

Becoming like Him

By Elder Scott D. Whiting of the Seventy

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" is daunting and seemingly unattainable.

There are some things including the references that Elder Whiting provided that are crucial to go over directly after this statement.

Matthew 5:48 JST

48 Ye are therefore commanded to be perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

3 Nephi 12:48

48 Therefore I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect

We should as members take time to reflect on why the Lord did not refer to himself as perfect in Jerusalem in Matthew 5 and why he referred to himself as perfect just like the Father while he was in the Americas in 3 Nephi 12. We are given one mortal probation- it begins at birth and ends at death. The Lord had not lived a "perfect life" until he hung on the cross and said "it is finished" and gave up the ghost.

Joseph Smith further clarifies, cements, and wraps this all together in Lectures on Faith, lecture five:

"And [the son] descended in suffering below that which man can suffer; or in other words, he suffered greater sufferings and was exposed to more powerful contradictions than any man can be. But notwithstanding all this, he kept the law of God and remained without sin, showing thereby *that it is in the power of man to keep the law and remain also without sin*. And also that by him a righteous judgment might come upon all flesh, that all who walk not in the law of God may justly be condemned by the law and *have no excuse for their sins*."

Being perfect is daunting and it does seem unattainable. But when members say "no one is perfect" or "no one can be perfect" they deny not only what the Savior accomplished, they deny what the Savior proved by what he accomplished. Firstly, what did the Savior accomplish? A perfect life and the atonement. The atonement did not make him perfect, being perfect allowed him to perform the atonement in conjunction with being the son of God which allowed him to suffer beyond the capacity of mortal men. Secondly, what did that prove? It proved that everyone can be perfect and should be perfect and will be judged to that standard.

Imagine if you will your Father in heaven sending you down to earth and then asking you to do things that were literally impossible for you to do and then as soon as you made a mistake he immediately cut you off from his presence. Would such a God be just? Would such a God or

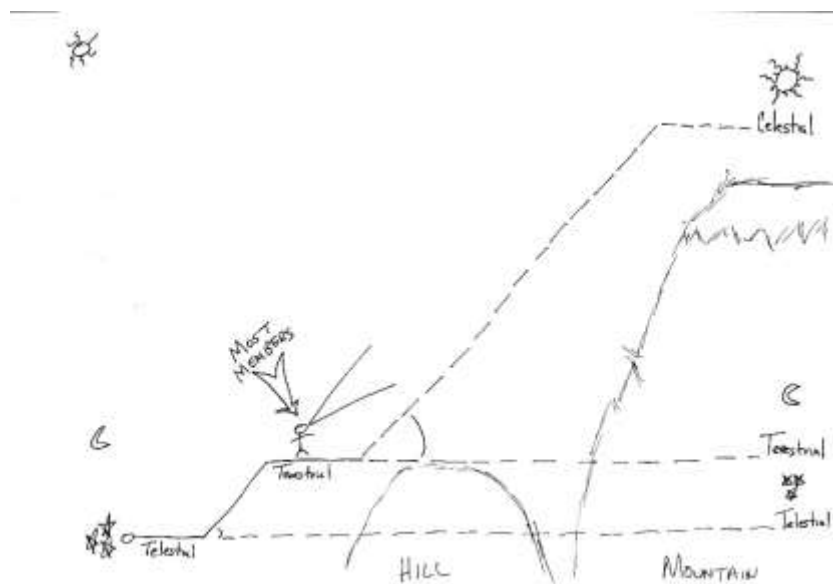
father be worthy of your love? It was equally important for the Savior to prove that God's laws were just, and that all men in the flesh could abide by them perfectly.

Every time we say "no one can be perfect" that is a false doctrine. "There was only one perfect man", that is a correct statement. The Savior, through the atonement, through his blood, provides the means by which we fallen, imperfect creatures, can wash our blood-soaked clothes and make them white. Though we all are fallen and imperfect, we through this, through the atonement, can become literally perfect. This does not mean that we yet won't make mistakes but it does mean that when you are "perfect in the Lord" the path you are on, which includes faith, hope, repentance etc, becomes so ingrained in your character that the Lord knows that you won't stop until you have reached perfection or in the words of Joseph Smith, "once the Savior has thoroughly proved the individual" then one's calling and election is made sure.

This talk is of crucial importance for without understanding and implementing this one cannot have their calling and election made sure (see my paper *Agency in Progression*).

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.

Or in other words, some members because this process of moving from a terrestrial sphere to a celestial sphere is too painful/uncomfortable/etc choose instead to focus on the "milk" (or as some say, "the meat and potatoes"). The process of moving from a terrestrial sphere to a terrestrial sphere is a process of being on the incline. There are changes that individuals need to make, steps, and ordinances that they need to fulfill etc etc. Moving from the terrestrial sphere to the celestial sphere is the same process, however, the space between the terrestrial and celestial is much greater than between the terrestrial to the terrestrial. Going from a terrestrial to terrestrial feels and looks an awful lot like climbing a hill. Going from the terrestrial to the celestial is like standing on that hill and looking up at Mount Everest. See below my hokey visual that might help you visualize what I'm saying.



What Elder Whiting is describing is members of the Church, those that are now standing on a terrestrial sphere, have a tendency to look at the mountain looming in front of them and instead of kicking it into overdrive, and set it to incline and climb to the top of the mountain, what a lot of members do however, which Elder Whiting is describing here, is instead of marching up the mountain they trek a course around the mountain at its base. Just like the children of Israel with Moses. They then convince themselves that when life is over God will just pluck them up from the base of the mountain and drop them on top of the mountain despite the fact that all they have done is walk in circles around the mountain their whole lives. Staying level in the gospel on a diet of “milk”, a life of no incline will park you directly in the terrestrial kingdom of which the Lord said “they were members of the Church who were not valiant” ie. these were members that never inclined.

Elder Whiting’s talk is crucial because it is an attempt to open members’ minds and to show them the way (and the only way) that they may attain a celestial glory ie. end up at the top of the mountain.

“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.

There might be those who after reading to this point came to the same conclusion, that Elder Whiting and Micah are being hyperbolic and unrealistic and that this is to be understood more figurative.

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?

These are the kind of questions that a master teacher asks his students. The age of idiom of “if I’m wrong I make it, and if you are wrong you don’t make it” plays out here. If Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, Elder Whiting, Micah etc are all wrong and the Lord doesn’t expect you to ever learn how to eat meat, if that is true, Joseph Smith, Elder Whiting, Micah etc all still make it. If you are wrong and Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon etc are correct and this knowledge was clearly available to you and you refused it, you won’t make it. That’s a risk that every member of the human race is going to have to determine for themselves, but what they don’t get to determine is the consequences for their actions. If they are wrong, they don’t make it.

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.” 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.”

As if Elder Eyring, Elder Holland, and Elder Whiting were all the same individual writing three parts of the same talk, Elder Whiting just like Elder Holland includes Elder Neal A. Maxwell here. The most damning thing that members do, and frankly repulsive thing that members do is not just extoling Christ and not emulating him, it is not simply enjoying ease and comfort versus taking the cross, it is far worse than this, what we do as members is we convince ourselves or teach that being half-hearted, lacking enthusiasm, loving ease and comfort, ie. milk, etc, that all of that is being Christ-like. It is one thing to hide, to be a coward, to love ease and comfort etc, but it is another beast entirely, a repulsive and disgusting beast, when we then hold up this behavior and say “this is Christ”. Those people don’t know Christ. Christ is helping people make it up the mountain; they are circling the base of it and convincing other members to stay there.

In fact, all are under the directive to become like Him, just as Jesus Christ became like the Father. As we progress, we become more complete, finished, and fully developed. 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.

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.

We have to learn this because without knowing this we won’t know who the Savior is and we then might be emulating a version of “the Price of Peace” that is nothing like the Prince of Peace himself.

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 have the desire to do so.

Missionaries that have worked with me or who have read my “*Master Teacher: Teaching for Edification*” know this is always the first answer- that is desire. This one is hard for people in some cases, near impossible in others, because to accept this doctrine forces individuals into a state of staring at themselves made bare. It removes the largest false shield that we put up to protect ourselves from having to be honest with ourselves. That shield is used in this way, “I might have cheated on my wife, but my desire, my heart, is/wants to be loyal to my wife.” The truth of the matter is if it was something you truly desired or at the very least desired more you wouldn’t have cheated.

There might be some members getting upset right now- hold on for one second and let me give you an example that I know you have taught a million times. And that is of Nephi and his brothers getting the brass plates. How do you as a member teach this? I know because I have listened to members teach this for 35 years. Who had the desire to get the brass plates? I have never heard this taught in any other way other than Nephi had the desire ie. “I will go and I will do” (1 Nephi 3:7). The second question would be, how do you know Nephi had the desire or why/how do we as members arrive at the conclusion (ie. judge) that Nephi is the answer to that question? Didn’t Nephi fail twice along with his brothers? The only way that we know definitively what Nephi’s desire was is based off of his actions, the fruit, which we identify as the brass plates in this example. We do it again with the broken bow and we do it again with the ship etc etc. And, we make no excuses for Laman and Lemuel- there is nobody in Sunday school that raises their hand and says, “yeah but we shouldn’t judge Laman and Lemuel, we don’t know their hearts.” People as a defense will say “the Lord judges us based off of the desires of our heart, not based off of our actions” but the truth is, and this is the painful truth, that our actions are a reflection of our desire. There is not somebody who just accidentally ends up on the top of Mount Fuji or who ends up cheating on their wife or randomly stumbles across the brass plates.

The painting, the tapestry of our life is a reflection of our desires throughout life. This is why the first step to anything in this life is desire. You want to be a master chef? You are not going to get there accidentally. Your desire to be a master chef has to be greater than all of your other desires. You want to be a master pianist? It doesn’t happen accidentally- the desire to be that has to be greater than all of the other desires in your life. And so it is with the celestial kingdom. Your desire for it has to bridle and overcome all other desires in your life.

My mother was a convert in Canada, not Alberta Canada, Winnipeg Manitoba Canada. There was one branch in the entire 800,000 population city. She graduated from high school and saved up enough money and wanted to buy a 1960’s Ford Mustang. But she also wanted to marry a member of the Church and have a family. There were other girls her age in the branch but no men. She decided to sell the car she did own and move down to Utah. She was married within a couple years to my father. After I got married my wife and I moved into a unit in Winnipeg that had as one of its members one of these sisters that my mother knew from before. She was living financially comfortable and was single and never married. If you were to ask an honest individual, an honest individual, which of these two women had a desire to get married to a member of the Church and have a family no one would say “you can’t judge their desires”.

So desire is first. But how do we obtain it?

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. To develop the desire, we must know who Jesus Christ is. We must know something of His character, 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.

No one decides to become a master pianist without first knowing what a master pianist is. No one decides to become a master chef without first knowing what it is. This is taught, once again, in the Lectures on Faith, “We showed [in lecture 2] that it was by reason of the knowledge of his existence that there was a foundation laid for the exercise of faith in him as the only being in whom faith could center for life and salvation. For faith could not center in a being of whose existence we had no idea, because the idea of his existence, in the first instance, is essential to the exercise of faith in him. “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (or one sent to tell them?) (Rom. 10:14). So, then, faith comes by hearing the word of God.” (Lectures on Faith, Lecture Three). Paul says something similar in Romans 10:17, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

So in the first case man must be introduced to something, what man does after being introduced to it is a reflection of his desire. So for example, two men are shown baseball- one man learns how to play baseball and joins a team and the other man does not. Both were introduced to the thing, both made choices and those choices were a reflection of their desire, with the strongest desire taking precedence.

Elder Whiting is suggesting that to increase one’s desire in a sphere one must surround themselves with the sphere. The age old idioms of “birds of a feather flock together” or “if you wish to be great surround yourself with greatness” or in the example above, if you are the man who didn’t learn how to play baseball or join the team how do you increase your desire? By sitting in the baseball meetings, by learning about baseball, by enveloping yourself in it- the longer one does this, the more of a desire they will have to learn and play baseball. The same principle applies to the Savior. You want to be more like him? Surround yourself with his doctrine, envelop yourself in his words, learn everything you can about him, etc. And the more you do this, the more your desire to be like him or emulate him will increase. This equally applies to negative influences. You hang around negative influences, you hang around with people practicing priestcraft, you hang around materialistic individuals etc long enough, and your desires will change over time to be more lock in step with those you chose to surround yourself with.

So recapping: we first hear and our desires are reflected in our actions from hearing (remember faith=action), the more we hear or surround ourselves with something, the more our desire changes to reflect that which we are hearing and surrounding ourselves with and our actions will follow suit. If we wish to change our outcome we must first change what we are hearing and who we are surrounding ourselves with. Then our desire will change to match those things and then our actions and desired result will follow suit.

What is the next thing that can cripple us? What is the next most important thing?

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

The next step is honesty. If we look at the situation in clarity and proceed to murky the waters how will we be able to evaluate, be accountable, and improve? For example, if you are struggling with your weight, you don't like that result, if you are to evaluate the situation honestly you would evaluate your behavior, who you hang out with, what you hear on a daily basis (ie. if you are told all the time that you look good the way you are) etc, by being honest in your evaluation and then making the changes, you will see an increase in your desire to be fit and your actions and the results will follow suit. However, if you are not honest when evaluating you will be completely ineffective in judging the source and thus you will have zero improvement, ie. you will circle the mountain instead of climbing it.

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.

Another helpful tool that you can use is that of a questionnaire like the one provided in [Preach My Gospel Chapter 6 Christlike Attributes](#). Once again however that would only be as useful as your honesty.

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. Perhaps you will learn that you need greater patience, humility, charity, love, hope, diligence, or obedience, to name a few.

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](#).

[Umm, totally forgot that he included this! I did it with the mountain metaphor and now I did it with this. We are on the same page.](#)

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.”

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.

Repenting has become too taboo. It has become something seemingly only used in a negative light. The ability to repent, to learn, grow, screw up and get better etc is a gift that we should be grateful for. If you were putting together a piece of Ikea furniture and someone came along and said “I think you are putting that on backwards” would you respond, “Don’t judge me! You don’t know my heart!” or would you be thankful that they attempted to save you time and effort and hear them out. Now if the worst case scenario played out and the individual trying to correct you was actually wrong and the way you were putting together the furniture was actually correct, would you be upset with the individual? Would you be mad at them? Or should we just be grateful that we made sure we were building it right? If that is how we act with something as insignificant as Ikea furniture, why can’t we see the value of this in something of such an eternal weight as the gospel? Satan robbing accountability and responsibility from the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and replacing it with a spirit of “don’t judge me” and apathy has been one of the most damning effects on the Church membership. We need to remember that “the Lord loveth whom he chasteneth” and he whom the Lord does not chasten or he who does not endure chastening is not a son of Christ but a bastard (Hebrews 12:8).

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.

He goes over three important points here:

1. None of these attributes come cheaply or quickly
2. The incremental increases we gain are directly related to why we want those gifts
3. All of the Christlike attributes are connected

Or in other words:

1. There is no pre-tribulation rapture. There is no “getting on your knees and praying until you are given the gifts”. We know that when one has perfected themselves in Christ that they will receive the Second Comforter. Ergo, no one receives the Second Comforter

overnight. Or as Elder Bednar said “decades of repeated emphasis speaks volumes/symphonies that singular events will never match”.

2. “Wherefore, seek not the things of this world but seek ye first to build up the kingdom of God, and to establish his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you...and after you have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them *for the intent to do good*- to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted.”(Matthew 6:33, Jacob 2:18-19)
3. Pick an attribute, one at a time, and try to increase it so that it is not as daunting. As you increase in this attribute a rising tide raises all ships, meaning other attributes will increase as well.

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 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.

He is now teaching the doctrine of accountability. Write down, perform, return and report.

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.

Once again, this is spoken with the understanding that God’s people don’t escape tribulation, tribulation makes God’s people. Much like a diet, there is no quick easy fix. You can’t go into this thinking “I’m going to sell a few of my possession, quit my band, say a prayer and I’ll be there”. Whoever is selling you that is selling you priestcraft like Nehor did, just like someone selling you “get fit fast and easy” is selling you what you want to hear, selling you a lie, because it makes you feel good.

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,” the only antidote, the only remedy, is to strive to be like the Savior, the Redeemer of all mankind, the Light of the World, and to seek after Him who declared, “I am the way.”

“Humility is willingness to submit to the will of the Lord (ie. “Let God Prevail”) and to give the Lord the honor for what is accomplished. It includes gratitude for His blessings and acknowledgment of your constant need for His divine help.” (Preach My Gospel, Chapter 6 Christlike Attributes, p.120) President Russell M. Nelson knows “better is he who humbleth himself verses he who is compelled to be humble.”

Like I always do with these papers, I don't like to dissect the testimonies at the end of the talks. So instead I will simply end with Elder Whiting's testimony and closing remarks.

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. 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.