

In the Crucible with Christ

Seeing the Goldsmith's Face

Lesson #4 for July 23, 2022

Scriptures: Matthew 5:16; 1 Corinthians 4:9; Ephesians 3:10; Job 23:1-10; Matthew 25:1-12; Daniel 12:1-10; Ephesians 4:11-16.

1. What is the goal of our Christian experience on this earth?

2 Corinthians 3:18: ¹⁸All of us, then, reflect the glory of the Lord with uncovered faces; **and that same glory, coming from the Lord, who is the Spirit, transforms us into his likeness in an ever greater degree of glory.**—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., 2 Corinthians 3:18). New York: American Bible Society [abbreviated as *Good News Bible*].^{†‡}

[From the Bible study guide=BSG:] Amy Carmichael took a group of children to a traditional goldsmith in India. In the middle of a charcoal fire was a curved roof tile. On the tile was a mixture of salt, tamarind fruit, and brick dust. Embedded in this mixture was gold. As the fire devoured the mixture, the gold became purer. The goldsmith took the gold out with tongs and, if it was not pure enough, he replaced it in the fire with a new mixture. But each time the gold was replaced, the heat was increased. The group asked, "How do you know when the gold is purified?" He replied, "When I can see my face in it."—Amy Carmichael, *Learning of God* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1989), p. 50.

God is seeking to purify us, to refine us like gold, to transform us into His image. That's an astonishing goal, and it seems even more astonishing that a Christlike character is developed in us only as we pass through life's crucibles.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sabbath Afternoon, July 16.^{†‡§}

2. How do you understand these words from Roman 8:29?

Romans 8:29: Those whom God had already chosen he also set apart **to become like his Son**, so that the Son would be the eldest brother in a large family.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

3. Will that happen on this earth? Or, is this a prediction for when we get to heaven?

Genesis 1:27: So God created human beings, **making them to be like himself** [without sin]. He created them male and female.—*Good News Bible*.^{**‡}

4. What has sin done to us? If we were exposed right now to the full glory of God—the glory in which Adam and Eve enjoyed walking in the cool of the evening,—we would die immediately. What has changed? God still keeps us alive on life support; but, if He should leave us completely, we would also die immediately!

5. How have we changed since the days of Adam and Eve? Notice these interesting words from Romans 3:10-19 which are actually several passages from the Old Testament.

Romans 3:10-19: ¹⁰As the Scriptures say:

"There is no one who is righteous,

¹¹ no one who is wise
 or who worships God.
¹² All have turned away from God;
 they have all gone wrong;
 no one does what is right, not even one. [Psalm 14:1-3; 53:1-3]
¹³ Their words are full of deadly deceit;
 wicked lies roll off their tongues, [Psalm 5:9]
 and dangerous threats, like snake's poison, from their lips; [Psalm 140:3]
¹⁴ their speech is filled with bitter curses. [Psalm 10:7]
¹⁵ They are quick to hurt and kill;
¹⁶ they leave ruin and destruction wherever they go.
¹⁷ They have not known the path of peace, [Isaiah 59:7-8]
¹⁸ nor have they learnt reverence for God." [Psalm 36:1]
¹⁹ Now we know that everything in the Law applies to those who live under
 the Law, in order to stop all human excuses and bring the whole world under
 God's judgement.—*Good News Bible*.*†

6. If it is God's plan for us to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ, why is Jesus the only Person so far who has ever lived on this earth without sinning? Shouldn't there be at least one person besides Jesus who has succeeded in doing that? If not, why not?
7. Will the 144,000 living at the end of this world's history reach the place where we/they live—at least for a short time—without sinning?

[From the writings of Ellen G. White=EGW:] When He leaves the sanctuary, darkness covers the inhabitants of the earth. **In that fearful time the righteous must live in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor.** The restraint which has been upon the wicked is removed, and Satan has entire control of the finally impenitent. God's long-suffering has ended.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 614.1.††

8. There is a core issue in the great controversy. It goes beyond the fact that some of us can be transformed to become more like Jesus.

[EGW:] **The Holy Spirit was the highest of all gifts that He could solicit from His Father for the exaltation of His people. The Spirit was to be given as a regenerating agent, and without this the sacrifice of Christ would have been of no avail.** The power of evil had been strengthening for centuries, and the submission of men to this satanic captivity was amazing. **Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world's Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church.**

Of the Spirit Jesus said, “He shall glorify Me.” The Saviour came to glorify the Father by the demonstration of His love; so the Spirit was to glorify Christ by revealing His grace to the world. **The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people.**

“When He [the Spirit of truth] is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” **The preaching of the word will be of no avail without the continual presence and aid of the Holy Spirit. This is the only effectual teacher of divine truth. Only when the truth is accompanied to the heart by the Spirit will it quicken the conscience or transform the life.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 671.2-672.0.††
[The brackets and the content in brackets in the paragraph are in the source; but, the brackets and the content in brackets as the introduction are added.]‡

9. **Satan has claimed that if God would not interfere, every human being would choose his—Satan’s—side. Satan has gone on to claim that it would be impossible for any human being to live a perfect life on this earth. Jesus Christ proved that was not true by His life. But, Satan has claimed that Jesus was a special case and that no ordinary human can live on this earth without sinning. God has responded by saying that not only would God prove that human beings can live without sinning on this earth, but also He would have an entire group of people at the end of this world’s history—at the most difficult time possible—who will choose to follow His plan for their lives so fully that even when Satan is allowed full access to them as he was to Job, they will not fail God. Satan’s final argument will be refuted!**
10. Notice these comments by God about Job.
Job 1:1,8: ¹ There was a man named Job, living in the land of Uz, who worshipped God and was faithful to him. **He was a good man, careful not to do anything evil....** [Doesn’t that sound good for God to have said?]
⁸ “Did you notice my servant Job?” the LORD asked. **“There is no one on earth as faithful and good as he is. He worships me and is careful not to do anything evil.”**—*Good News Bible*.*††
11. Why did almost no one in the time of Jesus seem to understand the message of Job, or even quote him? Why were the Pharisees so much like Job’s “friends”? Why was their picture of God so wrong? (**Job 42:7-8**)
12. There is no question about the fact that even those of us who live under very difficult circumstances are to shine as lights.
Matthew 5:16: [Jesus said:] “In the same way your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven.”—*Good News Bible*.*†
1 Corinthians 4:9: For it seems to me that God has given the very last place to us apostles, like people condemned to die in public as **a spectacle for the whole world of angels and of humanity.**—*Good News Bible*.*† [All the beings in the entire universe are watching us!][‡]

Ephesians 3:9-10: ... ⁹And of making all people see how God's secret plan is to be put into effect. God, who is **the Creator of all things, kept his secret hidden through all the past ages, in order that at the present time, by means of the church, the angelic rulers and powers in the heavenly world might learn of his wisdom in all its different forms.**—*Good News Bible*.*†

13. Imagine yourself on the field in a massive sports stadium. Suppose that Satan and all his followers are on one side in the bleachers and that God and all His followers are in the bleachers on the other side; both sides are watching you. Which side would have the most to cheer about? What does that tell you about yourself?

14. One of the challenging facts about the great controversy is that we cannot see “the soldiers” on either one of the two sides in this conflict!

Hebrews 11:27: It was faith that made Moses leave Egypt without being afraid of the king's anger. **As though he saw the invisible God,** he refused to turn back.—*Good News Bible*.*†

15. **What was the essence of Job's struggle? What did he not see? What did he not know? At the same time, what did he believe through faith, despite all his trials?**

Job 23:1-10: ¹⁻² I still rebel and complain against God;

I can't hold back my groaning.

³ **How I wish I knew where to find him,
and knew how to go where he is.**

⁴ **I would state my case before him
and present all the arguments in my favour.**

⁵ **I want to know what he would say
and how he would answer me.**

⁶ Would God use all his strength against me?

No, he would listen as I spoke.

⁷ I am honest; I could reason with God;
he would declare me innocent once and for all.

⁸ I have searched in the east, but God is not there;
I have not found him when I searched in the west.

⁹ God has been at work in the north and the south,
but still I have not seen him.

¹⁰ **Yet God knows every step I take;**

if he tests me, he will find me pure.—*Good News Bible*.*†

16. What kind of trials and troubles are we facing in our day? Could it be trouble with family members? The loss of our job? Or, loss of a home? Or, a large financial loss? How could such trials help our Christianity? All of these things happened to Job; and, yet, he thought they were going to bring him closer to God.

17. In His last day in the temple before His crucifixion and death, two parables are recorded which Jesus gave to His followers.

Matthew 25:1-12: “At that time the Kingdom of heaven will be like this. Once there were **ten young women who took their oil lamps and went out to meet**

the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish, and the other five were wise. ³The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any extra oil with them, ⁴while the wise ones took containers full of oil for their lamps. ⁵**The bridegroom was late in coming, so the women began to nod and fall asleep.**

⁶ “It was already midnight when the cry rang out, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come and meet him!’ ⁷The ten women woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸Then the foolish ones said to the wise ones, ‘Let us have some of your oil, because our lamps are going out.’ ⁹‘No, indeed,’ the wise ones answered, ‘there is not enough for you and for us. Go to the shop and buy some for yourselves.’ ¹⁰So the foolish women went off to buy some oil; and while they were gone, the bridegroom arrived. The five who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast, and the door was closed.

¹¹ “Later the other women arrived. ‘Sir, sir! Let us in!’ they cried out. ¹²‘Certainly not! I don’t know you,’ the bridegroom answered.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

18. Some comments about the parable of the young women waiting for the wedding include:

[BSG:] In what ways does the meaning of the story change, depending on whether you see oil as a symbol of the Holy Spirit or of the possession of character? What are the implications of this story for you if the oil represents the Holy Spirit, or a Christlike character?

Holy Spirit: [**The Holy Spirit is the One who makes it possible for us to obtain the changes in character that are necessary before we can be prepared for heaven.**]

Character: [**Character is the name for the changes that the Holy Spirit makes possible.**]*—Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, July 19.^{†‡} [That is what is called *sanctification* or *education*.] [**Why couldn’t the oil be shared?**][‡]

[EGW:] In the parable, **the foolish virgins** are represented as begging for oil, and failing to receive it at their request. This is symbolic of those who have not prepared themselves by developing a character to stand in a time of crisis. It is as if they should go to their neighbors and say, Give me your character, or I shall be lost. Those that were wise could not impart their oil to the flickering lamps of the foolish virgins. **Character is not transferable. It is not to be bought or sold; it is to be acquired.** The Lord has given to every individual an opportunity to obtain a righteous character through the hours of probation; but he has not provided a way by which one human agent may impart to another the character which he has developed by going through hard experiences, by learning lessons from the great Teacher, so that he can manifest patience under trial, and exercise faith so that he can remove mountains of impossibility.—Ellen G. White, *The Youth’s Instructor*,^{*} January 16, 1896, par. 2.^{†‡} See *That I May Know Him* 350.2.

19. The second parable that Jesus gave that day was about the **sheep and goats**.

Matthew 25:31-46: [Jesus said:] ³¹ “When the Son of Man comes as King and all the angels with him, he will sit on his royal throne, ³²and the people of all the nations will be gathered before him. Then he will divide them into two groups, **just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.** ³³**He will put the righteous people on his right and the others on his left.** ³⁴Then the King will say to the people on his right, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father! Come and possess the kingdom which has been prepared for you ever since the creation of the world. ³⁵I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes, ³⁶naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me.’

³⁷ “The righteous will then answer him, ‘**When, Lord,** did we ever see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? ³⁸When did we ever see you a stranger and welcome you in our homes, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹When did we ever see you sick or in prison, and visit you?’ ⁴⁰**The King will reply, ‘I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these members of my family, you did it for me!’**

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Away from me, you that are under God’s curse! **Away to the eternal fire which has been prepared for the Devil and his angels!** ⁴²I was hungry but you would not feed me, thirsty but you would not give me a drink; ⁴³I was a stranger but you would not welcome me in your homes, naked but you would not clothe me; I was sick and in prison but you would not take care of me.’

⁴⁴ “Then they will answer him, ‘**When, Lord,** did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and would not help you?’ ⁴⁵**The King will reply, ‘I tell you, whenever you refused to help one of these least important ones, you refused to help me.’** ⁴⁶**These, then, will be sent off to eternal punishment, but the righteous will go to eternal life.**”—*Good News Bible*. *†‡

19. In this parable what was the basis for the separation between the sheep and the goats? **It seems that they were being separated based on their works. This does not mean that we are saved by works; but, if we are saved, we will work. Faith works!**
20. What is the best test or demonstration of **a person’s character**? Would it be what s/he does when s/he thinks no one is looking?
21. As faithful Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we believe there will be a time of terrible trouble coming. Do you think it is possible that you could be alive to see that day?

Daniel 12:1-10: ¹The angel wearing linen clothes said, “At that time the great angel Michael, who guards your people, will appear. Then there will be a time of troubles, the worst since nations first came into existence. When that time comes, all the people of your nation whose names are written in God’s book will be saved. ²Many of those who have already died will live again: some will enjoy eternal life, and some will suffer eternal disgrace. ³**The wise leaders will shine with all the brightness of the sky. And those who**

have taught many people to do what is right will shine like the stars for ever.” [*sic*]

⁴ He said to me, “And now, Daniel, close the book and put a seal on it until the end of the world. Meanwhile, **many people will waste their efforts trying to understand what is happening.**”

⁵ Then I saw two men standing by a river, one on each bank. ⁶One of them asked the angel who was standing further upstream, “How long will it be until these amazing events come to an end?”

⁷ The angel raised both hands towards the sky and made a solemn promise in the name of the Eternal God. I heard him say, “It will be 3.5 years. When the persecution of God’s people ends, all these things will have happened.”

⁸ I heard what he said, but I did not understand it. So I asked, “But, sir, how will it all end?”

⁹ He answered, “You must go now, Daniel, because **these words are to be kept secret and hidden until the end comes.** ¹⁰**Many people will be purified.** Those who are wicked will not understand but will go on being wicked; **only those who are wise will understand.**”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†} [Why did God give a message and then say it was to be hidden?][†]

22. Notice that it is the wise who seem to know what is coming and are prepared. There is a time of trouble coming like nothing that has happened before in the history of our world. Why is it that the righteous are described as understanding while the wicked do not understand?

Proverbs 1:7: To have knowledge, you must first have reverence for the LORD. Stupid people have no respect for wisdom and refuse to learn.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

Proverbs 9:10: The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.—*Revised Standard Version*.^{*†}

23. What is it that could prepare us for what is coming? We need to gain a knowledge of God, His character, and His laws that reflect His character in order to be changed by that knowledge and to become more like Him.
24. How can we help each other to succeed in that goal? Is this something we need to do alone and by ourselves? Or, is it something with which we need to help each other?

Ephesians 4:11-16: ¹¹It was he who “**gave gifts**”; he appointed some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, others to be pastors and teachers. ¹²He did this to prepare all God’s people for the work of Christian service, **in order to build up the body of Christ.** ¹³**And so we shall all come together to that oneness in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God; we shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ’s full stature.** ¹⁴Then we shall no longer be children, carried by the waves and blown about by every shifting wind of the teaching of deceitful people, who lead others into error by the tricks they invent. ¹⁵Instead, by speaking the truth in a spirit of love, **we must**

grow up in every way to Christ, who is the head. ¹⁶Under his control all the different parts of the body fit together, and the whole body is held together by every joint with which it is provided. **So when each separate part works as it should, the whole body grows and builds itself up through love.**—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

25. **God is waiting for a group of people to represent Him clearly and convincingly in the face of everything that Satan throws against them in order to demonstrate that people intentionally will indeed choose God's side instead of Satan's side. But, we need to grow up in Christ in order to do that.**

26. In fact, God intends for the entire universe to watch everything that has happened and is going to happen on this earth, especially the final events, to see if He is proving His point.

Ephesians 3:9-10: ⁹God, who is the Creator of all things, kept his secret hidden through all the past ages, ¹⁰**in order that at the present time, by means of the church, the angelic rulers and powers in the heavenly world might learn of his wisdom in all its different forms.**—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}
[They need to see how God deals with sinful rebels.][‡]

[EGW:] **Character building is the most important work ever entrusted to human beings;** and never before was its diligent study so important as now. Never was any previous generation called to meet issues so momentous; never before were young men and young women confronted by perils so great as confront them today [i.e., over 100 years ago]. [Is it even more perilous now?].—Ellen G. White, *Education*^{*} 225.3.^{†‡}

[EGW:] **When Jesus speaks of the new heart, he means the mind, the life, the whole being.** To have a change of heart is to withdraw the affections from the world, and fasten them upon Christ. To have a new heart is to have a new mind, new purposes, new motives. **What is the sign of a new heart?—A changed life.** There is a daily, hourly dying to selfishness and pride.—Ellen G. White, *The Youth's Instructor*,^{*} September 26, 1901, par. 5^{†‡}; *SDA Bible Commentary*,^{*¶} vol. 4, 1164.10.^{†‡} [Review again Ellen White's comments about character building quoted in Item #18 above.][‡]

27. So, what is *character building*? How do we accomplish that? How could character building be measured? In oneself? In the local church? In the world church?

28. Do you agree with these words written by Helen Keller who was deaf and blind from an early age?

“Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved.”—*Leadership*, vol. 17, no. 4.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*^{*} for Friday, July 22].^{‡§}

29. So, what should be our goal in this overcoming/purification process? The only standard that it is safe for us to focus upon is Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 1:3: He reflects the brightness of God's glory and is the exact likeness of God's own being, sustaining the universe with his powerful word. **After**

achieving forgiveness for human sins, he sat down in heaven at the right-hand side of God, the Supreme Power.—*Good News Bible*.*†

30. What did Paul mean when he wrote, “After achieving forgiveness for human sins”? God is and always has been Forgiveness Personified. That is not something new that happened at the cross.

1 Peter 1:7: Their purpose [that is, the purpose of trials] is to prove that your faith is genuine. Even gold, which can be destroyed, is tested by fire; and so your faith, which is much more precious than gold, must also be tested, so that it may endure. Then you will receive praise and glory and honour on the Day when Jesus Christ is revealed.—*Good News Bible*.*†

31. Today, we have discussed four major issues as summarized in the Bible study guide:

1. **Suffering plays an essential role in the process of character formation and purification.**
2. We will see that **character formation is the restoration of the image of God in humans**, as they were created by God in the beginning, as well as the shaping of our characters according to the image of Christ.
3. This **formation of character entails the theme of the cosmic conflict**. It is in this conflict between good and evil, God and Satan, that we experience the crucible of maturity.
4. **Purification and maturity are never achieved by individuals in isolation; rather, purification and maturity are achieved by individuals in communities.** [Is this true? Was it true of Jesus?]*—Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 52.††

32. Why would this be true? We certainly are only saved as individuals, not as communities.

Ezekiel 14:12-14: The LORD spoke to me. ¹³ “Mortal man,” he said, “if a country sins and is unfaithful to me, I will stretch out my hand and destroy its supply of food. I will send a famine and kill people and animals alike. ¹⁴Even if those three men, Noah, Danel, [Footnote: “Danel or Daniel....”] and Job, were living there, their goodness would save only their own lives.” The Sovereign LORD has spoken.—*Good News Bible*.*††§ [See also Ezekiel 18.]†

33. Notice these words from Ellen White.

[EGW:] **The purification of the people of God cannot be accomplished without their suffering.** God permits the fires of affliction to consume the dross, to separate the worthless from the valuable, that the pure metal may shine forth. He passes us from one fire to another, testing our true worth. **If we cannot bear these trials, what will we do in the time of trouble?** If prosperity or adversity discover falseness, pride, or selfishness in our hearts, what shall we do when God tries every man’s work as by fire, and lays bare the secrets of all hearts?

True grace is willing to be tried; if we are loath to be searched by the Lord, our condition is serious indeed. **God is the refiner and purifier of souls;**

in the heat of the furnace the dross is separated forever from the true silver and gold of the Christian character. Jesus watches the test. He knows what is needed to purify the precious metal that it may reflect the radiance of His divine love.

God brings His people near Him by close, testing trials, by showing them their own weakness and inability, and by teaching them to lean upon Him as their only help and safeguard. Then His object is accomplished. They are prepared to be used in every emergency, to fill important positions of trust, and to accomplish the grand purposes for which their powers were given them. God takes men upon trial; He proves them on the right hand and on the left, and thus they are educated, trained, disciplined. Jesus, our Redeemer, man's representative and head, endured this testing process. **He suffered more than we can be called upon to suffer. He bore our infirmities and was in all points tempted as we are. He did not suffer thus on His own account, but because of our sins; and now, relying on the merits of our Overcomer, we may become victors in His name. God's work of refining and purifying must go on until His servants are so humbled, so dead to self, that, when called into active service, their eye will be single to His glory.** He will then accept their efforts; they will not move rashly, from impulse; they will not rush on and imperil the Lord's cause, being slaves to temptations and passions and followers of their own carnal minds set on fire by Satan. **Oh, how fearfully is the cause of God marred by man's perverse will and unsubdued temper! How much suffering he brings upon himself by following his own headstrong passions! God brings men over the ground again and again, increasing the pressure until perfect humility and a transformation of character bring them into harmony with Christ and the spirit of heaven, and they are victors over themselves.**—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,* vol. 4, 85.1-86.2.†‡

[BSG:] **Purification is a real experience that happens to real persons in a real history. How does this understanding help you in your experience of purification? In what ways have you personally noticed that the Holy Spirit is purifying your character?**—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 54.†‡

34. Have you had the experience of continually contemplating the image of Christ in your life? How has that affected you? What evidence of Christian growth of character do you see in your own life?

©2022, Kenneth Hart, MD, MA, MPH. Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution of all or of a portion of this material such as to a Bible study class is encouraged. *Electronic version. †Bold type is added. ‡Text in brackets is added. §Italic type is in the source. ¶Compared with the first source, this source has punctuation and/or capitalization differences only.

info@theox.org

Last Modified: June 9, 2022