CHAPTER THREE

BECOMING LIKE CHRIST

“I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 3:14

Because God loves us to the extent that He is committed to our future welfare and to meeting our deepest needs, He desires for us to grow - to become like Christ. Our desire to excel and be strong delights Him, but we must allow Him to teach us that excellence is a life-long process and that He is our only source of strength. Growth occurs when we maintain our walk with God – remembering that the Christian life is a process, rather than giving up in frustration because we just can’t live up to perfect standards. To become means to come into existence, to come to be, to undergo change or development. As we respond to His desire to be totally involved in our lives, we begin to change and to become like Christ.

There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness.  

Eugene Peterson

God’s Desire for Us

1. In each of the following passages, what does God communicate about His relationship to us?

Psalm 149:4

Jeremiah 29:13

Matthew 11:28-30

Ephesians 2:4-7

Are there insights in these verses that especially encourage you to seek God’s presence and work in your life? If so, what are they?

2. A biblical definition of becoming could be called sanctification. To “sanctify” means to make holy: sanctification is growing in divine grace as a result of Christian commitment. What critical truths do the following verses teach about the process of becoming like Christ?

Romans 8:28-29

1 Corinthians 1:4-9
Philippians 1:6

*(Special note: In order to pattern our lives after Jesus, we need to first enter into a relationship with Him so that we can live in His strength - not our own. If you do not know Jesus as your personal Savior and Lord, would you consider the verses and booklets mentioned at the end of this chapter?)*

In order to avoid discouragement and reliance on ourselves, it is important to know that God has begun His work in us, and He will complete it. But how encouraging to realize also that God is patient with the process! Oswald Chambers has challenged us, “Think of the enormous leisure of God! He is never in a hurry.” Moses was in the desert forty years before he led the Israelites out of Egypt. Joseph was in prison approximately nine years before Pharaoh called him out to interpret a dream and put him in charge of the Egyptian kingdom. Paul was in Tarsus several years before going on his first missionary journey.

3. What do these Scripture passages reveal about God’s perspective of time?

   2 Peter 3:8-9

   Habakkuk 2:1-3

How do the Scriptures you have studied so far in this chapter encourage your perspective concerning your own personal growth in the Lord?

4. In Philippians 3:12-14, Paul explains his key to the process of becoming. What is it? How does Paul’s response to God’s process encourage your life?

AUTHOR’S REFLECTION – God desires to have fellowship with us, He is committed to our growth, and He is realistic in understanding where we are in our relationship to Him. So often we are the ones who put high expectations on ourselves as we try to live the Christian life in our own strength. When we trust in ourselves, we are destined to fail and then tempted to give up the whole idea of living a life that would be pleasing to God.

One example in my life has been my efforts to control my tongue. It has taken years of reading the Bible, praying, and memorizing Scripture before I have seen any progress in controlling my tongue. Growing in any area of the Christian life takes time, and the key is daily sitting at the feet of Jesus. Grasping the truths Jesus shares in John 15 has enabled me to experience some measure of victory in my life. I’m not perfect, but I am in the process of becoming. As a wise old saint once said, “I ain’t what I ought to be, but I ain’t what I used to be either!”

5. Read John 15:1-11 carefully before answering the following questions.

   What are the key words in this passage?

   What does it mean to abide or remain?
Why is it necessary to abide?
What are the benefits of abiding?
What are the results of not abiding?
What is one way of knowing that we are abiding?

Abiding has been defined as “the continual act of laying aside everything that I might derive from my own wisdom and merit, in order to draw all of this from Christ.”

It needs time to grow into Jesus the Vine: do not expect to abide in Him unless you will give Him that time . . . . Come, my brethren, and let us day by day set ourselves at His feet, and meditate on this word of His, with an eye fixed on Him alone. Let us set ourselves in quiet trust before Him, waiting to hear His holy voice – the still small voice that is mightier than the storm that rends the rocks – breathing its quickening spirit with us, as He speaks, “Abide in Me.” – Andrew Murray

6. What do you think are some practical ways to answer the question, “How do I abide in Jesus?” (John 8:31 may be a helpful reference here.)

The Scriptures were given not to increase our knowledge, but to change our lives.

D. L. Moody

Our Desire for God

Prayer – secret, fervent, believing prayer – lies at the root of all personal godliness.

William Carey

7. Read and reflect on the following Scriptures. What imagery is used to describe desire for God?

Psalm 42:1-2

Psalm 63:1

Psalm 84:1-2

Why do you think the psalmists felt so strongly in their desire for God?
8. *Meditation* might be defined as prayerful reflection on the Word of God with a goal of application and understanding.

What are the benefits of meditation revealed in Psalm 1:1-3?

What are some possible ways you can meditate on God’s Word day and night.

9. Looking back over this chapter, take some time to evaluate your desire for God. What draws you to abide in Christ? What hinders your spending time with Him?

10. If you would like, take a few minutes to come up with some creative language (poetic imagery or a word picture) that helps capture how you feel about drawing close to God. Put your words in the form of a prayer to God.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE MEMORY: Philippians 3:14

> There is only one relationship that matters, and that is your personal relationship to a personal redeemer and Lord. Let everything else go, but maintain that at all costs, and God will fulfill His purpose through your life. *Oswald Chambers*

If you do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, prayerfully consider the following verses, and speak to a friend or pastor who could help you in understanding your relationship to Christ.

- Romans 3:23
- Romans 6:23
- John 14:6
- John 11:25-27
- Romans 10:9-13

These booklets can help you in relating to and growing in Christ:

- *Steps to Peace with God* (Billy Graham Evangelistic Association)
- *The Bridge Illustration* (NavPress)
- *Seven Minutes with God* (NavPress)
- *The Quiet Time* (InterVarsity)
- *Lessons on Assurance* (NavPress)