

Session One

Climbing Higher

THE ASCENDING LIFE

God's Golden Stairway to Glory

PRINCIPLES OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

THE PRINCIPLE OF A RECOGNIZED IDEAL

Matthew 5:48, Romans 8:28-30



Base Camp

Introduction. -- God's purpose for us is that we become like Jesus.

Matt Camp. 5:48: *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

Rom. 8:29: *For those whom God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son . . .* (See also Eph. 1:4 and Col. 1:22 and other scriptures. Throughout this series, whenever scripture verses are not printed out, please open your Bibles and read them aloud.)

In the first century the Gospel spread more rapidly than at any other time in history. WHY? The Gospel spread because of the quality of the lives of Jesus' followers, the Christians. They lived and died like JESUS! The word "Christian" means "like Christ." They allowed God to mold them and to make them into the image of Jesus. The New Testament encourages us to imitate Christ (I Cor. 11:1 ¹ *Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.* and Eph. 5:1-2 ¹ *Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children* ² *and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*)

- I. **What kind of person was Jesus?** He was our IDEAL PERSON! Obviously, he never sinned or made a mistake. He was the one and only totally perfect God/man.
1. He was the most understanding, loving, accepting, forgiving person who ever lived. He was completely non-threatening to lost sinners, but was perceived as threatening by the established clergy of his day--because he would not be bound by their theology or their system!
 2. He was a person who always acted according to the best interest of those with whom he was dealing, rather than reacting to what others did or were doing. He never let others push him into doing something or saying something. He was in complete control of himself in every situation, even at his trial and crucifixion.
 3. He was totally honest and open (transparent--he had nothing to hide). He condemned the religious rulers openly, to their faces and not behind their backs (Matt. 23).
 4. He never forced people to obey him or acclaim him. He never drew attention purposely to himself. He never made a campaign speech to gain followers. He simply taught God's revealed truth and let that and his own character and personality speak for itself (John 5:19,30). His calling and purpose was to reveal God, His heavenly Father, to us.
 6. He always seemed to know everything about everyone. He saw right into their hearts, not to judge them, but to help them in a loving and respecting way. He was never paternal, never looked down on others. He always brought out the best in others. (Think of Mary Magdalene, for example, and Peter and the other apostles.) He always helped people preserve their self-respect. He was always kind, even to women (John 8:1-11) and children (Matt. 19:13-15) which was extremely rare in his day. He never harmed anyone in any way, but always *went about doing good* (Acts 10:38). He perfectly demonstrated God's kind of LOVE (agape). *(A deep, unconditional, unselfish desire for the very best for the person loved regardless of the cost to yourself and regardless of the worthiness or unworthiness of the person loved. It is something you do more than something you feel. It requires the action of the*

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7. He never defended himself, never used violence, even verbally, except against those who deceived the people. He often allowed himself to suffer at the hands of wicked men rather than try to oppose them, knowing that God, the Father, would vindicate him and judge them.

II. How did Jesus get to be this kind of person?

1. We would all agree that he was born that way because he was miraculously conceived by the power of God, the Holy Spirit, in the virgin, Mary, and therefore did not inherit the sin nature with which all the rest of us are born.
2. Having said that, it must also be said that he was who he was because of his very deeply personal communion with his heavenly Father (John 1:1, 8:28-29).

III. How can we become like Jesus?

1. We become like Jesus first of all by being born again! We can never experience a virgin birth but we can experience a new, spiritual birth which makes us new people and gives us a new nature (John 3:1-21, II Cor. 5:17, II Pet. 1:3-4).
2. We also become like Jesus by spending time with the Father in a close personal relationship as he did. This requires TIME spent in the Word, in meditation and in prayer. It means developing a consciousness of His presence at all times.
3. As we ascend our mountain of spiritual growth we will learn more about how to do this.

IV. What would the world be like if everyone had the character of Jesus?

1. **Personal life would be different.** -- We would all enjoy better health because we would not allow ourselves to be stressed. We would have no bad habits. We would eat simple food without over-eating. We would walk much, as our health allows it, in order to maintain our health and be of service to others. We would have very little illness because our bodies would be able to fend off disease and most bacteria and viruses. We would enjoy personal peace in the midst of the turmoil of life all around us! We would almost never suffer from high blood pressure brought on by fear or guilt or anger. We would never have to hide anything and wonder if we would ever

be found out! We would never feel hatred or envy or bitterness or jealousy or greed or selfishness but would be filled with JOY, love, peace and all of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23)!

2. **Family life would be different.** -- In the family there would be mutually unselfish love and respect, each seeking what is best for the others. There would be no envy or sibling rivalry or jealousy or distrust or anger. There would be no insecure, rejected, unwanted or unloved children but only children who are loved and appreciated and who are helped to develop into everything that God wants them to be. There would be no adultery, no divorce; no loneliness or unfulfilled, frustrated people.
3. **Social life would be different.** -- There would be no fear of neighbors, no fear of police nor of criminals; no locked doors; no security systems. No desire to "keep up with the Joneses" or to be better than others. No false impressions or masks; no "hollow" people; no walls or fences to separate us from our neighbors. No spending just for the sake of appearances. There would be no racial or social stigma or prejudice, no social classes but social equality for everyone.
4. **Economic life would be different.** -- Employers would pay honest wages and employees would do honest work according to the agreement when they were hired. They would work together for the benefit of all. Neither would try to cheat the other nor would they cheat their customers. All prices would be reasonable. No one would be very rich and no one would be very poor. Management personnel would make sure they did not live too far above the level of their workers but would share the wealth of the company with ALL those who work for it. There would be no need for organized labor or for company cartels or monopolies. There would be no strikes or lock-outs; no exploitation; no greedy demands.
5. **Political life would be different.** -- There would be no negative campaigning, no false campaign promises; no compromise with principle just to get votes to be elected. There would be no pressure groups, no lobbies, no vested interests all vying for the best deal for themselves regardless of the needs of others. There would be no use of political position for personal privilege and financial gain. There would be no

difficulty in governing because everyone would want to cooperate for the good of all and everyone would want to do what is right for the sake of everyone else--for the people as a whole.

6. **International life would be different.** -- Nations would not be afraid of each other but would cooperate for the good of the whole world. Worldwide interests would take precedence over local and national interests. Wealth and jobs and education and training would be shared with all peoples for the sake of all. Nations would stop trying to dominate each other but would cooperate with each other with mutual respect.
7. **Religious life would be different.** -- Worship would be a time of joyous celebration of the personal relationship we enjoy with the Father through Jesus, the Son, by the Holy Spirit. Churches would not vie with one another or be jealous of one another, but would always seek to help each other to be the best training ground possible for new believers. Church members would never be jealous of one another but would *rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep* (Romans 12:15). ALL members would attend every meeting of the church designed for them. Each member would give at least a tithe (one tenth) to the work of the Lord through the Church. Every member would be a growing Christian, witnessing winsomely to the power of the Gospel to save, witnessing out of the overflow of his/her joy in the Lord and not because of a program. Church members would share Christ naturally and automatically with all of their neighbors and friends! Prayer meeting attendance would be at 100% of membership and all would pray earnestly and with joy for the power of God to work through them each day of the week.

Conclusion -- All of this is very idealistic, of course, but it is exactly what God has every right to expect from His people as we grow up and mature in Him. God has saved us not just from eternal hell, but from the hell of our own selfish lower nature, from all that drags us downward. We must not only believe in Jesus for salvation but we must also let Him be LORD of our lives and allow Him to re-make us into his own image. The rest of this series is designed to help us do that.

