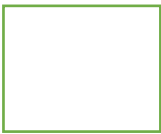


Becoming Like Jesus

On the Slow, Mysterious Work You Don't Do.

Christ is being formed in you – your part is to stay in the room.

WATCH BEFORE YOU BEGIN



Scan to watch the Lesson 7 teaching video – a 12-minute companion to this lesson.

CORE SCRIPTURE

My children, I am again suffering labor pains for you until Christ is formed in you.

—Galatians 4:19

Why Don't I Look More Like Him Yet?

It's a Tuesday afternoon. You snap at your spouse over something small — a tone in their voice, dishes in the sink, who can even tell. You walk away embarrassed, and somewhere in the back of your head, a voice you've been hearing more often these last few months pipes up: *I thought I'd be different by now.*

Maybe it's not your spouse. Maybe it's the scroll that ate forty minutes you'd promised yourself you wouldn't give it. Maybe it's the phone call you've been dodging, or the lie you told that was small enough to seem harmless until you replayed it that night. The specifics shift. The voice doesn't. *I thought I'd be different by now.*

If you've been walking with Jesus for somewhere between six months and a year, you've heard that voice. Most new Christians do. And most of them, without thinking much about it, resolve the discomfort in one of two ways. Some try harder — they read another book, sign up for another study, double down on the practices they hope will finally get them over the hump. Others quietly give up — they stop measuring, stop expecting, settle into the idea that maybe this is just how it's going to be.

Neither of those is what the New Testament says about how a person becomes like Jesus. There's a third option, and it doesn't look much like either of them.

DISCUSSION: Where does that voice come from in you — the one that says you should be further along by now? What does it usually push you toward?

Christ Formed in You – Paul’s Strange Image

Paul has a turn of phrase for this kind of moment, and it's strange enough that it usually slips past us on a first read. He writes it to the Galatians. This was a church that, like many new believers, was being pulled toward the idea that getting closer to God meant tightening up their religious efforts. Paul fights that pull through the whole letter. And in the middle of his argument, he says something that sounds almost personal:

My children, I am again suffering labor pains for you until Christ is formed in you. (Galatians 4:19)

Focus on that image for just a moment. Paul reaches beyond every framework his readers might have brought to spiritual change — moral effort, religious rigor, behavior management — and adopts the language of childbirth. Labor pains. Slow. Painful. Mysterious. Governed by a timeline nobody in the room chose. The mother doesn't decide when the baby comes, and she certainly doesn't make the baby. She bears it.

And the verb is the part that should slow us down. *Until Christ is formed in you.* Christ is the one being formed. You are the location where it's happening. The grammar is passive — something being done *to* you, not something you are doing. Paul could have said *until you become like Christ* or *until you finish the work of conforming yourself to His image.* He didn't. He said *until Christ is formed in you*, and the verb sits on Christ, not on you.

That's a small grammatical detail with enormous weight. If formation is happening *to* you, then your job description in this whole project is different from what most of us assume.

DISCUSSION: If Christ is the one being formed in you — and the verb is passive — what does that change about how you measure spiritual progress?

The Moralism Trap

Here's where most of us, if we're not careful, take the most beautiful sentence Paul wrote about formation and convert it back into the very thing he was warning against.

The slide goes like this. You hear *Christ is being formed in you*, and your heart agrees. "Yes," that's what I want. Then somewhere in the next half-hour, that desire quietly turns into *I am going to work on forming Christ-shape in myself*. The verb has flipped. You are now the worker. Christ is now the project. And the gospel running your spiritual life isn't the gospel Paul preached to the Galatians. It's the one he was fighting.

It usually starts well. A new believer wants to honor God, wants to grow, starts paying attention to their habits. None of that is wrong. The trap springs the moment paying attention turns into keeping score. Once you're keeping score, every honest failure stops being a normal feature of formation and starts being evidence the whole project is collapsing. The believer who tracks their prayer streak like a fitness app. The believer who used to feel close to God on the weeks they were "doing well" and now panics on the weeks they aren't. That panic isn't a sign of low faith. It's a sign of a wrong frame.

Paul gives us a different frame in Romans 8:29. He lays out a chain of verbs — *foreknew, predestined, conformed, called, justified, glorified* — and every single verb in that chain has God as the subject. You are never the actor. God decided to conform you to the image of His Son before you ever heard the gospel. That decision is older than your effort, and your effort isn't what makes it stick. Then Paul reinforces it in Philippians 1:6: *I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*. He wrote that sentence to a church he didn't get to micromanage, from a prison cell no less. His confidence wasn't in their consistency. It was in God's.

Which leaves us with one more honest word before we move on. Many new Christians find that real spiritual progress is invisible week to week and only becomes obvious looking back over years. Mood is a poor instrument for measuring formation. The days you feel close to God aren't always the days something is changing. The days you feel distant aren't always the days something has broken. If you measure formation by mood, moralism will hand you a verdict every morning, and most of those verdicts will be wrong. The way out isn't to try harder to feel right. It's to put the measuring stick down and trust the Worker.

DISCUSSION: What's the difference between trying to look like Jesus and trusting that Christ is being formed in you? Where does that distinction get blurry for you?

Your Part: Stay in the Room

If you're not the worker, what *are* you?

FIGURE 7.1 **Striving vs. Staying**

WHAT STRIVING LOOKS LIKE	WHAT STAYING LOOKS LIKE
<p>Striving</p> <p>"I'll work on forming Christ-shape in myself."</p> <p>You are the worker Christ is the project Keeping score by mood</p>	<p>Staying</p> <p>"...until Christ is formed in you."</p> <p>Christ is the Worker You are the location Showing up over time</p>
<p>Striving exhausts. Staying lets the Worker work.</p> <p>Lesson 7 · Galatians 4:19 · Romans 8:29 · Philippians 1:6</p>	

You're the one who stays in the room where the Worker works.

That's worth saying carefully, because the moment we hear "you don't form Christ in yourself," some part of us starts to wonder whether we have any part at all. We do. It just isn't the part we usually imagine. Your part isn't to produce formation. Your part is not to walk out of the room where the formation happens.

That kind of staying takes real effort — but it's a different *kind* of effort

from striving. Striving is the effort of trying to produce something. Staying is the effort not to leave. Think of a patient in a hospital chair, hooked up to a slow infusion. They're working — they're working at being still, at not pulling out the line, at trusting that something is going in even when they can't feel it. That's much closer to the New Testament picture of formation than the picture of a believer trying to willpower themselves into Christlikeness.

So, what is "the room"? It's the same room you've been learning to walk into for the last six lessons. It's opening Scripture on a Tuesday morning when nothing in it grabs you and reading anyway. It's showing up to the Sunday assembly when your week was ugly, and you'd rather not be seen. It's praying the same tired prayer for the same tired struggle for the eighteenth week in a row. It's having one honest conversation with one trusted believer when shame is telling you to isolate. None of those acts *produce* formation. All of them keep you in the room where the Worker is working.

Walking out usually doesn't look dramatic. It looks like drift. A skipped Sunday becomes a pattern. A Bible left closed becomes a habit. Confession gets replaced by performance. The room empties one quiet exit at a time, and the believer who walks out almost never notices they've left until they look around and realize they're standing somewhere else.

Paul reminds us where this is all heading. In Ephesians 4:13, he writes that we are growing *until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge*

FIGURE 7.2 **Who's the Subject?**

Two ways to read the same verb. Only one of them is Paul's.

GALATIANS 4:19
"...until Christ is formed in you."

THE WRONG FRAME
<p>I form Christ in me.</p> <p>↑ subject (you are the actor) — active verb — Christ is the project <i>The gospel Paul was fighting in Galatians.</i></p>
THE RIGHT FRAME
<p>Christ is formed in you.</p> <p>↑ subject (Christ is the actor) — passive verb — you are the location</p> <p>You are the where. Christ is the who.</p> <p>Lesson 7 · Galatians 4:19 · Romans 8:29 · Philippians 1:6</p>

FIGURE 7.3

Staying in the Room

WHAT STAYING LOOKS LIKE on a Tuesday morning

- 1 **SHOW UP**
"Open the Word, even on a dry day."
Short and steady beats heroic and rare.
- 2 **STAY HONEST**
"Pray the tired prayer again."
The same struggle, the same Worker — both keep showing up.
- 3 **KEEP COMPANY**
"One conversation with one trustworthy believer."
Shame says isolate. Stay in the room.
- 4 **TRUST THE TIMELINE**
"Don't measure by mood."
Many new believers find the work shows up in years, not weeks.

Stay in the room. The Worker is working.

Lesson 7 · Galatians 4:19 · Romans 8:29 · Philippians 1:6

of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness. Notice the *we all*. Formation isn't a solo achievement, and the destination isn't on this calendar. We are nowhere near the full stature of Christ. That's expected. The arrival happens on God's timeline, with God's church, by God's work. And in 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul gives us the direction of the Christian gaze in the meantime: as we behold the glory of the Lord, we are being transformed into the same image from glory to

glory. Look at Him. Don't stare at the progress meter. (Next week's lesson goes deeper into the Holy Spirit's role in this transformation. For now, it's enough to know the work isn't yours, and the gaze isn't on yourself.)

DISCUSSION: Which rooms in your life — practices, places, relationships — are the ones where God seems to be doing the slow work? Which ones have you been tempted to walk out of?

Remember: Christlikeness isn't Respectability

One last thing before we close, because if we leave it unsaid, the whole lesson can curdle into something it isn't supposed to be.

The image you're being formed into is cross-shaped.

Many new believers find that as Christ is formed in them, they look *less* like the respectable Christian their family or congregation expected, not more. They become harder to manage. Less impressed by what their world rewards. Quicker to side with the people on the margins, slower to defend the systems that keep them there. Their convictions sharpen in some places and soften in others, and the net effect doesn't always sit neatly inside the polished mold of what people around them call a "good Christian."

That's not a malfunction. That's the shape of Christ. The world's picture of a good Christian — composed, successful, well-regarded, useful — is not the same picture the New Testament paints of the Son we're being conformed to. He was misunderstood by His family, suspected by the religious

authorities of His day, and executed by the political authorities. Formation into His image will include some of the same texture.

So, as you keep walking, hold the question loosely: *what does it mean for me to look more like Jesus?* The answer the Spirit gives may not always match the answer your context expects. That's all right. The goal was never to look like a respectable version of yourself. The goal was always Christ.

Christ is being formed in you. Your part is to stay in the room.

DISCUSSION: Where might "looking more like Jesus" mean letting go of an image of yourself you've been quietly protecting?

He started the work. He carries it on. He will finish it.

That's enough to walk on for the rest of your life.

That's where we're going. Lesson by lesson, one slow day in the room at a time.