

LEARNING TO BE LIKE JESUS

Philippians 2:5

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(Including material adapted from Rick Warren and used by permission)

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PROLOGUE

Experience is a great teacher. Michael Hodgin quotes this story from a young mother:

I had just put my little boy to bed for the umpteenth time and my patience was running out. When I heard him cry "Mama" again, I yelled to him, "If I hear you say 'Mama' one more time, I'm going to discipline you." For a little while, all was quiet. Then I heard a little voice whisper, "Mrs. Green, can I have a drink?"

SCRIPTURE

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5 NIV).

INTRODUCTION

God put you on this earth to be like Jesus. This has always been God's plan. The Bible says, "For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters" (Rom 8:29 NLT).

To become like Jesus does not mean you become a god. Nor does it mean you have to go around in sandals and a tunic speaking Aramaic. Rather to become like Jesus means you develop the same character as Jesus.

This does not happen overnight. Paul says, "God wants us to grow up...like Christ in everything" (Eph 4:15 MESSAGE). It takes time to grow up. It is a process not an event. Unfortunately, some Christians grow older but never seem to grow up. It takes time and effort to become like Jesus.

God can help us become like Jesus and we cannot become like Jesus without God's help. But God also wants us to cooperate with him in this endeavor. The process of learning to become like Jesus is called discipleship. A disciple is a kind of student who learns by experience. The Bible says of such disciples, "We go through exactly what Christ goes through..." (Rom. 8:17 MESSAGE). We learn to become like Jesus as we go through similar kinds of life experiences.

Jesus went through troubles, faced temptations and took upon himself the trespasses of the world. If you are going to be like Christ, then you are going to go through similar kinds of

experiences. But these things do not automatically help you grow. You have to have your heart ready. If your heart is not ready, you are going to become bitter rather than better. So next to faith, the most important part of discipleship is attitude. Our key verse says, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5 NIV). How you view your experiences will often determine what you gain from them.

1. TROUBLES AS OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN TO TRUST GOD.

We will grow in Christ if we view troubles as opportunities to learn to trust God.

God knows that experience is a great teacher and that our attitude determines what we gain. But some people will complain no matter what.

A conscientious new cook tried hard to please her critical employer, a wealthy eccentric. He was the most cantankerous at breakfast. If she prepared scrambled eggs, he wanted poached; if poached eggs, he wanted scrambled. One morning the new cook poached one egg and scrambled the other and placed the plate before him. Anxiously she awaited what surely this time would be his unqualified approval. He peered down at the plate and snorted, "Can't you do anything right, woman? You've scrambled the wrong one!"

Jesus went through many troubles and trials in his life. One of the clearest examples of this took place the night before he was crucified. He knew what he was going to have to face the next day, and the turmoil in his heart was enormous. The real question was, "Would he trust God?"

He went to an olive garden called Gethsemane. He asked his disciples, Peter, James and John, to stay with him. Terrific stress and anguish came over Jesus and he said, "The worry in my heart is so great that it almost crushes me" (Mark 14:34). Have you ever had that feeling like you couldn't make it another day? Jesus knows that feeling. Notice how Jesus responded to trouble. "Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet, I want your will, not mine!" (Mark 14:36).

If we are going to become like Jesus, this is the first lesson we need to learn: trust in God. Now it is alright to say to God, "God I don't like this! Take it away!" But we also need to be like Christ when he said, "Your will be done." We need to say to God, "I want whatever fulfills *your* purpose in my life."

Jesus never promised anyone a trouble-free life. He experienced trials and hardship. Why would his followers have it any different? British broadcaster and Christian author Malcolm Muggeridge explained, "Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my 75 years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my

experience, has been through affliction and not through happiness."

The Apostle Paul puts it this way, "So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure" (2 Cor 4:16-17 NRSV). And in Romans we read, "We continue to shout our praise even when we're hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next (Rom 5:3,4 MESSAGE).

2. TEMPTATIONS AS OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN TO OBEY GOD.

We will grow in Christ if we view temptations as opportunities to learn to obey God.

Jesus faced temptation in the desert. Matthew writes, "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil" (Matt. 4:1 NIV). The very Spirit who came upon Jesus at his baptism led him out into the wilderness for a test of his character.

Every temptation is an opportunity to learn obedience. It can be a stepping stone toward becoming more like Christ if we choose to obey God. Notice what Jesus did when he was tempted. He said, "Get out of here, Satan. The scriptures say, worship only the Lord God. Obey only him" (Matthew 4:10 LB).

Now there are many instructive things we can say about temptation but let me just point out a few. First of all, it is not wrong to be tempted. Jesus never sinned but he was indeed tempted. Martin Luther said, "You can't keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair." [Now some of you fellows with follicly challenged scalps are thinking, "Whew! I guess that leaves me off the hook!"] But what Luther was trying to say was that it is not wrong to be tempted, only to give in to temptation.

Secondly, at the heart of every temptation is a lie. In order to avoid giving in to temptation we need to identify the lie. In effect, God was saying to Jesus, "Take my love to others; love them till you die for them; conquer them by this unconquerable love even if you end up on a cross!" But Satan was saying, "No, no, no. There is a much better way, a far easier way to get the job done." Satan was lying. Every temptation has a lie. Find it and you are well on the way to avoiding the temptation.

Thirdly, do not think you are the only one in history to ever face your particular temptation. It is not true and believing it only makes matters worse. Rick Warren says we are like "the toddler who thinks he's the first one in the world to ever stick a green bean up his nose!" It just ain't so!

Fourthly, do not resist temptation. If you resist you will lose. My brother, Alan, is ten years

older than me. When I was little, he enjoyed challenging me to arm wrestling matches. He always won. From the time he said, “go” to the time when the back of my hand was smashed against the top of the table was little more than a nanosecond. No amount of resistance on my part ever changed this outcome. So what did I do? Simple. I refused to participate. I did something else. We need to do the same with temptation.

Let me put this another way. In the battle between the imagination and the will, imagination wins every time. If your imagination is filled with thoughts of the temptation, then it’s a slam dunk. You lose. So fill your imagination with something else. The Bible says, “Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Phil 4:8 NRSV).

3. TRESPASSES AS OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN TO FORGIVE MYSELF AND OTHERS.

We will grow in Christ if we view trespasses as opportunities to learn to forgive one’s self and others.

I hope this does not come as any great shock to anyone but this world is not heaven. This is a fallen world. Everybody sins. You hurt other people. Other people hurt you. We hurt each other intentionally and unintentionally.

The biblical word for this kind of intentional or unintentional hurting is “trespass.” Some churches prefer to use this word when they say the Lord’s Prayer. A trespass is a kind of hurt that may involve such things as being misunderstood or criticized but it can also involve physical injury, damage, or loss.

It is God’s desire that we learn forgiveness. The Bible says, “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another” (Col 3:13 NIV).

Forgiveness is one of the primary qualities of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. If we want to become like Christ we need to learn to forgive. But bearing the hurt of other people without retaliation is both the most important and the most difficult step in becoming like Christ.

Forgiveness has many different aspects, but for our purposes this morning let us simply look at how Jesus responded to the trespasses against him. On the cross, Jesus not only carried the weight of our sins, he also endured enormous injury and hurt from the people who were right there. We read in Matthew’s account, “The people passing by (looking at Jesus on the cross) shook their heads and hurled insults at Jesus...and the elders made fun of him...Even the bandits who had been crucified with him insulted him in the same way” (Matthew 27:39-44 TEV). And what was his response? Jesus said, “Father, forgive these people, because they don’t know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34 NLT). Peter says, “They called

him every name in the book and he said nothing back. He suffered in silence, intent to let God set things right" (1 Pet 2:23 MESSAGE). What did Jesus do? What was his response to trespasses? He yielded his "right" to get even. He responded to evil with good. He forgave.

The Bible says, "Forgive others, just as God forgave you because of Christ" (Eph. 4:32 CEV). Forgiveness needs to be an important part of how we treat others and even our own selves.

CONCLUSION

God wants us to become like Christ. And if that's true, then we are going to go through the same types of experiences that Jesus went through.

- There will be times when we are in the Garden:
Through Troubles we can learn to Trust God's love.
- There will be times when we are in the Desert:
Through Temptations we can learn to Obey God.
- There will be times when we are at the Cross:
Through Trespasses we can learn to Forgive.

It all depends on how we view these experiences. That is why if we want to become like Christ then our

“...attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5 NIV).