footing.

1) *Challenges regarding Defining Spiritual Direction*

The well documented explosion of interest in spiritual direction has resulted in two developments.³ First, it has led to an inflation of competing terminology surrounding the concept of spiritual direction. In a review of the literature, the following terms are used as rough, imprecise synonyms with overlapping meaning: "spiritual guide," "spiritual friend," "spiritual

² Willard, *Renovation*, 22 (Emphasis Willard's).

³ "If publishers' lists are anything to go by, spiritual direction is a fashionable growth industry" [Gordon Jeff, *Spiritual Direction for Every Christian* (London: SPCK, 1987), 1]. Numerous books published since then note this upsurge in interest. For a substantial listing, see chapter one in Victor Copan, *Saint Paul as Spiritual Director: An Analysis of the Imitation of Paul with Implications and Applications to the Practice of Spiritual Direction*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2007).

companion,” “soul friend,” “discipler,” and “spiritual mentor.” An example of such imprecision is found in the foreword of Timothy Jones’s delightful and helpful little book, *Mentor and Friend*:

great *spiritual directors* are ones who understand that, as their *disciples* progress and mature, the *teacher-learner* relationship will evolve. . . . [The] best phrase is ‘*mutual mentoring*.’ It is the proverbial “iron sharpening iron” principle . . . by which both *director* and *directee* become indistinguishable in their needs.⁴

This needs some critique. Throughout Jones’s book, all the terms noted above are used interchangeably with virtually no differentiation in meaning. This leaves the understanding of spiritual direction rather vague and amorphous.

The second development is that this explosion of interest has led to a broad spectrum of competing (and sometimes contradictory) understandings of the nature and purpose of spiritual direction. For example, Gordon Jeff understands spiritual direction simply and directly as “two people sitting down together in an attitude of prayer to try to discern where the Holy Spirit is directing.”⁵ This understanding limits spiritual direction to an individualized, privatized undertaking, overlooking the communal and social dimension of the spiritual life.

John Yungblut, in contrast, understands a spiritual director as

being an instrument by which the divine course can find its way in this other solitary individual so that the crucial inward journey of this child of God may become creatively aligned with the immense journey of evolution itself, moving through the human species to the unknown ultimate destination of fully raised consciousness. We do not and cannot see the distant scene. One step is enough for us: a step in the direction of Christ-consciousness, individuation, wholeness.⁶

With startling dogmatism, Yungblut wedds his understanding of spiritual direction to Carl Jung’s myth of the psyche and to Teilhard de Chardin’s understanding of evolution. Yungblut apparently owes most of his thought regarding the soul and its development less to the Christian tradition and more to evolutionary science and Jungian psychology.

Beside the challenges mentioned above, three additional challenges confront the person in the study of Christian spiritual direction: (1) wide variance in the understanding of the practice of spiritual direction within the literature of the past twenty years; (2) no agreed upon methodological controls to determine the validity of a model of a spiritual direction that is

⁴ Timothy K. Jones, *Mentor and Friend: Building Friendships That Point to God* (Oxford: Lion, 1991), 11 (emphasis mine).

⁵ Jeff, *Spiritual Direction*, 10.

⁶ John R. Yungblut, *The Gentle Art of Spiritual Guidance* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 3.

truly Christian in nature; and (3) the more fundamental problem of the term “spiritual direction” not being anchored in Scripture. Because “spiritual direction” is not in Scripture, there is thus no universally agreed upon basis from which the study of spiritual direction can proceed. The field is thus prone toward the subjective predilections of each practitioner and results in “everyone doing that which is right in their own eyes.”

2) *Escaping the Definitional Quagmire: Generative Questions*

Is there a way to deal with this set of challenges? The strategy I suggest is to pose specific generative questions to biblical texts, which can (1) avoid imposing illegitimate categories on the text, (2) give us a “lens” by which to gain an understanding of how Paul functioned as a spiritual director and what his goals were, and thereby (3) make possible comparison, contrast, analysis—and also critique—of modern conceptions of spiritual direction.

A) Generative Questions, Set I: Exploring the Relationship Between Paul and Recipients

Below is an initial catalogue of generative questions specifically applied to the nature of the relationship between the Apostle Paul and those to whom he ministered (for our purposes, the recipients of his letters). These questions provide transparent criteria, which would facilitate the legitimate comparison and contrast between the Pauline model of spiritual direction and other models.

Relationship Paul → Recipients. Analyzing the relationship between Paul and the recipients.

Role: (1) What are the specific roles that Paul plays with respect to the recipients? How does Paul define himself with respect to the recipients? (2) How does he understand and define these roles? (3) How does he describe the purpose or goal of each individual role?

Manner: What is the manner in which Paul lives out his role and conducts himself with respect to the recipients?

Activity: What does Paul concretely do for the recipients (either *indirectly* on their behalf or *directly* to/with them) with respect to their growth?

Interaction: What are the methods of direct interaction he uses with them?

Response: (1) How does Paul respond to the concrete life-situations of the recipients that are discussed in the text? (2) What are the various concrete life-situations discussed? (3) How does Paul deal with them? (4) Which emotions emerge in relation to the various life-situations?

Other: Is there other information that gives insight into the character of the relationship between Paul and the recipients of his letters (supporting or illuminating factors)?

Although these generative questions provide a solid base to compare Pauline spiritual direction with other models, something critical is still missing: the spiritual director *as person* along with his motivation, convictions, and aims/goals show up only marginally in this list of questions.

B) Missing Components in Spiritual Direction: The Person and Ethos of the Spiritual Director

In reading through the letters of the Apostle Paul, one is struck by his relatively frequent and bold appeal to examine his life and character, and to follow his ways.⁷ It seems this was one of his key strategies for the development of the spiritual maturity of members of the communities he founded.

Yet, curiously, when one reads the contemporary literature on spiritual direction, there are virtually no references to this notion of imitation or patterning oneself after another.⁸ Parallel to this, one factor that does not receive adequate discussion in the literature is the impact that the total shape of the director's life has on the directee—that is, his or her personal life and praxis, work/ministry, emotional, intellectual life, and (of primary significance) the shape of his or her godward-directed life. In contemporary literature on spiritual formation, technique is at the forefront of the discussions on spiritual direction, whereas the life of the director is given short shrift.⁹

After considerable analysis, it is my contention that the total shape of the life of the director is a fundamental factor—if not *the* key factor—in the effectiveness of spiritual direction.¹⁰ In other words, effectiveness in spiritual direction is not to be found primarily in technique, but in the character and lifestyle of the one providing direction.

This observation builds on what classical rhetoricians called *ethos*, a term used to describe the impact that the totality of the speaker's life has on the audience even before he opens his mouth. *Ethos*, in its written variation, is an author's appeal to his own moral character and other aspects of his

⁷ 1 Thess 1:5–7, 1 Cor 4:16, 1 Cor 11:1, Phil 3:17, and Phil 4:9. (All Scripture quotations are taken from the NRS unless otherwise noted.)

⁸ See the documentation for this in *Saint Paul as Spiritual Director*.

⁹ Part of the reason for this surely comes from the contemporary and post-modern turn that eschews all apparent claims to authority. Whereas Evangelicals consider Paul's appeal to imitation as benign, Elizabeth Castelli argues the opposite: "Paul's discourse of mimesis uses rhetoric to rationalize and shore up a particular set of social relations or power relations within the early Christian movement. His use of the notion of mimesis, with all of its nuances, reinforces both Paul's own privileged position and the power relations of the early Christian communities as somehow 'natural'" [Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power*, *Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster, 1991), 116]. See my critique of her work in chapter seven of *Saint Paul as Spiritual Director*.

¹⁰ This is a contention argued in some detail in *St. Paul as Spiritual Director*.

life, which enhance his credibility—whether this is a conscious rhetorical strategy or not. It is, as John Marshall writes,

the relationship built up within the speech between the rhetor and the auditor which induces the auditor to believe the person speaking. Such a relationship is built up by means of identification between the rhetor and auditor, through participation in the world that exists between them.¹¹

Aristotle's discussion of ethos in *Rhetoric* is the first extant theoretical discussion of ethos as an artistic proof:

Now the proofs furnished by the speech are of three kinds. The first depends upon the moral character [*ēthos*] of the speaker. . . . The orator persuades by moral character when the speech is delivered in such a manner as to render them worthy of confidence, for we feel confidence in a greater degree and more readily in persons of worth in regard to everything in general. . . . For it is not the case, as some writers of rhetorical treatises lay down in their "Art", that the worth of the orator in no way contributes to the orator's powers of persuasion; on the contrary, moral character, so to say, constitutes the most effective means of proof.¹²

It is this factor of ethos with respect to the life of St. Paul that has special relevance for the practice of spiritual direction: The Apostle Paul sets himself up intentionally and boldly as a model for others. He functions as a model, a prototype, for the "directees"—the members of the churches he addressed in his letters. In Paul's day, both in the Jewish and Greco-Roman world, the concept of imitation functioned as *the* basic pedagogical tool of all branches of education. It was the fundamental purpose of human imitation to improve the virtue, character, or specific skills of an individual through orienting himself on a "virtuous" model, or *exemplar*. Based on this exemplar, one could observe with all the senses how a virtuous person lived, and thereby have a pattern for one's own life.

C) Generative Questions, Set 2: Person and Ethos of Paul

And so, to the previous generative questions regarding spiritual direction, it would be important to add the following that focus on the person and ethos of Paul:

¹¹ John W. Marshall, "Paul's Ethical Appeal in Philippians," in *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 360.

¹² Aristotle, "Rhetorica," 5.76 (Freese, LCL). (Noted in Marshall, "Paul's Ethical Appeal," 358.)

Paul as individual. Analyzing texts for descriptions of how Paul characterizes his life.

Ethos: What is it about the person of Paul that evokes persuasion? What elements of his character are explicit in the text?

Goals/Desires: How does Paul express his desires for his own life? In what way? Is there a hierarchy of desires? What textual indications do we have for what motivated, inspired, and drove him on a personal level? How do these relate to one another (Hierarchy of goals? Co-equal? In tension?)?

Lifestyle: What are the textual indications of how Paul lives his life? In which activities does Paul engage that leads him to achieve the desires he expresses? What things in Paul's life should others imitate?

Now, it would be a massive undertaking to develop a full-scale study covering all of Paul's life and writings using these two sets of generative questions. Our intention with this question catalogue is simply to indicate the lines along which a transparent and full comparison could be made between Paul as spiritual director and contemporary practitioners of spiritual direction. In this way, the presuppositions and methodology of both could be exposed and analyzed. In *St. Paul as Spiritual Director*, these questions guided our analysis of the Pauline imitation texts, the results of which are presented below. One further point, however, before we proceed to this.

D) Establishing a Base-Line Understanding/Working Definition of Spiritual Direction

This set of generative questions, however, need also to be grounded in a common, base-line understanding of spiritual direction that is sufficiently broad to encompass both what Paul and what contemporary spiritual directors are doing in their practice of spiritual direction. This definition would function as the means of comparison. Based on a review of the definitions that leading practitioners of spiritual direction have put forward, I would suggest the following working definition of spiritual direction:

Spiritual direction is the (variegated) means by which one person intentionally influences another person or persons in the development of his or her life as a Christian with the goal of developing his or her relationship to God and His purposes for that person in the world.¹³

¹³ I am aware that this working definition does not include Christlikeness as being the goal. This was done intentionally. This definition functions as a working baseline that would encompass an understanding of spiritual direction that all or most contemporary practitioners of spiritual direction would agree on and within which Paul's understanding would also fit.

3) *St. Paul, Imitation, and Spiritual Direction*

Paul's call for the churches he founded to imitate him is completely in line with the understanding and practice of imitation in the ancient Mediterranean world. In his person, Paul unites all the societal roles in which imitation was normally operative: as (fictive) parent, teacher, and leader. In his embodiment of these roles, Paul's call to imitate him simply "went with the territory" those roles would have entailed.

I would argue that these five imitation passages provide us with a methodologically solid "porthole" through which we view Paul functioning as spiritual director. These texts give us access to Paul's person, his motivations, his ultimate concerns, his goals, and the means by which he helped them attain those goals.

In *St. Paul as Spiritual Director*, these texts are examined in detail using the following question as a guide for exegesis and analysis, and the generative questions above are distilled down to three: (1) How does Paul present and describe himself in these contexts? (2) What specifically does Paul want the recipients to imitate, and (2) What do these imitation texts reveal to us about Paul that carries relevance for the practice of spiritual direction? In the remainder of this article, I will focus on distilling the results of this research.

This summary is divided into three sections. The first section reviews the self-designations Paul uses in these contexts. The second section analyzes the orientation and content (i.e., aims and goals) of Pauline imitation. The third section looks at the means and methods of imitation. The concluding section extracts the implications of these findings for the practice of spiritual direction today.

A) Paul as Model: Self-Designation and Description

With respect to his being a model, Paul presents himself with five self-designations (the first and last two pairs will be treated together).

(1+2) *Without a self-designation, and the designation, "brother."* In some of the imitation texts, Paul presents himself without a self-designation or with the designation, "brother." With these self-designations, Paul intentionally emphasizes commonality with the recipients.¹⁴ This focus on commonality is also seen through Paul's use of the term *adelphos* (brother). This term highlights and reinforces to the readers that there is, before God, no ultimate distinction between Paul and his recipients and no hierarchical

¹⁴ But not necessarily equality. See Andrew D. Clarke, "Equality or Mutuality? Paul's Use of 'Brother' Language," in *The New Testament in Its First Century Setting: Essays on Context and Background in Honour of Bruce W. Winter on His 65th Birthday*, ed. P. J. Williams, et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 152–64.

understanding that places Paul over the recipients of his letters (1 Thess 1:1, 4; Phil 3:17; 4:8; 1 Cor 4:16).¹⁵

It is of more than passing interest and significance that Paul's reference to imitation in 1 Thess 1:6 refers to the Thessalonian believers imitating not just Paul himself. Rather, Paul emphasizes that the Thessalonians became "imitators of *us*," referring to Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy (v. 1). This indicates that imitation is understood by Paul to be non-exclusive *and* that there is a corporate dimension to it. Although this corporate dimension is not the focus of this paper, it is significant to acknowledge this dimension of imitation.

(3) *Spiritual father*. Having said that, Paul also understands himself as a "spiritual father" to his "spiritual children" in 1 Cor 4:15–17. But, does this not stand in tension or contradiction to Paul presenting himself as "brother"? A more careful look at the context of 1 Cor 4 reveals that Paul is using this self-designation to emphasize the emotive bond between himself and the recipients. Context is critical here. In this passage, Paul deliberately sets up a contrast between the notion of *paidagōgos* (tutor), and *patēr* (father). He clearly uses the term *paidagōgos* to emphasize an emotionally detached, uncaring, and disciplinarian relationship—which Paul clearly rejects.¹⁶ Instead, when Paul uses the designation *patēr*, the context clearly indicates he is doing this to emphasize the relational bond of caring concern that a loving father has toward his children. This is expressed most clearly in verse 21, when Paul foregrounds his desires to come to them "with love, in a spirit of gentleness."

(4+5) *Servant and steward*. The last two self-designations Paul uses in association with imitation are found in the 1 Cor 4:1, in which Paul presents himself "as servant of Christ and steward of God's mysteries." The terms *hupēretas* (servant) and *oikonomos* (steward) are intended as a deliberate, rhetorically potent rejection of and contrast to the mind-set of the power and status conscious Corinthians (4:6). Paul's sole focus is to be at the service of Christ, and he rejects all claim or appeal to status or power as means of persuasion.

It is noteworthy that Paul nowhere explicitly calls for imitation of himself with an appeal to his apostolic authority—or any other authority; in 1 Cor 4:15–17, the inherently authoritative dimension of his role as "spiritual father" is downplayed even as the nurturing, caring aspects are accentuated.

¹⁵ See Andrew D. Clarke, *Serve the Community of the Church: Christians as Leaders and Ministers*, First-Century Christians in the Graeco-Roman World (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 223, 51; Clarke, "Equality or Mutuality," 152–64.

¹⁶ See v. 21. Note Andrew Clarke's thorough discussion of the "Paul as Father," where he counters claims of the term "father" as being a repressive claim to authority: Clarke, *Serve the Community*, 218–32.

B) Orientation and Content of Pauline Imitation (Aims and Goals of Imitation)

Toward what does Pauline imitation orient itself, and what is the specific content that is to be imitated? Both of these dimensions are inextricably intertwined for Paul. We are speaking here about the ultimate aims and goals Paul expresses for himself and his recipients.

i) Orientation of Imitation: Christ and the Gospel

In our analysis of these imitation texts, the pervasiveness of references to Christ and the gospel *in every reference* to imitation are striking. Without exception, all of Paul's references to imitation of himself focus directly on and are oriented toward Christ and his gospel. It is clear that these function for Paul as the radiating center around which all of Paul's life, thought, and ministry orbited.

It is explicitly at this point that Dallas Willard's claim that Christian spiritual formation "refers to the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself"¹⁷ finds its methodological verification and substantiation. When Paul is his most autobiographical, his christocentric focus manifests itself with clarity and decisiveness. Similarly, Michael Gorman identifies "cruciformity" or "conformity to Christ" as the ultimate goal of Paul for himself and for his recipients.

One of the chief hallmarks . . . of Paul's spirituality is this life of "mutual indwelling" between Christ and believers that results in conformity to Christ. . . . We may refer to this conformity to Christ crucified as *cruciformity*. . . . [T]his is not a onetime experience but an ongoing reality. It begins at the first moment of faith, expressed in baptism, and continues throughout life. Believers both die and rise with Christ in baptism (Rom 6:1–11); the paradox is that the new or "resurrection" life to which they rise is a life of ongoing "death"—ongoing conformity to the death of Jesus.¹⁸

If this christocentric focus is neglected, marginalized, or if we displace this by positing some other center, it will distort not only Paul's conception of imitation but will also skew the heart of Pauline theology as well.

Philippians 3:4–14 provides probably the most autobiographically revealing, as well as the most gripping and emotionally descriptive under-

¹⁷ Willard, *Renovation*, 22.

¹⁸ Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 120–1 (author's emphasis). This emphasis is further strengthened in Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

standing of Paul's core motivation for his life and ministry. Here, the exclusive focus around which Paul orients his life and ministry is "knowing Christ" (3:7–9; cf. Phil 1:21), the meaning of which he unfolds in these verses. Paul holds experiential, holistic knowledge of and union with Christ to be the ultimate value and goal in life that leads Paul to reject those elements which society considers of value that are not in alignment with Christ and his gospel (3:3–6). Everything Paul does and thinks is controlled and informed by this way of knowing Christ, and it is for this reason that personal glory, prestige, and honor are considered valueless.

ii) Content of Imitation

When we turn to look at the content of Pauline imitation—what it was specifically that Paul wanted his recipients to imitate—we observe two general categories: "global/holistic imitation" and "imitation of christocentric virtues."

(A) GLOBAL/HOLISTIC IMITATION

There are a number of references to Pauline imitation, which can be described as "global" or "holistic" imitation, two of which we will highlight here.¹⁹ "Global" or "holistic" imitation refers to the imitation of the totality of Paul's life.

None of the English translations capture the rich nuances of the Greek in 1 Thess 1:5.²⁰ An admittedly awkward translation that brings out some of the nuances is, "just as you know what kind of persons we were when we were with/among you." The emphasis of this text as well as the bulk of 1 Thess 2 indicates that Paul and his companions embodied the truths, values, and lifestyle of the gospel they proclaimed to the Thessalonian believers in such a compelling way that they then imitated what they saw in Paul and his companions.

In Phil 4:9, imitation is presented as encompassing all that Paul did and said: "Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me" (NRS).²¹ The global pronoun in v. 9, "the things" (*ha*), along with the four elements the Philippians obtained from Paul ("the things you *learned . . . received . . . heard . . . saw*") indicates that the totality of Paul's teaching and the way in which he embodied that teaching were to be objects of imitation: both in his formal teaching (first two verbs) and in the example of his life (last two verbs). Orthodoxy and orthopraxy are seen to go hand-in-hand for Paul, and imitation here encompasses both. No artificial distinction was made between Paul's "public" and "private" life or between what he taught and how he lived.

¹⁹ 1 Thess 1:6, 1 Cor 4:16–7, and Phil 4:9.

²⁰ *kathōs oidate hoioi egenēthēmen [en] humin di' humas.*

²¹ Again, this would be understood through the orientation-point Paul mentioned earlier of "knowing Christ" (3:10).

(B) IMITATION OF PAULINE (CHRISTOCENTRIC) VIRTUES

In addition to the call to global imitation, Paul also indicates specific virtues that the recipients are to imitate. What is significant about these “Pauline virtues” in these imitation texts is that they are all exclusively oriented to Christ and the gospel and reflect a cruciform way of living. Paul does not, for example, simply call them to imitate his virtue of “humility” or “discipline.” Paul calls them to imitate the virtues of humility and discipline “that was also in Christ,” “because of Christ,” or “for the sake of the gospel.” Paul spends no time on theoretical discussions of virtues or ideals as universal abstractions. On the contrary, the virtues Paul references are to be understood with respect to their Christocentric nature.

In the Pauline imitation texts, there are three groupings of virtues that Paul called his recipients to imitate. This is not to imply that the items in this list are the only Pauline virtues that one could or should imitate. It is only to say that these are the ones Paul expressly mentions in connection with imitation. Other Pauline virtues can legitimately be extrapolated from his writings on the basis of his call to global/holistic imitation discussed above. Further, I would argue that the determinative factor for legitimately adding to this list—going beyond what Paul explicitly discusses in his writings—would be the anchoring of these additional virtues in the life of Christ and the nature of the gospel.

(i) 1 Cor 4:16. *Willfully (a) rejecting the world’s definition of wisdom, strength, and honor; (b) accepting hardship; and (c) choosing humble, selfless service to God on behalf of others because of the message of the cross of Christ.* Paul intentionally uses the images of a servant and a steward to emphasize not working for selfish goals, but volitionally placing oneself in the service of God. He discards the Corinthian society’s perspective of that which is considered wise, strong, and honorable in light of the “message of the cross” (1 Cor 1:18–31). His life is focused on preaching the message of the cross of Christ and living in line with the implications of that cross.

(ii) 1 Cor 11:1. *(a) Disciplining oneself for the sake of the gospel; (b) avoidance of causing others to stumble in their relationship with God; (c) seeking the good of others; (d) giving up individual rights so the gospel is unhindered; (e) making oneself a “slave to everyone” in order to win them to Christ.* This passage contains a perspective similar to 1 Cor 4:16: selfless service for the sake of the advance of the gospel. Pauline imitation is focused (negatively) on not wishing to cause anyone to falter in their relationship with God and (positively) on intentionally seeking the good of the many so that they may be ultimately saved. This entails willful surrender of legitimate rights and freedoms for the higher good of the advance of the gospel. Further, this entails becoming like or adapting to those to whom one ministers in order to “win them for the gospel.” All these elements are included in actively “disciplining oneself” for the sake of an eternal prize (9:27). The athletic imagery in this context—of going into rigorous conditioning in order to win a race—provides a general outlook and approach to life that characterizes Paul and should characterize his recipients.

(iii) *Phil 3:16*. (a) *Singularly focusing, as would an athlete, on the surpassing value of knowing Christ to the exclusion of all other competing values; (b) humbly acknowledging imperfection; and (iii) relentlessly pursuing the future prize.* This passage contains similar themes to the passages in 1 Corinthians: the gospel orientation and its surpassing value, the element of disciplining oneself for the sake of a higher goal and subordinating one's own desires and values for the sake of others and the gospel. Pauline imitation is here oriented to the "surpassing value of knowing Christ," which rejects all competing claims to that which is highest value. This orientation is described in terms of an intense pursuit of experientially knowing (a) Christ, (b) his resurrection power, and (c) the fellowship of his sufferings for the purpose of attaining the resurrection from the dead. This pursuit is undertaken, on the one hand, in humble acknowledgment of not yet having attained, and on the other hand, with the dogged determination of an athlete focusing all his powers on the ultimate prize (*skopos*). Thus, by very nature of this "athletic contest" in which Paul understands himself to be, there is an intentional orientation to the future prize and a letting-go of the past insofar as it hinders him in this "competition."

4) *Implications for Spiritual Direction*

Paul's call to imitation functions as a window that reveals how he interacted with his recipients and reveals the aims he himself pursued in life and, correspondingly, to which he called his recipients to pursue. These observations carry significant implications for the practice of spiritual direction today. Five implications stand out as particularly relevant.

A) *Ethos trumps technique.* First, ethos trumps technique when it comes to spiritual direction. The power of a life well-lived supersedes any methodology, and makes methodology of secondary importance. Who the spiritual director is becomes the primary message and vehicle of spiritual direction.

B) *Personal presence as of primary importance.* Second, and going hand-in-hand with the first point, Pauline spiritual direction sees personal presence as being of primary importance. The nature of what one does is less important than being with another—and opening up all of your life to them. It is through *being with* the spiritual director that the life and thought and action of the directee are shaped.

C) *Relationship based on genuine love and concern.* Third, the spiritual direction relationship needs to be understood as based on a relationship marked by deep and genuine love and concern. Sterile, clinical detachment and fear of transference needs to be replaced by self-giving love and concern. Adopting a "counselor-client relationship" marked by clinical professionalism is not the model that shines through in these texts. Loving engagement in the life of the other is the hallmark of effective spiritual direction.

D) *Christocentric focus*. Pauline spiritual direction is christocentrically oriented. Everything orbits around Christ. Everything in life points toward Christ.

This is a particularly critical anchor point for spiritual direction that calls into question many modern approaches to spiritual direction. Since Pauline spiritual direction was radically christocentrically oriented, I would argue that Paul would reject spiritual direction that has a narcissistic focus—even though this narcissism may come in a spiritual guise. What I am speaking of has strong parallels to Paul Vitz's book, *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self Worship*.²² The primary aim of Pauline spiritual direction, in fact, does not have inner harmony, and mystical experiences, and a sense of oneness with God as the ultimate goal. Much of what is going on in modern spiritual direction is, seems, in fact, to be a subtle form of spiritual narcissism that speaks of God, yet does not have as its aim the development of a cruciform life.

Yes, prayer is vital. Yes, inner harmony is laudable. Yes, there is certainly nothing inherently wrong with exploring ways to experience God. But if the primary goal and focus on orienting our lives toward Christ is supplanted by desires for spiritual experience for ego-purposes, then that type of spiritual direction would receive a negative critique from Paul.

E) *Developing Christocentric virtues*. Pauline spiritual direction focuses on the development of christocentric virtues—virtues that Christ himself embodied. The comments in the previous point are relevant here. Pauline spiritual direction focuses on conforming our lives to Christ in every aspect of our being and developing those virtues that are embodied in Christ. This may mean that direct confrontation may be in order in spiritual direction. Pauline spiritual direction is not afraid to call a spade, a spade: where thoughts, ideas, values, and lifestyle are not conforming to Christ, these need to be challenged and confronted.²³

F) *Acknowledging the corporate dimension of Spiritual Formation*. Finally, the observation that Paul's practice of imitation was not bound exclusively to himself but incorporated other exemplars indicates a corporate dimension to the practice of imitation. In light of that, it follows that spiritual direction is not something that is to be narrowly conceived as taking place exclusively between two individuals, in a privatized and individualized way. There is a corporate dimension that must be acknowledged and incorporated into the practice of spiritual direction.

These then, I would suggest, are some of the key implications for the practice of spiritual direction today based on a careful analysis of Pauline imitation texts. These implications provide the biblically anchored contours

²² Paul Vitz, *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self Worship*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

²³ As Paul would say, "speaking the truth in love" (Eph 4:15).

for spiritual direction that help others take on “the inner being of Christ himself.”

Author: Victor Copan. Title: Associate Professor of Ministry Leadership Studies and Biblical Studies. Affiliation: Palm Beach Atlantic University (West Palm Beach, FL). Highest Degree: Th. D., University of Vienna, Austria. Areas of interest/specialization: spiritual formation and spiritual direction, Pauline studies, and hermeneutics.

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