

Becoming What We Behold

Deep within every true Christian is a longing to be more like Christ. We are not content as we are; we want to be changed. This longing comes from the Holy Spirit, who not only gives the new birth (John 3:5–8), but fills regenerated people with a zeal to glorify God (Rom. 8:1–5).

The question is, How can we become more like Christ? The biblical answer to this may be surprising to us pragmatic modern folks. We tend to look for methods, strategies, and action points. But the Bible teaches that we become like Jesus as we worship Jesus.

To understand why this is true, we need to understand how human beings are made. God designed us to be His image bearers:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

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

(Gen. 1:26–27)

Greg Beale observes: “God has made humans to reflect him, but if they do not commit themselves to him, they will not reflect him but something else. . . . We either reflect the Creator or something in creation.” In other words, it’s in our nature to bear the image of something. If not God, then idols. If not the Creator, then the creation.

And this is exactly what we see in the story of humanity. Throughout the Old Testament, God’s people repeatedly turn to idols—and the biblical writers show them becoming like those idols. When Israel bows down to the golden

calf at Mount Sinai, God calls them “stiff-necked” (Ex. 32:9), like a stubborn cow. In Isaiah 6:10, God curses His people with a sensory dullness that mirrors their idols: “Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes.” Second Kings 17:15 explains the exile by saying of Israel, “They went after false idols and became false.”

When we worship false gods, we become like them. Our worship of money makes us greedy and stingy. Our worship of power makes us harsh and demanding. Our worship of approval makes us anxious and fearful. Our worship of success makes us busy and restless. The more we avert our gaze from the true God and chase these idols, the more ungodly we become. Do you see this in your own life? What false gods do you find yourself chasing? How do you see yourself becoming like them instead of like Christ?

The more clearly we see God, the more we will become like Him.

Thankfully, we don't have to be conformed to the image of false gods. We can be conformed to the image of Christ. Consider 2 Corinthians 3:17–18:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

How are we transformed into the image of Christ? By beholding the glory of the Lord. Who causes us to behold this glory? The Spirit. And where do we behold this glory? Primarily in the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit is both the source of Scripture (Eph. 6:17; 2 Peter 1:20–21) and the One who illumines its meaning (Acts 10:44; 1 Cor. 2:4; 1 Thess. 1:5). We behold the glory of the Lord by allowing the Spirit to speak to us through the Word, bringing God's truth to our hearts with fresh power and urgency.

But perhaps this still sounds rather abstract. Does this beholding “just happen”? In one sense, yes, for it’s a gift of grace. But in another sense, beholding God’s glory involves purposeful effort. “I have set the LORD always before me,” the psalmist said (Ps. 16:8). “Choose this day whom you will serve,” Joshua demanded (Josh. 24:15). The language of worship in Scripture is always the language of commitment, devotion, and surrender.

Here, then, are three biblical ways we can purposefully worship the Lord and be changed into His likeness.

1. Contemplation/meditation (reflecting on God’s worth). The Bible urges us to think on the Lord (Ps. 1:2; Phil. 4:8). In contemplation, we slow down our minds and hearts to ponder God’s goodness. We mull over His promises, allowing them to sink into our souls. We read His Word thoughtfully, pondering its implications for our lives.
2. Praise/thanksgiving/singing (declaring God’s worth). The Scriptures encourage us to make our praise explicit by singing and making melody to the Lord (Ps. 96; Eph. 5:19). When we sing, we join our voices together to testify to God’s worth and beauty. Singing also lightens the heart and engages the body in purposeful worship of God.
3. Obedience/action/service (displaying God’s worth). The Bible is clear that our worship of God must find tangible expression in works of merciful neighbor-love (Isa. 58; James 1:27). As we serve the church, help the poor, and meet the needs of others, we demonstrate that Jesus is our true treasure (Matt. 6:21) and we learn afresh that “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

We become what we behold. So, empowered by the Holy Spirit, let’s behold the glory of the Lord Jesus by meditating on His Word, singing His praise, and obeying His commands. The more clearly we see Him, the more we will become like Him.