

Measuring Progress

#0089

Study Given by W. D. Frazee—March 23, 1973

There is many a heart that is saying, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!" Well friends, He is not far away. He is right here. He said, "...Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world..." (Matthew 28:20) so I know He is here with us tonight.

This evening I want to share with you a very simple (but to me a most precious) thought dealing with a problem that I ran into in trying to help somebody just a few days ago. May I say this in passing? Some of the greatest blessings that come, dear friends, are found not in simply being alone in study, but in trying to help people who need help. And if there are times that you yourself feel a great longing for getting closer to the Master, you may find Him in a season all alone; you may find Him out where the need is, where people need help.

The problem that I ran into is this. Here was somebody that was trying to live the Christian life, but the more they tried, the farther it seemed they were from their objective. There may be some people like that here tonight. Is there anybody here tonight that the more you try, the farther you seem away from your goal? Well, I have something to share with you that I think can be a great blessing to you.

I have put on the blackboard two lines. Both of these lines are going upward, but one is going higher faster than the other. The upper line represents your view of Christ and what He expects, your view of Christ in His perfection, Christ in His beauty. It is God's intention that you and I shall see more and more in Jesus as the days go by. It is God's plan that as we behold the beauty of that life, it shall charm us more and more.

And oh, my dear friends, I'm so glad tonight that this is going to continue through endless ages. A million years from now, we will see more in Jesus than we ever saw before. More and more as eternity rolls, we shall say, "Oh, how good God is! How wonderful His love is! How perfect He is!" No wonder those holy beings who stand in His presence sing constantly of the unfolding revelations, saying, "...Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come" (Revelation 4:8). No wonder they touch their harps and sing:

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" Revelation 5:12.

Oh friends, the infinite riches of love that are found in Christ can never be fathomed. Always, there is an increasing revelation. Are you finding it so?

Now, therein lies our problem. The more we see of the perfection of God in Christ, the more we sense how short we fall. You know, when a sinner first comes in contact with God, He becomes deeply convicted over some of the most flagrant violations of the law. If he is a cursing, swearing, drinking, hateful man, hating others, he becomes conscious of the fact that these things are not like God. And as he gives himself to the Master, he asks God to help him to quit his drunkenness, to quit his hateful attitude, to quit his cursing and swearing, and God helps him.

Now, if that were all there were to it, and then he could live on the rest of his life, perhaps just saying, "Thank the Lord, I used to be a drunkard, but now I'm not anymore. I used to curse and swear, but I don't do that anymore."

But something else happens. While God is giving him those victories, He is also giving him an increasing revelation of the perfection of God's character. And so even though he has dropped off those habits of drunkenness and swearing, he sees so much more in the divine perfection than he saw when he was out in sin that, in comparison, he is farther off than he was before. And if we do not understand this, we are liable to get very discouraged.

Let me tell you, friends, what the remedy is. It is looking to Jesus instead of self. God has made no plans—don't miss this—God has made no plans for us here in this mortal flesh to look at ourselves and say, "Well, I'm getting along pretty well. I guess I have either arrived or I have *about* arrived." No. God has not made arrangements for that.

Turn to Philippians, the third chapter, and let's read the testimony of one of the greatest saints that the Bible presents, the apostle Paul:

"Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended..." Philippians 3:12–13.

That word 'apprehended' means 'to lay hold of,' 'take hold of.' I haven't arrived, Paul is saying. I haven't gotten hold yet of what I'm after. And Paul was writing this, not at the beginning of his Christian life, not in the middle of it, he was nearing the end of it. He was in prison.

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" Philippians 3:13–14.

Ever approaching, yet always seeing something more. This was the experience of the apostle Paul.

Now, I have represented the life of the Christian, viewed from the human standpoint, by this lower line. You notice that it is also going upward, but you will notice that it is not going upward as fast as the higher line. And therefore—and don't miss this—you see that the gap between the lines here gets bigger the farther we go so that the Christian looking at the perfection of Christ, as he sees it here at the beginning of the Christian life, he sees it way above. But a year later, he looks and it's farther between him and what he sees than it was back there. Does that mean he has made no progress? Not at all. He's made progress, but he sees more to be accomplished than he did to start with (not that there *is* more to be accomplished, but he *sees* more).

Now, that leads me to this point. This is where I got some help to help somebody the other day. If this is so, it is plain that God does not intend that you and I shall get comfort or satisfaction out of measuring our own progress as we see our lives. He does intend that we shall find our comfort in a progressive revelation of the perfection of God.

"Well," you say, "But Brother Frazee, how could that *encourage* me? It *discourages* me." Well, that all depends on how you relate to it. Look here, friend: if somebody should take pity on you because you were bankrupt and couldn't pay your debt, and he paid off a \$100,000, you would feel very grateful, wouldn't you? But if, as time went on, you found out that he had paid \$200,000 instead of \$100,000, would that discourage you? Would it? Wouldn't it make you more grateful? Yes. And suppose, as time went on, you found out that it had cost him \$500,000. The more we see of the perfection of Christ's character, the more our own lack shows up in contrast, the more grateful we can be for the covering righteousness of Jesus Christ.

You see, friends, God counts us all that Christ is. Turn to 2 Corinthians 5:21:

"For He hath made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" 2 Corinthians 5:21.

What was He made to be for us? Sin. What are we made to be in Him? Righteousness. What *kind* of righteousness? What does it say? The righteousness of God. Can you get any better than that? No. It would be impossible, wouldn't it?

God counts us, dear friends, not as we see ourselves—in our weakness and imperfection. He counts us the righteousness of God in Him. And this means—and don't miss it—the more I see of the perfection of Christ's character, the more I have to rejoice in that's counted to me.

Do I see more in Jesus than I did a year ago? Then I see more that's counted to me. This is what righteousness by faith is. And so when Satan comes and tries to get you discouraged by looking at your attainments, don't try to present to him a chart full of

red stars and gold seals and blue ribbons. No, no. Just hold up Jesus. This says that God has made us to be the righteousness of God in Him, in Christ. All that we see in Christ, that is accounted to us. Why not look at what is accounted to us instead of the way we look to *ourselves*? Why not spend our time beholding that perfect character and rejoicing that we see more in Him than we did a year ago or a week ago? If that makes *us* look cheap in comparison, all right. Our standing does not depend upon what we are or upon how we *look* to ourselves. It depends upon *Him* and our acceptance of *Him*.

Let me read a few statements here now from the divine commentary. This one is *Selected Messages*, Book 2, pages 32–33.

“We may enjoy the favor of God. We are not to be anxious about what Christ and God think of us, but about what God thinks of Christ, our Substitute” *Selected Messages*, Book 2, pages 32–33.

The next time you are lying on your bed and the enemy begins to bother you with thoughts like this, “I wonder what God thinks of me anyway. I wonder what God thinks of me. Look how I have failed Him today. Look how weak I am. I ought to be, oh, so much farther up the road.” And it’s all true, friends. Shouldn’t we be a lot farther? Aren’t we weak? Unworthy? Yes. But listen: I’m not to be anxious about that. I am to be thinking about what God thinks of Christ, my Substitute.

We are accepted in the Beloved. (See Ephesians 1:6.) What is your ground of acceptance? Not what you have done. Not what progress you have made. You know, if I could take that blackboard and just turn it a little bit this way, the lines would be exactly the same, but that lower line would seem to be going downhill, wouldn’t it? Yes. Did you ever find in driving through the mountains that something that you thought was uphill was downhill and vice versa, depending upon the circumstances and surroundings? Yes.

Listen, friends: it happens more than once in the Christian life that when you are really making progress, it seems to you that you are not making any progress at all. Now perhaps I ought to read that to you so you won’t have to take my word for it:

“There are those who have known the pardoning love of Christ and who really desire to be children of God, yet they realize that their character is imperfect, their life faulty, and they are ready to doubt whether their hearts have been renewed by the Holy Spirit. To such I would say, Do not draw back in despair. We shall often have to bow down and weep at the feet of Jesus because of our shortcomings and mistakes, but we are not to be discouraged” *Steps to Christ*, page 64.

Now you will notice that, as I drew the line there, I didn't present it as an interstate highway, carefully graded and just a certain percent of elevation. Some of us, if we were drawing the line, might make it even more up and down than that. Don't worry about that, friends. The question to help you measure your progress is this: (Listen! Watch!) Do you see more in Jesus to admire than you did a month ago, a week ago, a year ago? Are you more and more pleased with God and His way and His truth and His instructions? Do you like the way He does things?

Let me state it in another way, another approach to the same thing. Sometimes when people first come in contact with God's message, they weep because they think they are going to have to give up this, that, and the other thing. Do you know what I mean?

Here is something that God says, "Don't do this. It's bad for you." But my poor human heart says, "Oh, do I have to give that up? Oh my! What will I do without it?" But as times goes on and I give that thing up and get closer to Jesus, I am not weeping because I had to give that thing up. I'm weeping because I'm not more like Jesus. Do you see the difference in the tears?

What then is your sorrow? Are you sorry because the Christian life calls for things that you don't want to give up? If you are doing that, you are not as far up the road as you ought to be. But if you sorrow because you are not as much like God as you wish you were, then friends, I say you are making progress. This is the way that you can measure if you want to measure. For it is written:

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of
heaven" Matthew 5:4, 3.

Again, I read from this same page:

"The closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will
appear in your own eyes..." *Steps to Christ*, page 64.

In this is the essence of what I'm giving you tonight.

"The closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will
appear in your own eyes..." *Ibid*.

Well, if that's the program, I had just as well get used to it. What do you say? I had better not be trying to find my satisfaction in looking at myself because if I do, I will get utterly discouraged.

"The closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will
appear in your own eyes; for your vision will be clearer, and

your imperfections will be seen in broad and distinct contrast to His perfect nature” *Ibid.*

Tell me, did any of you ever go hiking in the mountains and start out for some distant peak, and after you had hiked three hours, it seemed just as far as it was when you started, seemingly? Have you ever had that experience? Oh yes, it can happen.

But listen while I quote:

“Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God's ideal for His children. Godliness—godlikeness—is the goal to be reached” *Education*, page 18.

Does He tell us that to discourage us? No. To *encourage* us because with every revelation of that, we are to be reminded of two great facts. One is: He guarantees to get us all that we see. He guarantees to *bring* us to that perfection. He guarantees that in our human nature, godlikeness is to be demonstrated. I propose that He can do that for me. What do you say?

But the other thing (and this is wonderful) is that He counts me as having already attained just because I choose what He offers and take Christ's life instead of my life. What could be better than those twin offers, friends? What could be better than that?

If God counts me all that I see in Christ's perfection, and on top of that guarantees if I will stay with Him to bring me to the place where, before men and angels, He can present me as demonstrating that righteousness, what have I to worry about? And why should I feel discouraged and sad because my own evaluation of my progress is not what I wish it were? Oh, rather, let me look and rejoice in the fact that the more I see in Jesus, the more I know is being accounted to me because all that He is, this is counted to me.

Let me read another statement here. This one is from Book 1 of *Selected Messages*, pages 83 and 84.

“Oh, how I wish that I could lead our people to have faith in God! They need not feel that in order to exercise faith they must be wrought up into a high state of excitement. All they have to do is to believe God's Word, just as they believe one another's word” *Selected Messages*, Book 1, pages 83–84.

Now before I finish reading these lines, I want you to turn to Philippians 1:6, one of my favorite texts because I see that it helps so many people and it helps me. Tell me: what is that second word in the verse? Confident. What does that mean? Shaky? Uncertain? Wishful? What does ‘confident’ mean? ‘Sure.’ ‘Positive.’ ‘Certain.’ ‘Without any question.’

What is this that we are confident of?

“Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”
Philippians 1:6.

Do you mean that the One who started a work in me is going to keep right at it until He comes the second time? Is He? Well, I propose to let Him do it. What do you say? And if I may say it reverently and not be misunderstood, I will say this: it is *His* problem how He is going to get it done. If it rested with me, I *would* be discouraged. I wouldn't have what it takes to go on because these lines represent my own experience, friends. I see weaknesses in myself that I didn't use to know about. And I find that self, when it gets chopped off in one direction, it has a way of wiggling around and showing up another direction.

Really, I think that God has a hard problem on His hands in me. But friends, I know that He started something in me. I am sure of that because there are wrong things that I used to like that I don't like anymore. The glory is His. And there are duties in the Christian life that used to appear difficult that now I'm happy for. The glory is His.

And yet I see so much to be done in me that I didn't know about years ago. I believe He can finish what He started. What do you say? Will He do it? Why, of course! Why would He start it if He didn't intend to finish? You know, that is why you and I keep the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a sign that God can start something and finish it, isn't it? Isn't that what the Sabbath tells us?

“For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day...” Exodus 20:11.

Why did He rest? He was through. He finished His work.

“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished...” Genesis 2:1.

And on the seventh day, God rested. He rested because the work was done. So every week, as we come to the Sabbath, we can rejoice in this wonderful fact: we serve a God who can, by His creative power, start something and *finish* it. He started something in your life and mine. He is going to what? Finish it. And He is going to bring us to that divine perfection which we see in Christ. And I repeat, the more I see in Jesus, the more beautiful is the character that I know He is going to eventually perfect in me.

Let me illustrate it in another way. Suppose here we are... Just imagine we are all children, 10 or 12 years old or so. And it is arranged for some of us to have some music lessons. And so the teacher comes and gives us music lessons. We begin to play the piano. Pretty soon I can play *Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so*. And I can play it through without hitting one wrong note. Isn't that wonderful? Yes. Well, I'm about ready to graduate now, am I not? Huh? Do you know what the teacher

does? The teacher shows me another piece. And is it more difficult? Yes. Too bad. No, it's good, isn't it? Sure.

And so we practice on that second piece, and finally we get it where we can play it. But then the teacher brings out another piece. You know how it goes. And you know what I find? My musician friends, they don't think they have arrived yet, even though they have been playing all their lives and practicing all their lives. There is always something more on beyond. Am I correct? Yes.

It is so in every phase of life. And thank God it is, friends. But listen: don't forget these two wonderful truths when it comes to character. One is God guarantees that you and I will graduate if we will stay in His school.

“...When He shall appear, we shall be like Him...” 1 John 3:2.

Reverently, humbly, I intend to hold Him to His Word. But oh, don't miss the other part of it! He counts me that way already. He counted me that way the moment I surrendered my heart to Him. He has counted me that way at every step as I have surrendered to Him. If I have rebelled against Him and gone astray, as soon as I kneel at His feet and confess my sins, He covers them again with His righteousness, and we're on the Upward Way. Oh, friends! What more could God do to encourage us? What do you say?

Now back to my reading:

“All they have to do is to believe God's Word, just as they believe one another's word. He hath said it, and He will perform His work. Calmly rely on His promise, because He means all that He says” *Selected Messages*, Book 1, page 83.

The very words are given to us to repeat:

“Say, He has spoken to me in His Word, and He will fulfill every promise that He has made. Do not become restless. Be trustful. God's Word is true. Act as if your heavenly Father could be trusted...” *Ibid*.

What do you say?

Now here is another one. This is wonderful:

“Many make a serious mistake in their religious life by keeping the attention fixed upon their feelings and thus judging of their advancement or decline. Feelings are not a safe criterion. We are not to look within for evidence of our acceptance with God” *Testimonies for the Church, Volume 5*, page 199.

Well, where do we look? Turn to Hebrews, the 12th chapter, and we will see where to look:

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” Hebrews 12:2.

Where do we look? To Jesus. You see, if I look to Jesus and see how perfect He is, and I think it is left with me to become like Him, that can utterly discourage me because the longer I look and the more I try to follow, the greater the distance there seems to be between my attainments and His perfection. But oh, if I have grasped this wonderful fact that He is counting me like He is right now and guaranteeing to make me that way, then friends, looking to Jesus inspires faith and hope and courage.

“We are not to look within for evidence of our acceptance with God. We shall find there nothing but that which will discourage us. Our only hope is in “looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith.” There is everything in Him to inspire with hope, with faith, and with courage.

...Those who look within for comfort will become weary and disappointed. A sense of our weakness and unworthiness should lead us with humility of heart to plead the atoning sacrifice of Christ. As we rely upon His merits we shall find rest and peace and joy” *Testimonies for the Church, Volume 5*, pages 199–200.

Isn't that wonderful, friends? Look, suppose that I have a trip to make across the country, and I look in my wallet, and I see I only have a few pennies. And I think, “How in the world will I get there with all that expense of gas and oil across the country?” Suppose a good friend of mine that has plenty of money hands me his credit card. He says, “Now here, Brother Frazee. Here is a credit card, and I am going to give this to you and you can use this all across the country to pay your expenses.”

Suppose you are driving with me. What do you think I would use? Those few pennies I've got in my wallet, or do you think I would use the credit card? Suppose after we are a few hours out, and the gas gage begins to get low, suppose somebody says, “Well, Brother Frazee, you had better get some gas. It is getting down toward empty.” And suppose you hear me say, “I don't know what in the world I am going to do. I have only got a few cents here, and I know that won't fill up the tank and look at all we have got to go.”

What would you do? What would you remind me about? You would remind me about what? That credit card. Have you got a credit card on the bank of Heaven?

Have you? Who signed it? Jesus. It's signed with His blood. Philippians 4:19 is the credit card:

“...My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” Philippians 4:19.

Let's not look at our empty wallets, friends. Let's look at our credit card. What do you say? Now this credit card that I am holding in my hand here, it has a limitation. It's only good for so many dollars. But the credit card we are talking about tonight is unlimited. I just read off the *terms* of it: “...My God shall supply all your need according to *His riches* in glory by Christ Jesus.” An unlimited credit card. What do you say, friends?

Listen! Why not look at the credit card instead of the empty wallet? Why not? So tonight I rejoice that God lives, and because He lives, we too shall live. Brethren and Sisters, believe that Jesus meets with you. Turn the eye away from self. Look unto Jesus. Talk of His matchless love. By beholding Him, you will become changed into His likeness.

I love Him, friends. What do you say?

Friends, if this looks too simple, I will just tell you: it *is* that simple. And it needs to be. And if you don't need it that simple tonight, salt it away to help somebody that needs it that simple and salt it away for the day when *you* need it that simple. I need it that simple tonight. “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness... On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.” I see Him—beautiful, sweet, perfect, lovely. And I know He counts *me* that way tonight, and He has guaranteed to make me that way. I propose to stay with Him.

[Testimony service follows]

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