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Becoming like Him

Only with the Savior’s divine help can we all progress toward becoming like Him.

To even the careful student of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the Savior’s admonition to be “even as I am”¹ is daunting and seemingly unattainable. Perhaps you are like me—all too aware of your faults and failings, so you may find it mentally more comfortable to walk a path with no upward incline and little growth. “Surely, this teaching is unrealistic and hyperbole,” we rationalize as we comfortably choose the course of least resistance, thereby burning fewer calories of needed change.

But what if becoming “even as [He is]” is not figurative, even in our

mortal condition? What if it is, to some degree, attainable in this life and, indeed, a prerequisite to being with Him again? What if “even as I am” is exactly and precisely what is meant by the Savior? Then what? What level of effort would we be willing to give to invite His miraculous power into our lives so that we can change our very nature?

Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught: “As we ponder having been commanded by Jesus to become like Him, we see that our present circumstance is one in which we are not necessarily wicked, but, rather, is one in which

we are so half-hearted and so lacking in enthusiasm for His cause—which is our cause, too! We extol but seldom emulate Him.”² A young minister, Charles M. Sheldon, expressed similar sentiments this way: “Our Christianity loves its ease and comfort too well to take up anything so rough and heavy as a cross.”³

In fact, all are under the directive to become like Him, just as Jesus Christ became like the Father.⁴ As we progress, we become more complete, finished, and fully developed.⁵ Such teaching is not based on any one sect’s doctrines but comes directly from the Master Himself. It is through this lens that lives should be lived, communications considered, and relationships fostered. Truly, there is no other way to heal the wounds of broken relationships or of a fractured society than for each of us to more fully emulate the Prince of Peace.⁶

Let’s consider how to begin a thoughtful, deliberate, and intentional pursuit of becoming as He is by gaining the very attributes of Jesus Christ.

Resolve and Commit

A few years ago, my wife and I stood at the trailhead of Japan’s highest mountain, Mount Fuji. As we began our ascent we looked up to the far-distant summit and wondered if we could get there.

As we progressed, fatigue, sore muscles, and the effects of altitude set in. Mentally, it became important for us to focus on just the next step. We would say, “I may not soon make it to the top, but I can do this next step right now.” Over time the daunting task ultimately became achievable—step by step.

The first step on this path to becoming like Jesus Christ is to



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have the desire to do so. Understanding the admonition to be like Him is good, but that understanding needs to be coupled with a yearning to transform ourselves, one step at a time, beyond the natural man.⁷ To develop the desire, we must know who Jesus Christ is. We must know something of His character,⁸ and we must look for His attributes in scripture, worship services, and other holy places. As we begin to know more of Him, we will see His attributes reflected in others. This will encourage us on our own quest, for if others can attain in some measure His attributes, so can we.

If we are honest with ourselves, the Light of Christ⁹ within us whispers that there is distance between where we are in comparison with the desired character of the Savior.¹⁰ Such honesty is vital if we are to progress in becoming like Him. Indeed, honesty is one of His attributes.

Now, those of us who are brave might consider asking a trusted family member, spouse, friend, or spiritual leader what attribute of Jesus Christ we are in need of—and we may need to brace ourselves for the response! Sometimes we see ourselves with distorted fun-house mirrors that show us either much more round or much more lean than we really are.

Trusted friends and family can help us see ourselves more accurately, but even they, as loving and helpful as they would like to be, can see things imperfectly. As a result, it is vital that



we also ask our loving Heavenly Father what we are in need of and where we should focus our efforts. He has a perfect view of us and will lovingly show us our weakness.¹¹ Perhaps you will learn that you need greater patience, humility, charity, love, hope, diligence, or obedience, to name a few.¹²

Not long ago, I had a soul-stretching experience when a loving Church leader made a very direct suggestion that I could use greater measure of a certain attribute. He lovingly cut through any distortion. That night, I shared this experience with my wife. She was mercifully charitable even as she agreed with his suggestion. The Holy Ghost confirmed to me that their counsel was from a loving Heavenly Father.

It may also be helpful to honestly complete the Christlike attribute activity in chapter 6 of *Preach My Gospel*.¹³

Once you have made an honest assessment and resolved to start the hike up the mountain, you will need to repent. President Russell M. Nelson lovingly taught: “When we choose to repent, we choose to change! We allow the Savior to transform us into the best version of ourselves. We choose to grow spiritually and receive joy—the joy of redemption in Him. When we choose to repent, we choose to become more like Jesus Christ.”¹⁴

Becoming as Jesus Christ is will require changing our hearts and minds, indeed, our very character, and doing so is possible only through the saving grace of Jesus Christ.¹⁵

Identify and Act

Now that you have resolved to change and repent and have sought guidance through praying, pondering honestly, and possibly counseling with others, you will need to select an attribute that will keenly become your focus. You will need to commit to exerting meaningful effort. These attributes won’t come cheaply and suddenly, but through His grace they will come incrementally while endeavoring.

Christlike attributes are gifts from a loving Heavenly Father to bless us and those around us. Accordingly, our efforts to obtain these attributes will

require heartfelt pleas for His divine assistance. If we seek these gifts to better serve others, He will bless us in our efforts. Selfishly pursuing a gift from God will end in disappointment and frustration.

By focusing deeply on one needed attribute, as you progress in obtaining that attribute, other attributes begin to accrue to you. Can someone who is focusing deeply on charity not increase in love and humility? Can someone who is focusing on obedience not gain greater diligence and hope? Your significant efforts to gain one attribute become the tide that raises all boats in the harbor.

Record and Sustain

It is important for me as I strive to become like Him to record my experiences and what I am learning. As I study with one of His attributes deep in my mind, the scriptures become new as I see examples of this attribute



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in His teachings, His ministry, and His disciples. My eye also becomes more focused on recognizing the attribute in others. I have observed wonderful individuals both within and without the Church who have attributes that emulate Him. They are powerful examples of how those attributes can be manifest in mere mortals through His loving grace.

In order to see real progress, you will need to put in sustained effort. Much like climbing a mountain requires preparation before and endurance and perseverance during ascent, so too will this journey require real effort and sacrifice. True Christianity, in which we strive to become like our Master, has always required our best efforts.¹⁶

Now a brief word of caution. The commandment to be like Him is not intended to make you feel guilty, unworthy, or unloved. Our entire mortal experience is about progression, trying, failing, and succeeding. As much as my wife and I may have wished that we could close our eyes and magically transport ourselves to the summit, that is not what life is about.

You are good enough, you are loved, but that does not mean that

you are yet complete. There is work to be done in this life and the next. Only with His divine help can we all progress toward becoming like Him.

In these times, when “all things [appear to] be in commotion; and . . . fear [is seemingly] upon all people,”¹⁷ the only antidote, the only remedy, is to strive to be like the Savior,¹⁸ the Redeemer¹⁹ of all mankind, the Light of the World,²⁰ and to seek after Him who declared, “I am the way.”²¹

I know that becoming like Him through His divine help and strength *is* achievable step by step. If not so, He would not have given us this commandment.²² I know this—in part because I see attributes of Him in so many of you. Of these things I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. 3 Nephi 27:27. For related admonitions from the Savior, see Matthew 5:48 (“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect”); 1 John 2:6 (“He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked”); Mosiah 3:19 (“For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to

- submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father"); Alma 5:14 ("And now behold, I ask you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances?"); 3 Nephi 12:48 ("Therefore I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect").
2. Neal A. Maxwell, *Even as I Am* (1982), 16.
 3. Charles M. Sheldon, *In His Steps* (1979), 185.
 4. See Doctrine and Covenants 93:12–17.
 5. See Matthew 5:48, footnote *b*.
 6. See Isaiah 9:6; 2 Nephi 19:6.
 7. See 1 Corinthians 2:14; Mosiah 3:19.
 8. See Matthew 7:23; 25:12; Mosiah 26:24; see also footnotes to each scripture; David A. Bednar, "If Ye Had Known Me," *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2016, 102–5.
 9. See Doctrine and Covenants 93:2.
 10. See Moroni 7:12–19.
 11. See Ether 12:27.
 12. See *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service*, rev. ed. (2019), chapter 6, "How Do I Develop Christlike Attributes?" References to other attributes of the Savior are scattered among scripture. A few examples include Mosiah 3:19; Alma 7:23; Articles of Faith 1:13.
 13. See *Preach My Gospel*, 132.
 14. Russell M. Nelson, "We Can Do Better and Be Better," *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2019, 67.
 15. See Bible Dictionary, "Grace"; Guide to the Scriptures, "Grace," scriptures.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
 16. See Sheldon, *In His Steps*, 246: "If our definition of being a Christian is simply to enjoy the privileges of worship, be generous at no expense to ourselves, have a good, easy time surrounded by pleasant friends and by comfortable things, live respectably and at the same time avoid the world's great stress of sin and trouble because it is too much pain to bear it—if this is our definition of Christianity, surely we are a long way from following [in] the steps of Him who trod the way with groans and tears and sobs of anguish for a lost humanity; who sweat, as it were, great drops of blood, who cried out on the upreared cross, 'My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?'"
 17. Doctrine and Covenants 88:91.
 18. See Isaiah 43:3.
 19. See Job 19:25.
 20. See John 8:12.
 21. John 14:6.
 22. See 1 Nephi 3:7.