

# *Becoming Image Bearers of Christ*

## GETTING READY TO TEACH

One of my treasures is a picture of my paternal grandfather, Aaron Bryce Wilkinson. Aaron's picture is special to me because I never knew him. His picture, a Bible, and a few family stories are my only connection to him. I've noticed that my dad looks a lot like his father and I bear some resemblance to my dad. It is easy for anyone to guess that my brother and I are from the same family. You might say that we all bear the image of a Wilkinson.

Moses was inspired to tell us that we were created in the image of the One True God (Gen. 1:26-27).

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

These verses have long been a source of wonder for me. I am awed by the truth that in some small way I bear the image of God! I can imagine Paul's wonder at this same truth in his writing to the Colossian church:

I have become [the church's] servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness—the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:25-27)

Imagine! We are Christ's image bearers. What purpose and significance that single thought can bring to a person's life! This lesson looks at this concept in detail. It also speaks to the process God uses to form believers into the image of Christ—sanctification.

There are some simple truths about the doctrine of sanctification that will be presented:

- ◆ **Sanctification is a life-long process.** While we immediately obtain a sanctified position when we enter our relationship with Christ (positional sanctification), it takes a lifetime for God to conform us to His image (experiential sanctification). We only become full reflections of Christ when we join Him in Heaven (glorification).
- ◆ **There is no such thing as sinless perfection in this life.**
- ◆ **Suffering and brokenness are integral parts of God's sanctification process.**

As you prepare to teach, ask the Holy Spirit to release in you a fresh awareness of the wonder of being Christ's image bearer. May you reflect Him well both to those you daily encounter and to those you teach in your Bible Fellowship.



## STUDYING THE WORD TOGETHER

Roger Barrier

“Dear Lord,” Richard prayed one evening in my living room, “please let us see ourselves from Your perspective.” Sooner or later the Holy Spirit makes us aware of the infinite difference between God and us. In John 15:5 Jesus said,

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

The Lord and I have a running argument here. I say, “Surely, something, Lord.” He reiterates, “No, nothing.” How distant we are from His holiness! From His power! From His character! He is not just the Father and Creator of our universe. It is likely that He is the Father and Creator of the multiverse—numerous universes each in multiple dimensions. Who can fathom that! He is not just the God and Father of purity. He is the Father and Creator of sinless perfection. Adam was created in God’s image; but unfortunately, in our fallen, sinful state, we certainly don’t look or act much like Him after all.

Fortunately, God initiated a restoration plan. In Colossians 1:27, Paul revealed one part of the plan: “To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” He provided Christ-followers with the necessary hope and the power for fulfilling Christ’s Matthew 5:48 dream: “Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect.”

Peter described this same concept of the indwelling Christ in 2 Peter 1:4: “... you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

Before we surrender to Christ, our human spirit is in a coma-like state. (We will describe this concept in detail in a future lesson.) At the moment of our salvation, the Holy Spirit accomplishes His regenerating work. He turns on the light in our innermost human spirit so that we become alive toward God and positively inclined toward spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:11-15).

**Maturity Insight 6: God, the Father, Purposes to Mold Us into the Image of Christ and to Experience with Us the Same Intimacy He Has with the Son!**

God’s design is to mature every Christ-follower to look like Jesus Christ. Paul enunciated this concept in Colossians 1:28: “We proclaimed him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.”

On our own, we do not tend to reflect much of the nature of Christ. But with Christ indwelling our very being, we have

the potential to look much like Jesus. When we see ourselves from God’s perspective, Christ-likeness seems unreachable. Fortunately, Jesus said in Matthew 19:26: “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

### *How Far Have We Fallen*

When I was ten years old, my dad took me to the Braniff Airlines Building in Dallas where he worked. As we walked along the sidewalk he encouraged me to notice the difference in people’s heights. Some were five feet tall, some six-feet-six-inches tall, and everything in between. Moments later, we were looking over the safety railing on the tenth-floor balcony.



Dad said, “Now look at the people on the sidewalk. Can you tell the difference between the five footers and six and one-half footers?”

“No, not from ten stories up! They all look the same!”

“Let this be a lesson to you,” he said. (He said that a lot.) “People look good or bad and everything in between, from our perspective on earth. But from God’s perspective, people all look alike.”

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). None of us is close to God’s level. We all need a Savior.

Sooner or later God makes us aware of the infinite difference between God and us. In his Space Trilogy, C.S. Lewis used science fiction to consider the implications of man’s Fall into sin (Gen. 3). Lewis pondered in volume one, *Out of the Silent Planet*, what mankind might be like if sin had never contaminated our earth. He pictured every planet in the universe overseen by an angelic creature called an “Oyarsa.” Once a year all the Oyarsas throughout the universe—except one—gathered in the Heavens for an annual convention. Lucifer, the Oyarsa who oversaw Earth, never attended the gathering. In fact, no communication ever emanated from Earth. Our planet was known to all as the “Silent Planet”. The Oyarsas knew that something horrible once occurred on Earth and that God’s creation there was now “bent.” They did not know the details nor the implications of “bent,” but they did know that the creatures on Earth were so bent that they could not even see angels!

We know what a “bent” race looks like. We are one! We live in a world where the choice to sin or not to sin is already made. We have no idea how close to God the unfallen state might be!

Think of the infinite difference between God and us. Then consider the plans for restoration that God has for His children. God’s primary purpose for us is both to save us for eternal relation-

ship with Him and to conform us to the image of Christ, reducing the emotional or relational distance between God and us.

### *Christians Are Christ’s Image Bearers*

Early on in our growth we discover Romans 8:28-29: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” This best-loved, most-reassuring, all-time favorite promise from God is often misunderstood by spiritual children.

A beloved aunt is struggling with cancer. A well-intentioned Christian nephew says, “Don’t worry, Aunt Susie, God promised that all things work together for good to those who love God and we both know that you love God. Therefore, you can be at peace, you are going to be all right!” Two weeks later, Aunt Susie is dead. All things did not work out so *good* after all.

A teenage son is in a horrendous automobile accident. Mom and Dad are wringing the tears from their eyes in the emergency room when a well-intentioned believing neighbor says, “It’s going to be all right. Tommy’s going to be fine, because Romans 8:28 says, ‘All things work together for good to those who love God.’ So don’t worry. Let’s believe God for His promise.” But, unfortunately, Tommy remains paralyzed from the waist down for the rest of his life.

Too many Christians imagine that the “good” of Romans 8:28 stands alone. It does not. The “good” of verse 28 is indelibly linked to verse 29: “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his son....” The promise of Romans 8:28-29 is that every experience would be allowed and/or designed by the Father for the *good purpose* of molding us into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Miles Stanford, in *Principles of Spiritual*

## Lesson 4

# The Prayer God Always Answers

### Becoming Image Bearers of Christ

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Growth<sup>1</sup> observed:

*The open secret of healthy spiritual growth is to know and settle upon this fact as set forth in Romans 8:28-29. When we see that all things are working together to make us more and more like the Lord Jesus, we will not be frustrated and upset when some of these “things” are hard, difficult to understand, and often contain an element of death. We will be able to rest in our Lord Jesus and say to our Father, “Thy will be done.” And our constant attitude of faith will be: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15). This is our matriculation to spiritual maturity.*

“Let us make man in our own image,” God said in Genesis 1. He was not referring to His physical image. God is a spirit. He might well be referring to His moral and spiritual image. Frankly, if anyone had been around in those early days before the Fall, he or she could look at Adam and see a reflection of what God the Father was like. Adam was the “spitting image” of the Father. He was made in the image of God. Unfortunately, when we turn the page to Genesis 3:1-6, we discover that Adam’s sin detonated both a physical and spiritual bomb. No longer was He in the image of God. In Genesis 5:1-3 Adam and Eve conceived a son named Seth. The Bible indicates that Seth was born in man’s image—not God’s. One of the consequences of sin was that the image of God was no longer visible on earth. (See Figure 1.)

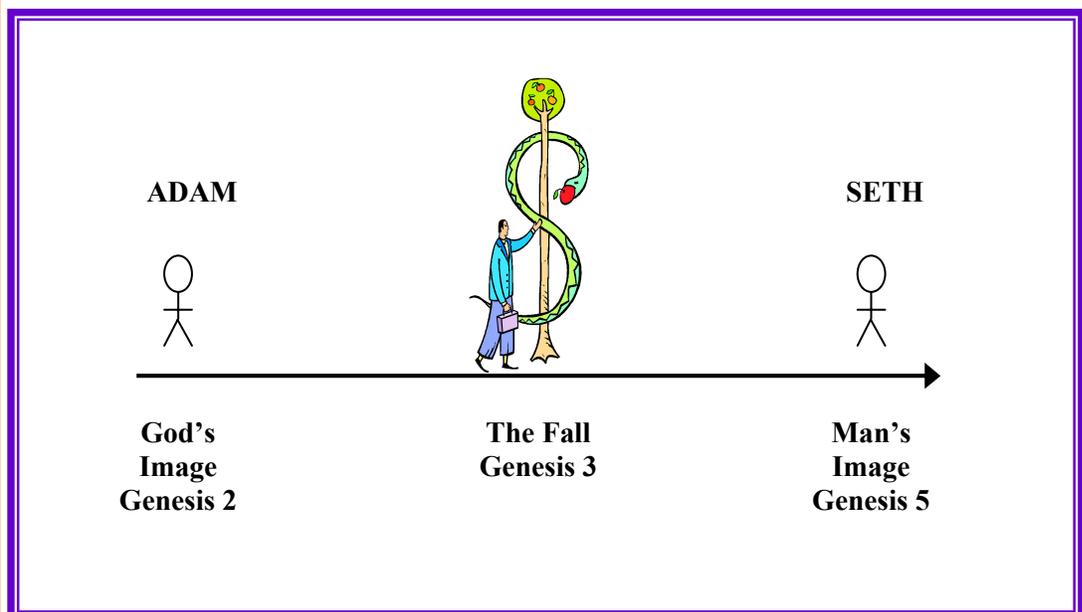


Figure 1: Adam in God’s Image; Seth in Man’s Image

When Jesus was born, the image of God returned. The image of God was back on Earth. Hebrews 1:1-3 declares, “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets...but in

these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...[who is] the exact representation of his being...”

In John 14-17 Jesus was making His final ministry “handoff” to the Disciples.

<sup>1</sup> Miles J. Sanford, *Principles of Spiritual Growth* (Back to the Bible, Lincoln, NE, 1997 edition) 25



Philip turned to Christ and pleaded, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

It was a broken-hearted Jesus who said to Philip, “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am

in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work” (John 14:8-10).

The next day wicked men crucified Christ. For three days Christ was inside a tomb. The image of God was removed from the earth. (See Figure 2.)

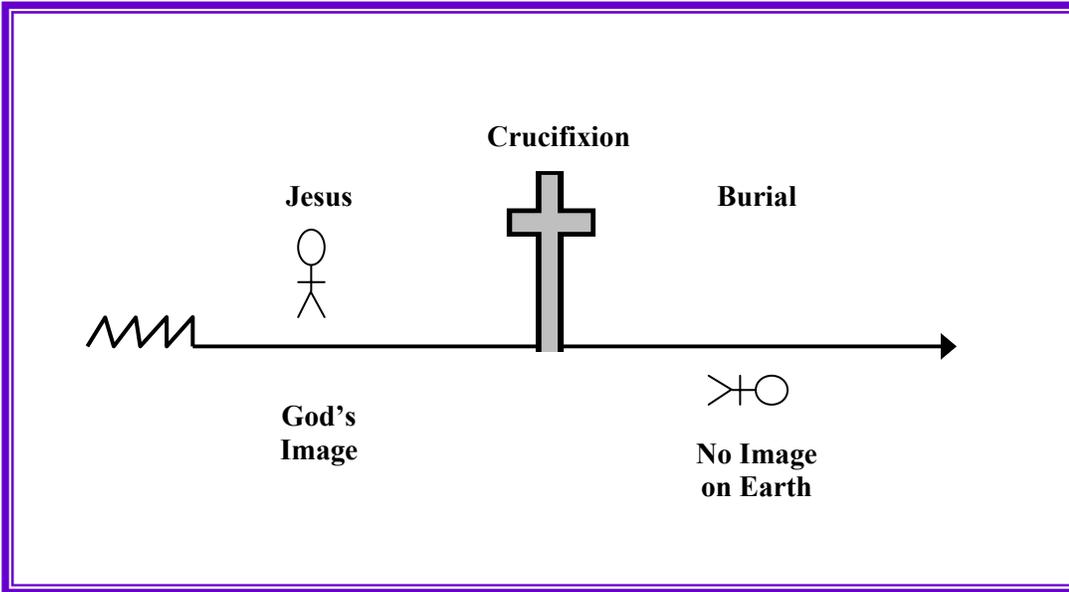


Figure 2: Jesus in God’s Image, Crucifixion, and Burial

During the 40 days following His resurrection, Christ appeared to over five hundred different individuals.

The image of God was once more unveiled on earth. Then He ascended and the image of God was gone. (See Figure 3.)

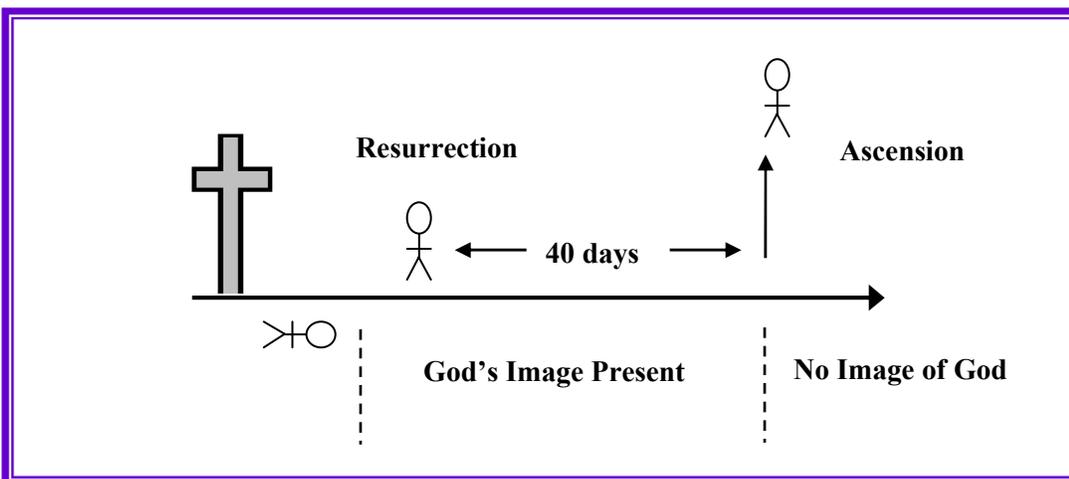


Figure 3: Resurrection, Appearances, Ascension

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On Pentecost, ten days after the ascension, the Holy Spirit (Who is revealed in Scripture as the Spirit of Christ) descended as living tongues of fire

and settled on, and then indwelt, one hundred and twenty believers. Once again the image of God was back on earth—multiplied. (See Figure 4.)

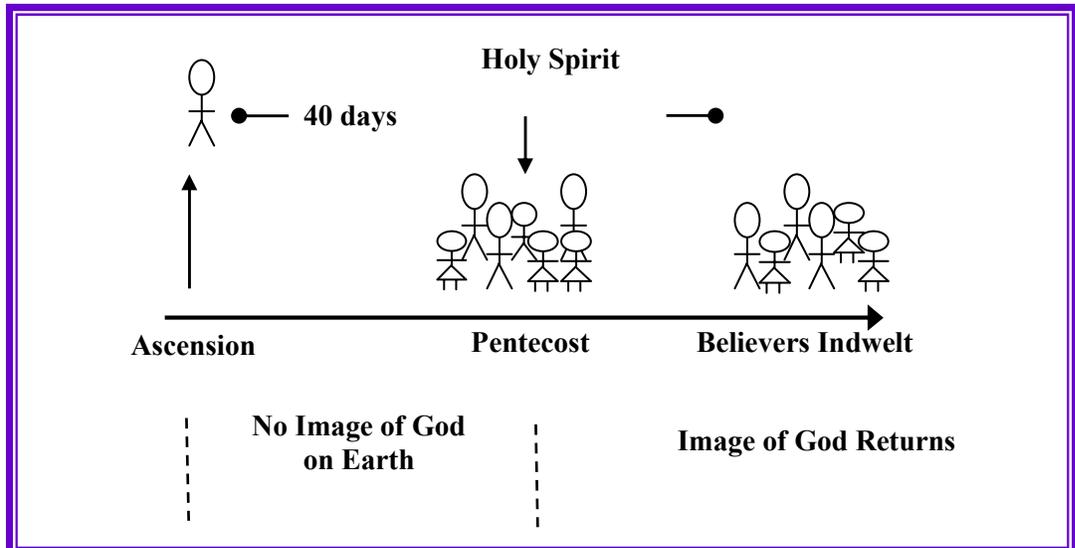


Figure 4: Image of God Returns

Now the image proliferated. Once again it was possible for people all over the world to see the nature and character of God lived out before their eyes. In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul wrote:

And we, who with unveiled faces  
all reflect the Lord's glory,  
are being transformed into his  
likeness with ever-increasing glory,  
which comes from the Lord,  
who is the Spirit.

The Spirit of Jesus is no longer limited by His earthly body. The image of God is back upon the earth, not just in one locale, but in hundreds and thousands of locales throughout the world wherever there are followers of Jesus Christ.

Christ did not come into our lives solely to forgive sins and give us a home in Heaven. Christ came into our lives so that He might be on divine display (glorified, manifested) for the entire world to see.

### *God Longs for Intimacy with Us Just As We Long to Experience Being Close to Him*

As we grow to look more like Christ, God's second purpose follows naturally: the Father longs to bring us into an intimate relationship with Him, just like the one He has with His Son, Jesus. When John was writing his gospel he recalled that Jesus placed much emphasis on the close relationship that Jesus had with His Father. Their closeness impacted John greatly. Reflect in the following verses on the close relationship John remembered between the Father and the Son. This is the sort of relationship God purposes to have with us.

No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. (John 6:46)

The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone.... (John 8:29-30)

I and the Father are one. (John 10:30)

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.... (John 15:9)

I pray...Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.... that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. (John 17:20-23)

Picture such oneness with the Father. What must it feel like to have constant companionship where there is no sense of being alone? Imagine God's love and compassion rolling over you like the continual washing of the waves upon the shore. Wonder about experiencing an ongoing closeness to God where you hear His voice and see His face. This is oneness. This is intimacy. This is God's heartfelt purpose for all of His children.

Adam broke not only his relationship with God, but also God's heart when he chose to enter into the world of sin. Do you simply read the words in the Bible, or do you try to imagine the emotions and feelings behind the words? Think of the initial moments after the Fall as recorded in Genesis 3:8-9:

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

**D**o you hear the care and concern—and the disappointment—in God's voice? When you read the entire passage, you see that God was looking forward to His daily intimate walk with Adam in the Garden. But Adam was no where to be found. He was in hiding, already suffering the consequences of his sin. He was afraid to meet with God. The closeness of their relationship was broken by sin. Their relationship was forever marred.

Moses recorded the text so that it appeared that God was still unaware of what Adam had done. "Where are you,

Adam?" God asked. God's question is recorded as if numerous concerns coursed through His mind all at once. Are you lying hurt or injured somewhere? Have you gotten tired of me? Have you found something else that is more fulfilling than I am?

Then the awful truth came to mind: "Have you eaten the fruit I told you not to eat?" Can you hear the hurt in God's heart? No wonder Adam was hiding.

I believe God was brokenhearted. But immediately He initiated a plan to restore mankind to the kind of relationship He had with Adam before the fall. He needed the Cross to *begin* the process. He needs *Christ-likeness* to complete the process.

We can also see God with a broken heart when we observe Christ in the gospel stories. Think of the account of the ten lepers healed by Jesus (Luke 17:12-19). Ten lepers stood at a distance from Jesus and asked to be healed. Jesus had pity and told them to go to the priests (in order to confirm their healings). They believed and behaved exactly as He instructed—even before they experienced the grace of healing. Luke was careful to record that after they left Jesus, as they were on their way to see the priests, they were healed. Nine were Jews; one was a Samaritan. He alone returned to kneel in worship and gratitude at the feet of Jesus.

Listen to the hurt and pain in Jesus' heart in the next line of the story. He said to the Samaritan,

"Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?" (Luke 17:17)

Do you hear the disappointment? He wished that all ten were kneeling and intimately fellowshiping with Him. But only one came back—and he was a Samaritan. Nine obeyed His instructions exactly and got healed. One also obeyed and was healed; but he also experienced the blessing of intimacy at the feet of Jesus. Just as Jesus longed for intimacy with all ten lepers—not just one—God Who is from the beginning longs for close relationship with us. It is not just we who

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hope to be close to Him; He hopes to be close to us.

**M**y observation is that most Christians spend the majority of their lives working to get their beliefs and behaviors just right. They somehow believe that this is the essence of the Christian life. Unfortunately, they stop far short of fulfilling the purpose for which they were created: kneeling in intimate relationship at the feet of Jesus. Jesus not only wants our doctrines and morals correct, He also longs to enjoy a fulfilling companionship with us—like He once enjoyed with Adam. If God were not interested in a relationship with us, He could have doomed all mankind to eternal separation in Hell. Instead, right in the Garden, He planned for a Savior.

God has two primary purposes for all His children: We mature to be like Christ because the world needs to see the image of God once again reflected on earth. As we become more like Christ, we experience the same ever-deepening relationship with the One True God Who personally knows why it was “not good for man to be alone.”

Our baby daughter Jessie cost us dearly. Medical care for Julie drained our savings account before Jessie was born. Our medical insurance did not come close to paying the bills. After Jessie’s birth the costs mounted quickly. We received doctor bills from doctors we knew and a host of bills from doctors we never even met. The hospital costs skyrocketed each day during the forty days she was in neonatal intensive care. Weekly doctor visits continued long after she was released. Stress from a dying baby mixed continually with the stress of how we could afford her. Then, after nine agonizing months, she died.

She hasn’t cost us a dime since. Yet, we would give anything to have her back. As I write these words I realize that if she were still here, she would be twenty-nine years old. I hurt when I think of all the

great times we missed. I have a variety of fun and delightful memories with my other daughters. I don’t have any memories like that with Jessie. I would have enjoyed being at Jessie’s high school graduation. I would give anything to have seen her excited smile as I walked her down the aisle at her wedding. I remember that moment with Brianna and Bronwyn. But, Jessie and I never experienced that together. What I wouldn’t give to see her hold her first born right after birth.

Julie and I now have deep, secure, adult relationships with both of our girls and their husbands. Occasionally, I still pull off to the side of the road and weep at what was never allowed to be. Before she was born we had such dreams for her and for the loving relationship we would enjoy. I would give anything to have her back, healthy and whole, no matter how much she cost.

**I** am certain that God had the same feelings and dreams for Adam. He loved their relationship. Then one day it was over. God surely wept as Adam departed the Garden just as Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus. God strives to restore His relationship with individual Adams and Eves even to this day.

### *Reflecting the Glory of Christ*

**W**hen we reflect or glorify Christ, others can see in our behavior the loving nature and character of Christ. They see the essence of God in us. Jerry Wilkinson tells a story about his wife Lana and her bird-watching hobby to illustrate this idea.<sup>2</sup>

*From an upstairs window one morning just before sunrise, Lana saw a great horned owl perched on a neighbor’s chimney. She hurriedly grabbed her binoculars, awakened me, and began to describe the owl in great detail.*

*She described the color of its eyes, the many shades of its feathers, the*

<sup>2</sup> Used by permission.

*broadness of its chest, and the length of its tail feathers. I learned more about great horned owls that morning than I ever wanted to know.*

*Lana used her binoculars to magnify or glorify that highly perched owl. Our lives should be like binoculars through which others can clearly see the magnified or glorified image of Christ.*

One of my favorite preachers was Charles Spurgeon. He pastored in London during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Eighteen thousand copies of his sermons were printed and distributed worldwide each week. He was one of the greatest preachers this world has known. His love for Jesus transcended the core of his being.

Joseph Parker also preached in London during the same period. His sermons were collected in a series of books called, *The People's Bible*. It extends over five feet of shelf space in my library. Spurgeon's sermons, by the way, cover over twenty feet of space.

When folks departed church after hearing Parker preach, the most often-heard comment was, "Joseph Parker is a wonderful preacher." Many of those same folks went later to the Metropolitan Tabernacle to hear Spurgeon. The most frequent comment overheard after Spurgeon preached was, "Jesus Christ is a wonderful Savior."

Do you see the difference? God is not interested in putting us on display. He's concerned that Jesus Christ is on display. As our Christ-likeness increases, our intimacy with the Father flourishes. When our lives reflect both the nature of Christ and the closeness of our intimacy, the beauty of our relationship with Christ has such an appeal that it is hard for others to resist longing for the same kind of relationship.

Unfortunately, it is my impression that not many Christians are good "binoculars" that others can use to see the deeper essence of Christ. Not many seem close to God, either. Fortunately, God has a plan and a process both to mold Christ-followers unto the image of Christ and, simultaneously, to draw them close into His heart.

### *A Reflective Interlude*

Let's pause for a moment of reflection before we discuss the next ministry insight. Consider what might be going on in the heart of God if Jesus were consistently on display in your life. When people think of you, what is the first thing that comes to their minds? Can others gain a better understanding of the nature and character of Christ because they know you? Can they imagine that God is lovingly and caringly involved in their lives, because you are caringly and lovingly involved in theirs?

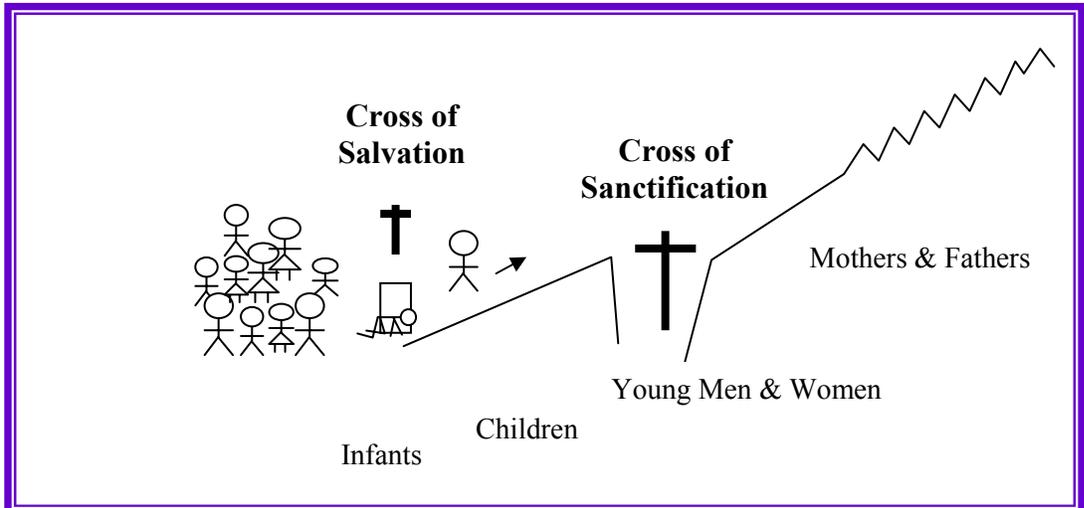
As God molds us into the image of Christ, we naturally fulfill His second purpose. As Christ was one with His Father, so are we—in unity and relationship. What does it do to your heart to imagine the possibility of fulfilled, constant companionship with the Creator and Sustainer of the universe?

### *Sanctification is the Process We Experience as We Become Christ's Image Bearers*

New Christians need not blaze a fresh trail to maturity. Many have traveled before them. The road is well established. In the Scriptures God provided a clear picture of what our journey toward spiritual maturity might look like.

Think of the diagram on the next page as a "sanctification road map."





**Figure 5: The Cross of Salvation and the Cross of Sanctification**

The small door with the cross above represents the door of salvation. There are a few, according to Jesus, who humble themselves at the foot of the cross, repent of their sins, receive Christ into their lives as Lord and Savior, and transit the narrow door of salvation. Jesus said:

Enter through the narrow gate.  
 For wide is the gate and broad  
 is the road that leads to destruction,  
 and many enter through it.  
 But small is the gate and narrow  
 the road that leads to life, and only  
 a few find it.” (Matthew 7:13-14)

The Greek translation of the word Jesus used to describe the door of salvation meant small and confining; it’s undersized; it’s tight. But it leads to life eternal with Christ. This entrance to the Kingdom of God is tight because there’s not enough room to enter with both our will and our sins intact. We shed these to fit through the door so that spiritual new birth occurs. We are now spiritual infants or spiritual babies. We are growing into spiritual childhood.

Fortunately, not long after our spiritual birth God engineers a moment of enlightenment. We discover that we did not surrender as much of ourselves as we imagined at the door of salvation. We still

cling to our self-reliance, self-centeredness and self-condemnation. *My way*—not *God’s way*—remains too often the struggle of our hearts.

*Two Purposes for the Cross of Christ*

Now we stand at the edge of a precipice. Will we pay the price to go on with God, or not? A chasm opens wide and bottomless before us. Will we ever reach the spiritual mountain peaks beyond? Then we notice the cross spanning the chasm! It is at this point that we begin to understand that the cross of Christ has two functions.

First, the cross provides for our salvation. God placed Christ on the cross of salvation to deliver us from the domination of our sin nature in Adam. In addition, God places us on the cross to deliver us from the ongoing fallout of our sin nature—our everyday sins and shortcomings. Paul described these two functions of the cross. Galatians 3:13 portrays the first function:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hung upon the tree.”  
 (Galatians 3:13)



Galatians 2:20, 5:25-24, and 6:14 illustrate the second function of the cross:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.  
(Galatians 2:20)

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. (Galatians 5:24-25)

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.  
(Galatians 6:14)

### *Dying on the Cross with Christ*

Note the interaction. Christ died on the cross for us. We die on the cross with Christ. We take these truths by faith, but our responsibility is to work these out in the practical reality of everyday living. Young men and women appreciate how God uses the cross as a tool to mold us to look like Christ. They recall the words of Christ:

If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, whoever loses his life for My sake, will find it. (Matthew 16:24-25)

These verses are often used out of context. Some say things like, Jesus is commanding me to take up my cross and follow Him to be a pastor, or to Brazil to be a missionary...or whatever...or wherever. But Jesus was not talking about going to Brazil as a missionary, or about following Him into the ministry. We take our crosses to Golgotha, and we do there what He did there. Jesus described full surrender at any price. In many ways the surrender looks like the yielding up of our

self-reliance, self-centeredness, and self-condemnation.

Who wouldn't like to have self-reliance, self-centeredness, and self-condemnation refined out of their lives! It is from these three expressions of self that all issues of sin spring forth. They prevent the daily victory over the sins that so often beset us! They hinder our intimacy with the heart of God! They prevent us from experiencing resurrection power! Fortunately, the sanctifying work of the cross paves the way for resurrection life here on earth.

### *Some Seek to Avoid the Cross*

Unfortunately, too many Christians don't want to die on the cross with Jesus. A spiritual crisis ensues as they stand at the edge of the chasm and realize that following Christ will cost them their lives after all! Too many Christians, consciously or unconsciously, retreat toward the door of salvation. They refuse to grow up; they go into spiritual retrogression. They live defeated, stagnant lives in deep danger of becoming what Paul referred to as "carnal" or "fleshly" (1 Cor. 3:1-3).

### *Some "Take Up Their Cross"*

However, there are a few who hate the chains that bind them to the emptiness of a barren powerless Christian life. So disgusted are they with their life of sin, so disgruntled with their spiritual powerlessness, so desperate for a meaningful relationship with God that they cry,

*Father, I want to be a spiritual mother or father at any price.*

God then continues the process. Spiritual young men and women consciously surrender to the sanctifying work of the cross. The cross is not viewed as a threat to their well-being—to be avoided at all costs. Instead, it is recognized as the instrument that leads to their freedom and resurrected life in Christ. It is on the cross of sanctification that we are sanctified. It is there that we

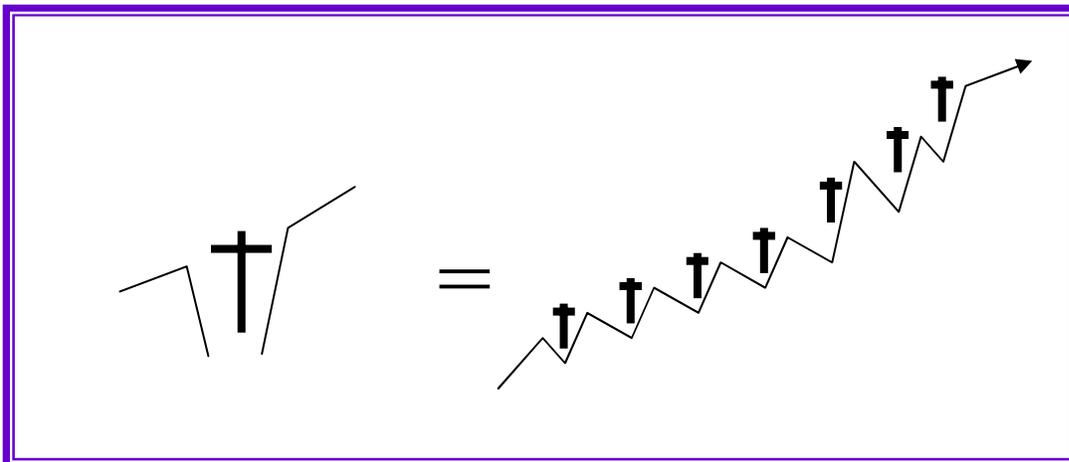


allow the Christ within to both transform us and shine forth from us. It is through this process that we become more authentic bearers of His Image.

**A**s we conclude this lesson, I ask you to remember that the graphs we have used represent one model of what the maturity process might look like. The basic outline has a strong biblical base which follows carefully John’s outline in his first epistle. The delineations of the stages and the chasm are approximations which give us a feel for either what may lie ahead of us or what is already behind. Our model is a linear representation of a dynamic living process. Spiritual growth is never as clear-cut as our diagram makes it appear.

For example, we do not experience only

once the cross in the chasm. Choosing to follow Jesus is an ongoing, daily struggle. We are not processed once on the cross and then move directly into the realms of spiritual mothers and fathers. The sanctifying cross is a long-time (even life-time) process. We move back to childhood and then back to the cross and then to fatherhood and then back to the cross—time and time and time again. But, eventually, we spend more and more time on the resurrection side of the cross—and less and less on the childhood side, and on the cross itself! We are moving on to maturity. As previously mentioned, our model portrays one large cross in the chasm. Don’t let that mislead you. The single large cross merely represents the proliferation of many smaller crosses that we experience in life.



**Figure 6: We Encounter Many Sanctifying Crosses**

*Closing Meditation*

**W**hen I was a teenager I heard a simple story that shaped my spirit in following Christ. I have long ago lost the source of the story. However, I hope that you are both inspired and moved by the faith of this fourteen-year-old French girl who lived in German-occupied France during WWII. Her family was Christian and she had multiple opportunities to decide not to climb upon the cross of sanctification.

*One evening an errant allied bomb killed her mom and dad and leveled their house. She was picked up on the street by German soldiers and sent to a dreaded camp. She found many opportunities to encourage fellow prisoners with the good news about Christ. Unfortunately, the commandant demanded that she cease her sharing. But she couldn't. She was brought before the commandant and threatened if she did not stop. But she couldn't keep*

quiet about Christ. Once more, brought before the commandant, she faced her moment of trial: “Will you follow Hitler, or Christ?”

She answered, “Christ.”

The commandant nodded to a soldier standing near the fireplace who pulled out a branding iron in the shape of a cross. Again, the commandant asked, “Hitler, or Christ?”

She answered, “Christ.”

They bent her over the top of his desk and branded the shape of a cross into her back. She was returned to her cell.

Yet she couldn't stop talking about Jesus. Again and again she was taken before the commandant: “Hitler, or Christ?” Again and again she answered, “Christ.”

She screamed, “Jesus, oh Jesus, help me!” as they branded her with the iron. Infection soon ravaged her back. She could not stand nor walk without assistance. But still she answered, “Christ.”

Not long afterward, allied troops liberated her camp. The soldiers who found her rushed her immediately to an American field hospital where she was prepared for surgery. She looked up at the two doctors who prepped her and said, “If I had it all to do over again, I'd do it again, for Jesus.” Both doctors eventually followed Christ. They are the ones who related this story.

Take a moment now and look back at the diagrams. Remind yourself of what we have discussed in this lesson.

Where are you on the graph? What issues are you struggling with in your Christian life? Is your relationship with Christ deeper and more intimate than it was at this time last year? Five years ago? How about ten?

Before you continue your preparation to teach this lesson, why don't you bow your head and pray to be a spiritual mother or father at any price? May God grant that you will soon rest in the comfort and presence of Almighty God.

*Father, thank You for Your love, tenderness, and compassion that You share with us. I desire to grow into the spiritual man or woman that You want me to be—bearing Your glory in my everyday living, and having an intimacy with You that transcends all. May I recognize Your hand at work in my life. Please mold me into a spiritual mother or father at any price. Amen.*

### A Final Thought

As we allow ourselves to be crucified with Christ upon His saving and sanctifying cross, we experience something called “brokenness.” Learning to embrace our brokenness is an important part of the sanctification process. In Lesson 9, we will discuss both how to embrace our brokenness and how to let Christ be put on display in the midst of it. At the same time, we will observe how pride keeps us from embracing our brokenness.

May God bless you as you reflect upon your own journey toward becoming a spiritual parent. I am glad that we are all traveling together.





## COMMENTARY

### THE FALL OF MAN<sup>3</sup>

The “Fall of Man” is a theological term that is not found in Scripture, though the essential fact is a matter of Scripture record and of clear, though not frequent, reference. The particular account is in Genesis 3. The most explicit New Testament references are Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21-22, 45-47; 2 Cor. 11:3.

#### *Bible Doctrine*

Man at his creation was in a state of moral purity. In connection with his freedom there was, of necessity, the possibility of sin. But still there was no evil tendency in his nature. God pronounced him, with other objects of His creation, “good.” He was made in the image and likeness of God.

The temptation to disobedience came from an evil source outside himself. In Genesis only the serpent is mentioned. In the NT the tempter is identified as Satan, who employed the serpent as his instrument (1 Cor. 11:3, 14; Rom. 16:20; Rev. 12:9). The temptation came in the form of an appeal to man’s intellect and to the senses. The forbidden fruit was presented as “good for food” and “desirable to make one wise.” Thus the allurements were in the direction of sensual gratification and intellectual pride.

At the beginning of the sin lay unbelief. The tempted ones doubted or disbelieved God and believed the tempter. And thus, under the strong desire awakened by the temptation, they disobeyed the divine command.

By this act of disobedience “sin entered into the world, and death through sin.” Shame and alienation from God were the first visible consequences. The image of God, which contained among its features

“righteousness and holiness of the truth,” was marred and broken, though not completely lost. Expulsion from Eden followed. The ground was cursed on account of sin. Sorrow and toil and struggle with the evil in human nature became the lot of mankind.

#### *Theological Views*

The theological treatment of this topic should be particularly noted. The Calvinistic types of theology regard the Fall in two ways: (1) the supralapsarian, or most rigid view, includes the Fall under the divine decree; (2) the sublapsarian, the less rigid but less logically consistent view, represents the divine decree as relating to the condition produced by the Fall. Out from the race fallen in Adam God elected a certain number to salvation.

The Arminian theology regards the Fall not as predetermined by a divine decree but as foreseen and provided against by divine grace. It asserts that, but for the redemptive purpose of God in Christ, the race of fallen descendants of Adam would not have been permitted to come into existence. When man fell...he fell into the arms of redeeming mercy. Probation is still the condition of mankind. For though man is fallen and therefore under the bondage of sin, through Christ (the second Adam) man has his moral freedom restored to such an extent that he can avail himself of the provisions God has made for his salvation.

#### *Sanctification*

The word “sanctify” is used with two broad meanings: (1) The first is to devote, to consecrate to God, to recognize as holy, that is, as belonging to God. This is the regular Old Testament usage and is most



common in the New Testament. The prophets showed that this belonging to Yahweh demanded righteousness. The New Testament deepens this into a whole-hearted surrender to the fellowship of God and to the rule of His Spirit. (2) Though the word itself appears in but few passages with this sense, the New Testament is full of the thought of the making holy of the Christian's life by the Spirit of God in that fellowship into which God lifts us by His grace and in which He gives Himself to us. The...general conclusion that we draw from the New Testament teaching as to the Christian life is this: the sanctification which is a part of all Christian living follows from the very nature of that life as fellowship with God. Fundamental here is the fact that the Christian life is personal, that nothing belongs in it which cannot be stated in personal terms. It is a life with God in which He graciously gives Himself to us, and which we live out with Him and with our brothers in the spirit of Christ, which is His Spirit. The two great facts as to this fellowship are, that it is God's gift, and that its fruit is holiness.

First, it is God's gift. What God gives us is nothing less than Himself. The gift is not primarily forgiveness, nor victory over sin, nor peace of soul, nor hope of heaven. It is fellowship with Him, which includes all of these and without which none of these can be.

Secondly, the fruit of this fellowship is holiness. The real hallowing of our life can come in no other way. For Christian holiness is personal, not something formal or ritual, and its source and power can be nothing lower than the personal. Such is

the fellowship into which God graciously lifts the believer.

Sanctification is man's task...All Christian life is gift and task alike. "Work out your own salvation .... for it is God who worketh in you" (Phil. 2:12 f). All is from God; we can only live what God gives. But there is a converse to this: only as we live it out can God give to us the life. This appears in Paul's teaching as to sanctification. It is not only God's gift, but our task. "This is the will of God, even your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:3). "Having therefore these promises .... let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness (*hagiosune*) in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). Significant is Paul's use of the word "walk." We are to "walk in newness of life," "by (or in) the Spirit," "in love," and "in Christ Jesus the Lord" (Rom. 6:4, Gal. 5:16, Eph. 5:2, Col 2:6). It is only as we walk by the Spirit that this becomes powerful in overcoming the lusts of the flesh (Gal. 5:16; compare 5:25).

If God gives only as we live, then He cannot give all at once. Sanctification is then the matter of a life and not of a moment. The life may be consecrated in a moment, the right relation to God assumed, and the man stand in saving fellowship with Him. The life is thus made holy in principle. But the real making holy is co-extensive with the whole life of man. It is nothing less than the constant in-forming of the life of the inner spirit and outer deed with the Spirit of Christ until we, "speaking truth in love, may grow up in all things into him, who is the head" (Eph. 4:15).

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from The New Unger's Bible Dictionary. Originally published by Moody Press of Chicago, Illinois. Copyright © 1988.



#### RESOURCES

##### NEEDED:

- ◆ 2-sided copies of Lesson Notes / Take-Home pages
- ◆ 2-sided Student Graphs of Figures 1-6 (Original follows Lesson 4's Lesson Notes / Take-Home pages)
- ◆ 11" x 17" Teacher Resource: Displays for Figures 1-6  
**Note:** You will use Figs. 5 and 6 again in Lesson 8
- ◆ Pencils or pens for each person
- ◆ Dry erase markers and white board or felt tip markers and a flip chart
- ◆ Index cards for each class member
- ◆ Optional: Crayons for use in Step 1

##### TIME FRAME:

- ◆ 45 minutes

## LESSON PLAN

#### Focal Scriptures:

- ◆ 2 Corinthians 3:18
- ◆ Matthew 7:13-14
- ◆ Galatians 2:20
- ◆ Matthew 16:24-25

#### Maturity Insights Covered in This Lesson:

- ◆ **Maturity Insight 6:** God, the Father, Purposes to Mold Us into the Image of Christ and to Experience with Us the Same Intimacy He Has with the Son

#### Teaching Goals:

Department members will

- ◆ Learn: Being a Christian means being an image bearer of Christ
- ◆ Learn: Experiential sanctification involves dying on the cross with Christ
- ◆ Experience: Imagine and identify their heart response to Christ's commitment to His Father as He took up His cross and walked to Golgotha; reflect on making their Matthew 16:24-25 commitment to die on the cross of sanctification in order to become a spiritual father/mother

#### Before Class Begins:

- ◆ Distribute index cards onto chairs or tables in your classroom for use in "An Image of Me" on students' Lesson Notes. *Optional:* Also supply a variety of colors of crayons if your class is seated at tables.

#### STEP ONE: GETTING READY TO LEARN (7 MINUTES)

- ◆ Refer your classmates to "An Image of Me" on Lesson Notes. Read Step 1 for them and allow one minute for them to complete it.
- ◆ Lead them through forming groups of 5-6 people and completing the remaining steps in the exercise.
- ◆ When they're done, tell them: Today we'll consider a wondrous thought—that God's purpose is to mold each of us to "look like Jesus." No, we won't have long hair, a beard, and flowing robes. But we can reflect His image so that others can recognize it! We'll examine how and why God makes us into Christ's image bearers.

#### STEP TWO: GOD, THE FATHER, PURPOSES TO MOLD US INTO THE IMAGE OF CHRIST AND TO EXPERIENCE WITH US THE SAME INTIMACY HE HAS WITH THE SON! (20 MINUTES)

- ◆ Write *text from Step 2 (Maturity Insight 6)* on your white board or flip chart. Lead class members to fill in the blanks on their Lesson Notes. Reiterate the insight.

**NOTE:** You will need to move quickly through the points in this section in order to stay within your timeframe!



- ◆ Paint a mental image of the difference between Christ and us from “Studying the Word Together” (pp. 4-2 through first part of 4-3). Communicate the concept that God has greater purpose for each of us than we can ever imagine! His plan is not merely to save us for eternal relationship with Him. Wonder at the significance He brings to our lives, as He prepares us to bear the image of Christ: *Christ in you, the hope of glory (Col. 1:27)*.
- ◆ Write “***We are Christ’s image bearers***” on the whiteboard. Quote Romans 8:28 and ask your class what this passage means to them. As you seek responses, ask questions such as, “So, since Aunt Susie loves the Lord, will she not die from cancer?” “Will that teenager whose parents love the Lord recover fully from his injuries in that automobile accident?” Then explain that Romans 8:29 clarifies God’s good purpose: to mold us into the image of Jesus (pp. 4-3 to 4-4).
- ◆ Use the 11" x 17" Teacher Resource and refer to the Student Graphs as you lead class members through the scriptures and concepts regarding the presence and absence of God’s image on earth (Figs. 1-4, pp. 4-4–4-6).
- ◆ Refer to 2 Corinthians 3:18 on their Lesson Notes; allow time to turn in their Bibles to the passage. Ask a volunteer to read it aloud. Make it clear that God’s image is now throughout the world, in thousands of places wherever there are followers of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ Transition to the next thought by writing the following to complete the blanks on their handout: ***God longs for intimacy with us just as we long to experience being close to Him.*** Help them experience emotionally God’s longing for us to be close to Him. Grieve with God His loss in the Garden, as the closeness He had

enjoyed was broken by Adam and Eve’s sin. Or describe Christ’s sorrow when only one of the ten lepers—the Samaritan—returned to express gratitude for being healed. To connect hearts as well as minds to God’s desire to be close to His children, highlight Roger’s story of his grief over loss of relationship with Jessie .

- ◆ Write on the board: ***Reflecting the glory of Christ means that others can see His loving nature and character in our behavior.*** To explain the idea of reflecting or glorifying Christ, use the story of the owl and binoculars or highlight the contrast between the styles of Spurgeon and Parker.
- ◆ Pause for a reflective interlude. Guide your class members to consider the extent to which they currently reflect Jesus’ image. Encourage them to envision the joy of life in fulfilled, constant companionship with God.

### STEP THREE:

#### SANCTIFICATION IS THE PROCESS WE EXPERIENCE AS WE BECOME CHRIST’S IMAGE BEARERS (15 MINUTES)

- ◆ Write the ***text of Step Three*** on the white board or flip chart, directing your class members to complete the blanks on their Lesson Notes.
- ◆ Using Roger’s model on pages 4-9–4-11, teach the “sanctification road map.”
- ◆ Have a volunteer read Matthew 7:13-14, as you indicate the Cross of ***Salvation*** on Figure 5. Explain that salvation is the first purpose of the Cross of Christ.
- ◆ Ask someone to read Galatians 2:20. Summarize Galatians 5:24-25 and 6:14. State that the second function of

## Lesson 4

# The Prayer God Always Answers

### Becoming Image Bearers of Christ



the cross is sanctification—growing into the image of Christ.

- ◆ As another volunteer reads aloud Matthew 16:24-25, fill in the Cross of **Sanctification** on the chart. Explain that taking up this cross involves our volitional choice. It means giving up our self-reliance, self-centeredness, and self-condemnation—yielding ourselves fully to the process of becoming a spiritual mother or father—at any price.
- ◆ Contrast the defeated, stagnant lives of those who seek to avoid the cross with the victorious freedom and joy of those who “take up their cross.”
- ◆ Quickly explain Figure 6. Teach your students that, as Roger explains on page **4-12**, spiritual growth is a dynamic, fluid, ever-evolving process.

### STEP FOUR: CLOSING MEDITATION (5 MINUTES)

- ◆ Read or relate Roger’s story of the French girl. Ask your students to look back at Figure 5 and reflect where they are on the graph. Allow some time for quiet reflection.
- ◆ Lead them to pray in unison the prayer on their Lesson Notes.
- ◆ From “A Final Thought” (p. **4-13**), mention the concepts of pride and brokenness to be covered in a future lesson.
- ◆ Point out the Reflections on the Take-Home page.
- ◆ Refer to the description of next week’s topic, “Spiritual Development Stages,” on their Lesson Notes.

# Today in My Department

## *An Image of Me*

1. On the 3" x 5" index card your teacher has given you, sketch an image of yourself. Include enough recognizable features that others can tell that it is you, but don't show it to anyone yet.
2. As your teacher directs, form a group with 4-5 other people.
3. Hand all index cards, blank side up, to one person in your group, who will shuffle and randomly redistribute them among the group members.
4. Take turns holding up the cards you have been given and guessing whose image is sketched on each card.

## **MATURITY INSIGHT 6:**

God, the Father, purposes to \_\_\_\_\_ us into the \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ and to experience with us the same \_\_\_\_\_ He has with the Son!

- ◆ We are Christ's \_\_\_\_\_.
- ◆ God longs for \_\_\_\_\_ with us just as we long to experience being close to Him.
- ◆ Reflecting the \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ means that others can see the loving nature and character of Christ in our behavior.

## **Sanctification is...**

the \_\_\_\_\_ we experience as we become Christ's \_\_\_\_\_.

- ◆ The Cross of Christ has two purposes: salvation and sanctification.
- ◆ Some seek to avoid the cross. Some "take up their cross."  
*Spiritual young men and women consciously surrender to the sanctifying work of the cross.*

## **Next week: "Spiritual Development Stages"**

We'll explore these questions: What does the Bible say about these stages? What do they look like in real life? Where am I in my journey?

## **Today's Scriptures**

**2 Corinthians 3:18** - And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

**Matthew 7:13-14** - Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.



**Galatians 2:20** - I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

**Matthew 16:24-25** - Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it."

*Father, thank You for Your love, tenderness, and compassion that You share with us. I desire to grow into the spiritual man or woman that You want me to be—bearing Your glory in my everyday living, and having an intimacy with You that transcends all. May I recognize Your hand at work in my life. Please mold me into a spiritual mother or father at any price. Amen.*



## Becoming Image Bearers of Christ

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## Daily Reflections

**Monday:** *I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:5).*

Jesus comforted His disciples as they walked together toward Gethsemane. He was leaving, but He would not leave them alone. The closeness they had experienced with Him in the flesh, they could continue in the Spirit—if they chose to remain in Him. Do you hear His desire for close connectivity with His followers? Will you choose that intimate relationship, that dependence upon Him? Rejoice in the privilege of connecting so intimately with your Savior!

**Tuesday:** *This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples (John 15:8).*

Bruce Wilkinson defines *fruit* as representing good works—a thought, attitude, or action of ours that God values because it glorifies Him.<sup>1</sup> How exciting that our thoughts, attitudes, or actions can glorify God! Yet how humbling that others can—or cannot—see Jesus in us! Does your heart long to be an accurate reflection of Him? Then tell Him so. Invite Him to polish your mirror!

**Wednesday:** *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:23-26).*

How crucified does your sinful nature feel? Most likely, your answer would vary day to day—even moment by moment! Isn't it wonderful that our *feelings* do not accurately measure the truth of Whose we are? If you belong to Christ, your sinful nature is crucified. Isn't it comforting to know that the crucifixion of your old nature flows not from your strength, but from His? Celebrate as He guides your steps and leads you into the reality of His freedom.

**Thursday:** *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose...to be conformed to the likeness of his Son... (Rom. 8:28-29).*

How would you respond if a close friend were to ask, "How's things?" Would it be "Fantastic! I am so excited about..." Or "The pits! I am miserable because..." Or somewhere in between? Can you accept the fact that no matter how good or bad life is at this moment, God will work *all things* together for your good—to conform you to the likeness of Jesus? If your burden is heavy at the moment, bring it to the Father. Imagine handing that sack of stuff to Him. Then tell Him: "I'm handing this ugly mess to you. I know that You can transform it into something beautiful. I don't know how and I don't know when—but I know that You will do what you have promised!" Linger with Him; rejoice in His love, His trustworthiness. Does your burden seem easier to bear?

**Friday:** *His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness...[and] he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires (2 Peter 1:3-4).*

If anyone ever understood the contrast between human weakness and God's power, it was Peter. The braggart who promised courage and delivered cowardice was transformed at Pentecost into the Spirit-filled preacher whose first sermon brought 3000 converts! Will you, like Peter, set aside self-effort and rely instead on His divine power to make you like Jesus? Draw near to the Father; allow His nature to seep in and fill you to overflowing!

<sup>1</sup> Bruce Wilkinson, *Secrets of the Vine* (Sisters, OR, 2001), 21.

*Becoming Image Bearers of Christ*

# God's Image on Earth

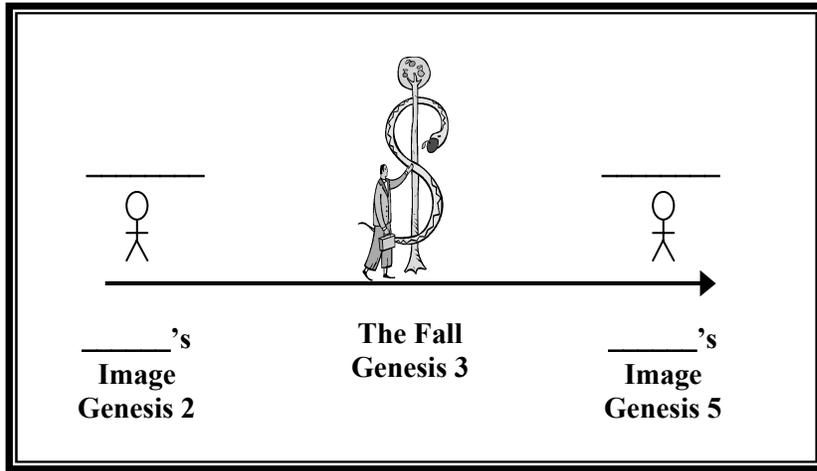


Figure 1: Adam in God's Image; Seth in Man's Image

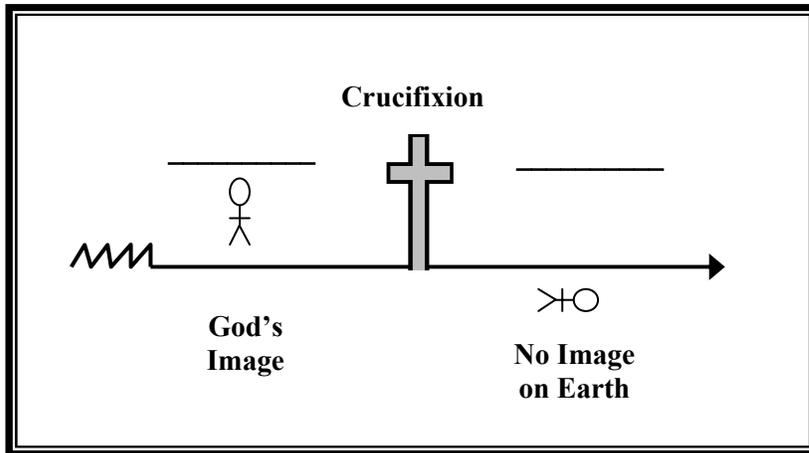


Figure 2: Jesus in God's Image, Crucifixion, and Burial

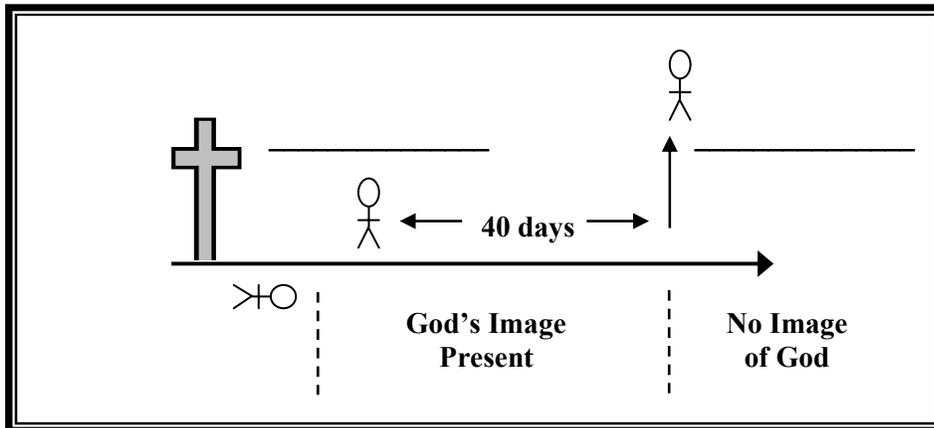


Figure 3: Resurrection, Appearances, Ascension

# God's Image / Our Sanctification

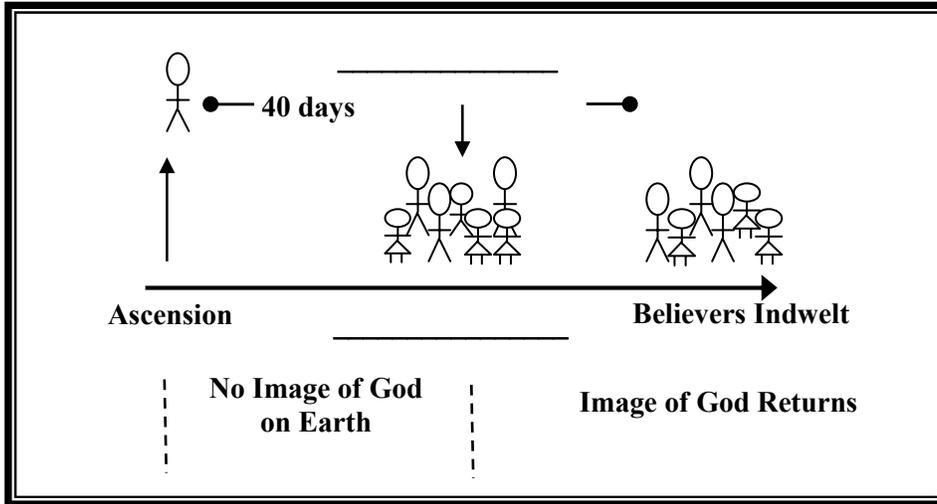


Figure 4: Image of God Returns

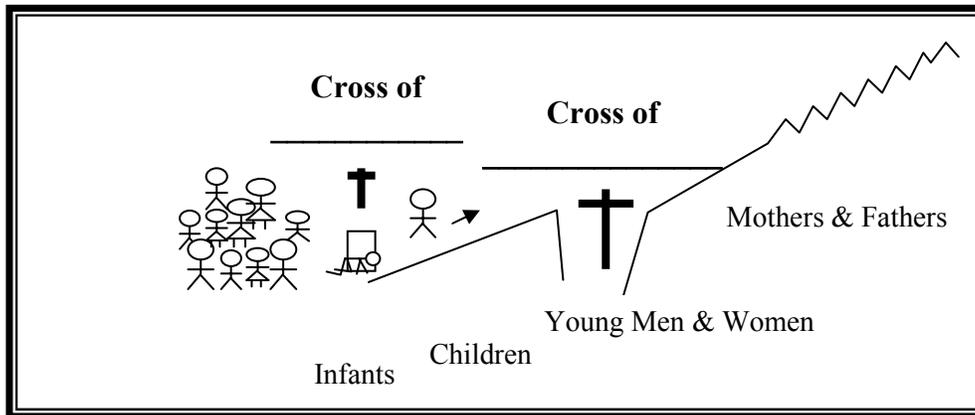


Figure 5: The Cross of Salvation and the Cross of Sanctification

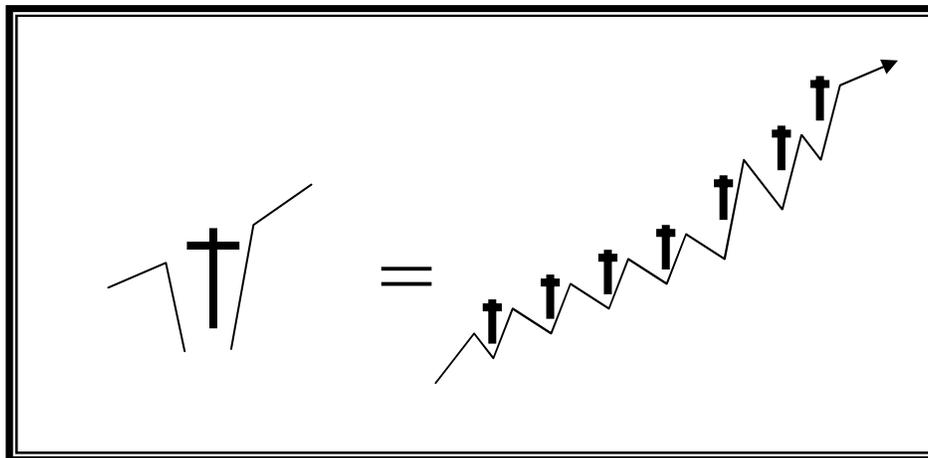


Figure 6: We Encounter Many Sanctifying Crosses