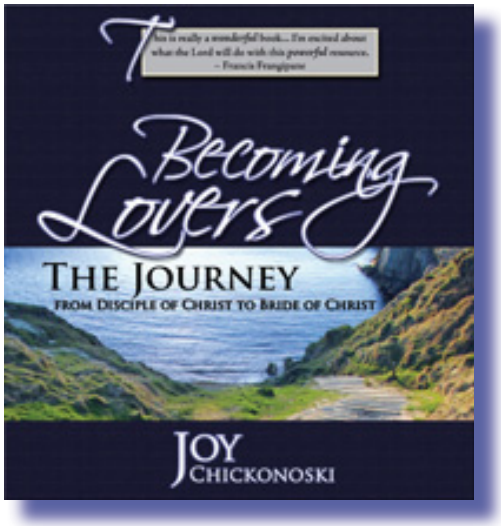
Becoming Lovers

The Journey from Disciple of Christ to Bride of Christ



For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

This scripture is adored by all who have made a commitment to Jesus Christ and memorized by Sunday school pupils the world over, but John 3:16 is also familiar to anyone who has ever watched a football game on TV. We live in a society where the Bible is one of many "holy books" and just about anyone who goes to church on Sunday, and even some who don't, considers himself a Christian.

No matter how watered down the contemporary version, the word *Christian* still means, "Little Christ." The character of Jesus and the intimate relationship He had with our heavenly Father is the focus for every true believer. As Christians, we are to follow Jesus Christ with our whole heart, which involves considerably more than a Sunday obligation and an occasional prayer in times of need or want.

The love of Jesus is all consuming. Once you have tasted it, you are ruined for the world. Our relationship with Jesus is a constant discovery which requires love, faith, and hope. The reward is secured, but the destiny is the journey. The Father is far more interested in our relationship with His Son than He is in getting us some place or making us someone. If we are going to travel this journey peacefully we must learn to see things as the Holy Spirit decides they are, not as we decide.

Often we lose our peace because we are afraid to find out what God wants. Instead of surrendering to our heavenly Father because He knows what is best for us, we try to bargain for our own way. Years ago, a good friend of mine gave birth to a very ill child who was not expected to live. Of course, the Christian community began to pray for a healing. However, the parents went to God for His plan instead of pursuing their own. God told them the child would be with Him in heaven. It amazed me to see the faith of these parents in surrendering their child to God. I was even more amazed to see the reaction of several of the Christians closest to the family. My friends were tormented in their grief by Christians who cursed them saying, "If this child dies it will be your fault for not having faith." Not having faith! These parents peacefully surrendered to the will of God while some of the Christians around them used their "faith" to try and manipulate God. If we are going to call ourselves Christians we must be like Christ who completely surrendered to the Father.

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ISBN: 978-1-886296-44-2

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Convert or Disciple

The first step in the Christian journey is ***conversion***. This is the realization, brought on by the Holy Spirit, that we are sinners in need of a savior. We accept Jesus Christ into our lives and acknowledge his death and resurrection as the only payment for our sin.

The next step is that of ***discipleship.*** Many Christians never progress to this step in their Christian walk. Without the power of God released into the life of a surrendered disciple, the church is left so weak that the world pays little attention to us.

There is a huge difference between a convert and a disciple of Christ. A convert believes Jesus Christ is the way to heaven, however, a convert still maintains the Lordship of his own life. Jesus is only one part of a convert's life. A true disciple, on the other hand, has completely abandoned his life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Their life is rooted in the Word of God and guided by the Holy Spirit. To a disciple, human reasoning and carnal desires must always surrender to the Holy Spirit's conviction.

The number one distinguishing factor between a convert and a disciple is the level of passion. Even though a disciple of Christ is not perfect, the passion of their heart is to serve Jesus Christ. This passion compels them to follow hard after the Savior no matter the cost.

A convert, however, has competing passions that are stronger than his or her passion for Christ. Therefore, a convert will justify and make excuses for carnal thoughts and actions rather than repent and be justified through Christ. Those who choose to be just a convert often choose self justification; remaining spiritual toddlers and never maturing in their knowledge of the Lord. Hebrews speaks to this kind of Christian.

…You have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you... you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Hebrews 5:11-14 NKJV

The disciple on the other hand, desires to be convicted by the Holy Spirit of carnal thoughts and actions, leading them to repentance and allowing God to give them the mind and character of Christ.

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It is very important that you take a moment right now and evaluate your position in Christ. Have you made the decision to be a disciple of Christ or are you merely a convert? If you have not taken the step to make Jesus Lord of your life then close this book, get down on your knees and repent for trying to have things your own way. Jesus is the lover of your soul. He is passionately pursuing you. He loves you and wants to have your whole heart. Do not make the mistake of thinking that you can resist the irresistible love of God. He will capture your heart at one time or another, why not make it today?

The Struggle

At every stage in our Christian walk we will encounter struggles and surprises. As a disciple, we are formulating our beliefs. We are in a constant state of change and growth. This can be exciting or unsettling, depending on our perspective. If we are religious it will be hard for the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth (see John 16:13).

This is true for several reasons: First, religion is man's way of trying to reach God. Therefore, religious people make the mistake of thinking God thinks as they do. Secondly, religious people are concerned more about traditions than truth. In combination, these errors lead religious people to think all their man-made traditions are God-given truth thus leaving little room for change.

Some scientists tell us that our brain does not have the capacity to know that the information it has stored could be wrong. This means our first reaction will be negative to information that is different from the information we have already learned. This is why humility is required to follow the Lord. We must be open to the Holy Spirit changing our theology. Our theology can change, but God will not. If this scares you, then you may be holding on to your principles too tightly.

When we assume we know the truth we can miss God. Our faith must be in God, not our knowledge of God. Our finite knowledge will always fall short of who the infinite God really is.

For if we are beside ourselves (mad as some say), it is for God and concerns Him; if we are in our right mind, it is for your benefit…
II Corinthians 5:13 AMP

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Paul is saying, what I already know I tell others with confidence, but I will never allow what I know to make me presumptuous before God. Be like Paul. As you read this book submit everything you know to God for further instruction. Whenever you read something that challenges your thinking or may even offend your beliefs, stop reading and go to God.

I do not want to just teach what I know. My desire is to see the life of Christ established in you. This will not happen by a transfer of information. The life of Christ can only be imparted when you hear God speak to you personally. If I can provoke you to go to God, then this book will be a success, even if you do not agree with everything I say.

As a disciple of Christ our struggle is to keep learning, to keep growing. A mentor of mine by the name of David Richards once told me, "The great paradox of the Christian life is that once you have found God, you must keep seeking Him." This man was nearly eighty when he died, but he spoke of God with the wide-eyed wonder of a child.

The Surprise

As a young Christian I was made aware of the responsibility I carried as a child of God. I rarely heard sermons about the love of God; they were usually about God's expectations of me. I knew the scripture taught that it was not by my own power but by God's.

However, I still felt God was expecting me to change myself by praying enough, reading my Bible enough and going to church enough. The problem was, I couldn't do any of these things enough. I felt defeated; believing that God was disappointed in me. I was still trying to gain God's approval through works instead of through the blood of Jesus.

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 NKJV

One day while studying Galatians 2:20, the Lord asked me, "What power does a dead man have?"

I answered, "None."

He replied, "Then why do you think I expect you to do anything?"

If we are crucified with Christ then we have no power of our own. So, if we mingle the law or our own efforts with grace we will only fail.

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Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

Galatians 3:25 NKJV

Faith does not exist under the law. For the law insinuates that we can actually live up to the law, or there would be no standard. God says, Jesus, and only Jesus, satisfies the law (see Hebrews 9:11-15). Therefore, we must expect God to change us; we cannot try to change ourselves. God will never be disappointed or disillusioned with us, because He never had any illusions in the first place.

If we understand that God expects to change us then we will not allow guilt and shame to drive us away from God's presence. It is important that we fellowship with God in His presence without shame, for when we do, God is able to heal us of our wrong thinking and cleanse us from our sin.

For instance, I used to spend the first ten minutes or more of a worship service unable to worship because of my guilt. I would feel unworthy because I did not read my Bible enough or I sinned too much that week. By the time I got into the presence of God the worship service was over and I was blaming the Pastor for quenching the Holy Spirit by ending the worship too soon. Remember, if you get shocked by your sin you are thinking too highly of yourself. The root of guilt is not humility, but pride. Guilt infers that I have the ability to be something more than a sinner in need of a savior. No matter how long we have been saved we are still nothing without Jesus. The word teaches us that Jesus is our righteousness (see Philippians 3:8-9). God does not expect us to live His life; rather He wants to live through our life.

Let me share with you how the Holy Spirit taught me this truth. During a worship service I began to get the sensation that I was floating in a pool of water. I began to think about the law of gravity which makes it impossible for me to float unless I am in water. The reason being, the law of buoyancy overrides the law of gravity. It does not matter how long I am in the water, the minute I get out of the water I can no longer float. I never changed, nor did the laws of physics, what changed was my location.

Romans 8 speaks of the law of sin and death and the law of the spirit of life, these are God's spiritual laws. Jesus is our righteousness. He is like the water, as long as I am in Christ I am no longer under the law of sin and death illustrated by the law of gravity. It is sin that weighs us down. In Christ the law of the spirit of life, which is represented by the law of buoyancy, enables me to rise above sin like floating.

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We are sinners who fall short of the glory of God (see Romans 3:23). If we walk in the Spirit and keep our mind set on Christ we can rise above our nature to sin. If I understand who I am, guilt has no place in my life. I am nothing. Jesus is everything. As a side note, God taught me this while my mind was wondering in worship. So, pay attention to your thoughts when they wonder, it just might be God speaking to you.

Let's have a

SoulSOAK

Still your mind • Open your heart • Affirm God's truth • Kindle new passion

The Blessing

I declare all guilt and shame to be removed from our hearts in Jesus' name. We will surrender to the grace of God. We will walk in intimacy with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, because of the blood of Calvary. We will not focus on our lifestyle but on our relationship with God.

The Meditation

1. Do you live with guilt and shame? Have you understood that this comes from pride and not humility?

2. Am I willing to be known for who I am, instead of hiding or denying my weaknesses?

3. What adjustments do I need to make to walk in grace and humility?

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The Prayer

Lord, cleanse me of all guilt and shame. I want to live free through Your grace. Help me to…

Do not confuse guilt with conviction. Guilt is a negative feeling initiated by Satan to produce unworthiness and shame. Satan wants to drive us away from God by leading us to believe God is disappointed with us.

> *For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*
>
> *II Timothy 1:7 KJV*

The word "fear" in this passage means, a feeling of disapproval. God is not disappointed with us; He wants to empower us, whereas Satan tries to minimize God in our eyes. Guilt says God does not really have unconditional love; He loves just like we do, conditionally.

When we receive guilt we believe God is disappointed with us; we feel condemned. Condemnation leads to further sin. Oftentimes we receive these feelings from well-meaning, yet misinformed spiritual leaders who try to shame us into repentance. This is religion, not a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Conviction is a positive feeling initiated by the Holy Spirit to produce Godly remorse and freedom from shame through repentance. When the Holy Spirit points out our sin, it is not to shame us or accuse us. Remember that is Satan's job (see Revelation 12:10). Instead, it is the Holy Spirit's desire to protect us from the outcome of sin, which is death. He also wants to remove anything that will hinder our relationship with the Father.

The proper response to conviction is freedom through repentance and forgiveness of our sin. God's love overwhelms us and we lose the desire to sin. Conviction is simply the Holy Spirit saying that He is about to remove the sin because it is doing you harm (see I John 1:9). When God brings conviction into our life, it is just like a loving parent removing matches from the hands of a curious toddler. If that toddler could understand the

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danger he held in his hand he wouldn't feel bad about it being taken away. On the other hand, if he understood the danger he wouldn't be playing with it! This is the process of conviction and repentance.

What a relief to know that God is not disappointed with us and He does not expect us to live up to the expectations of the law. Instead God wants us to know His love and be empowered by His forgiveness. All we have to do is walk by faith. We must expect God to change us. This process begins by confessing our sin; not excusing it. Then we must ask God to show us why we desire the particular sin we have confessed. This allows the Holy Spirit to show us how to break our compulsion toward the sin.

For example, several years ago the Holy Spirit began to convict me about the types of TV programs I allowed myself to watch. I knew I needed to have more discretion, but I couldn't seem to resist. I prayed and asked God to remove my desire for the television.

One day I came down stairs to see my seven month old daughter sitting in her walker watching the television. The Holy Spirit gave me a vision of a demon coming out of the television and talking with my child. Now, I am very picky about what I watch. The Holy Spirit broke my compulsion for television not me. He changed my heart because he loves me and wants to protect me.

What a great love God has for us. God is not religious. He's not trying to shame us into righteousness. He is our redeemer. He does not expect us to make ourselves holy. He will make us holy when we yield ourselves without shame into His loving care. Do not be afraid to confess your sin before God. Ask Him to show you your own heart. He will reveal the truth that will set you free. Do not hide from God because of shame or guilt. Come out into the open with God, fall into His loving arms and allow Him to heal you.

The decision of the disciple is to keep growing, to keep allowing God to change him or her into the image of His son; to never allow what he already knows to keep him from knowing more.

It will come as a pleasant surprise to realize God will never be disillusioned with us, because he never had any illusions in the first place.

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