

The Biblical Way to Rise Above Mediocre Expectations

We spend a lot of life figuring out if we “measure up,” a phrase someone coined in the mid-1800s.

Even in childhood, we begin comparing ourselves with siblings and kids at school, and it never seems to stop. The problem goes back to Cain and Abel, doesn't it?

Most of the time, we don't go about the “measuring up” process in a wise way. The result? The way we feel about ourselves takes a battering, and the way we evaluate others is skewed.

Romans 12:3 says we should think of ourselves “with sober judgment” (NIV). There's only one accurate measurement that leads to a healthy self-assessment. Have you found it? What is your measure? Your standard? Your mark? Is it a true one?

Have you heard of the little boy who found a long stick and cut notches he assumed to be accurate measurements? He went running to his mother and said, “Mom! I made this ruler and measured myself! I'm seven feet tall!”

If we use the wrong measurements, our self-perception will be biased. The only true way of measuring up is given in Ephesians 4:13, which says we should strive to “be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ” (NLT).

He is the Man of our measure, the only One with whom we should make comparisons. A little soul searching might reveal we compare ourselves to friends and neighbors more than we do to the Lord. We're prone to say, “At least, I'm not as bad as so and so . . .” We can find a million ways to feel better about how we're performing, but that leads to a mediocre life. We need to identify the Man to whom we should compare ourselves.

Our expectations about how we're to live shouldn't be from our society; we should measure up to the full and mature standard of Christ.

Let's get specific about Christlikeness.

First, consider His blameless character. There was never a hint of immorality or an inkling of greed. No lie passed His lips nor did any abusive attitude darken His personality. He didn't yield to anxiety or resort to exasperation. He was kind without being gullible, gentle without being weak and wise without being smug.

None of us are like Him, but we can grow more like Him, and that's what the Bible commands in Ephesians 4:13, "to mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ."

Helen Keller said, "Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired and success achieved."

As you face the troubles of daily life and respond to its challenges, keep your eyes on Jesus and walk by faith. In the process, the Spirit will correct, mature and make you more Christlike.

As we study the teachings of Jesus in Scripture, we also learn to measure up to His conversational skills. He was just as comfortable talking to a leading rabbi as to an adulterous woman. When necessary, He could speak sharply. But there was never a wasted word, and the people were amazed for "He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:29).

We all know from experience how easily we can say something foolish. But the more we read the "red letters" in the Gospels and study the words of the Lord Jesus, the more we'll emulate the patterns of His speech and measure up to the wisdom of His

words.

Christlikeness also involves conduct. I'm amazed at how Jesus moved through life with grace and with graciousness. I've read the story of His rejection in Nazareth many times, and I've been to where it happened—Mount Precipice in Nazareth, where the crowd sought to throw Him down a cliff. How did He escape? Luke 4:30 simply says, "Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way."

We're left to wonder how that happened! It seems Jesus conducted Himself with such deportment that the crowd parted like the Red Sea and He went His way. Can we have that level of poise in our conduct?

Maybe not, but the Bible does tell us: "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Pet. 2:11-12).

Novelist Michael Phillips remembers the day he began praying a very personal prayer: "God, make me like Jesus." That became a lifelong quest. He wrote, "I have been asking God to develop Christlikeness within me for thirty-five years. It is sometimes difficult to see much headway. But I continue to pray it ... It is a quiet prayer, a personal prayer, a humbling prayer, an invisible prayer."

It's a prayer God answers day by day as our conduct increasingly reminds people of Jesus and we rise above the mediocre expectations of the world.

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