

Defending the Faith



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August 2017

Made In the Image of God

According to Genesis 1:26-28, God made us in His image, in His likeness. Nothing else in God's creation was made in His image. If we were made in God's image, there is something about us that is distinctive, exceptional, and even Holy. In what ways are we like God? Unlike any other creature in the world, we possess the gift of free will. We are capable of choosing our actions, choosing between good and evil. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the garden was placed there by God, so that we would be able to exercise our free will. Why did God give us the gift of free will, when He knew we would succumb to temptation and choose evil? It is only through free will that we can express love. God loves us infinitely, and all He asks of us is to love Him in return and to love one another. This is God's purpose for us. This is why we were created. There is no greater gift we could have been given than the ability to choose to love.

God placed in us all the qualities necessary for us to act in love. Christ revealed to us the attributes required to love as He loves us in the Beatitudes of Matthew 5. We all possess the potential to develop these attributes. However, we must exercise our free will and choose to become what God intended us to be. If we cannot love a God who died for us, who loves us so much that *"though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross"* (Philippians 2:6-8), how can we love anyone?

Although it is our God-given nature to be good, we often choose evil. Evil is the lack of love. In essence, when we sin we choose to withhold love. Instead, we choose to love ourselves. For example, when we steal, we choose to consider our needs or desires greater than another's. When we gossip, we delight in portraying another as more flawed than ourselves, and thereby, making ourselves to feel we are better in some way. When we engage in sexual activity for the sake of sex, we use the other person as an object simply for our transitory physical pleasure, without respect or regard for him/her as a loving human being. When we allow ourselves to fall into alcoholism or drug addiction, we do not regard the consequences this has on our families and friends. It is purely the quest for our own

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transitory pleasure, which ultimately destroys us. Selfishness and the lack of love destroy us. We were made to love.

We cannot experience God's kind of love, infinite love, divine love, apart from Him. We cannot resist the temptation of evil without Him. Christ implants the Holy Spirit within us to teach us and guide us, to help us develop those attributes that allow us to act in love. Humility teaches us to deny ourselves and allows us to open the door to love. Meekness is required to control our negative emotions and desires. It teaches us patience and helps us deny the desire for instant gratification. Mournfulness reminds us that we are flawed and that we are no better than anyone else. It allows us to be honest with ourselves. It teaches us that becoming like Christ is our goal. Mercifulness teaches us kindness and compassion for all human beings. Forgiveness is the greatest gift we can give to others. Our ability to have mercy on others is tested daily. These are only some examples.

God created us to love and He placed in us the attributes necessary to truly love others as ourselves. However, He also gave us the ability to choose to act in love. Every day, we have numerous opportunities to love or withhold love, to love God or reject Him, to love others or love ourselves. We are able to love others as God loves us through the Holy Spirit within us who reveals Christ to us and who allows us to know God. Saint Seraphim of Sarov says *"the true goal of our Christian life consists in the acquisition of the Holy Spirit."* We have the ability to acquire the Holy Spirit by knowing and loving God.

St. Clement of Alexandria said that *"The greatest of all lessons is to know oneself; for if one knows himself, he will know God; and if he knows God, he will become like God."* Because we were made in the image of God, we have the ability to know God and love as He loves. We have the potential of becoming like Christ. It is a process, a daily journey we take with God at our side, until He calls us out of this world. At that moment, we will experience a metamorphosis. We will mature into the butterfly we were meant to be. We will be like Christ, pure and sanctified, filled with His divine love.

Our God came into this reality and visited us to offer us an incomprehensible love! It is up to each and every one of us to make the decision to accept His love or reject it on a daily basis. What does He ask of us in return? He only asks us to love Him and to love our neighbors.

Helen Kamenos
Readers' Favorite Author

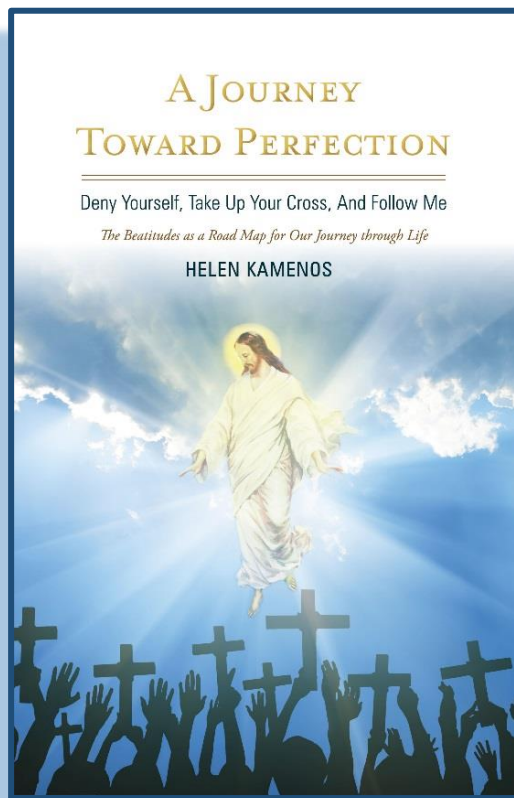
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Can People Change?

Absolutely! We cannot change others, but we can change ourselves. Our responsibility in life is to always work toward molding ourselves into the best person we can be. We can transform ourselves by first discovering our weaknesses, desiring a change, and then asking God for help. The Holy Spirit within us will work on our hearts and guide us. The Holy Spirit teaches us how to love selflessly. He will fill us with God's love. We aspire for the attributes of the Beatitudes to experience God's divine love. We receive His infinite love, and in turn, we offer His love to those who cross our paths in life. In the process, our relationships reap the benefits.



The following is an excerpt from my book, *A Journey Toward Perfection*:

The Beatitudes offer us a roadmap for our journey through life. The attributes that Christ lifted up in the Beatitudes are the attributes Jesus possessed. He was humble, meek, and merciful. He lived a life of righteousness. He had a pure heart. He was persecuted. This is the journey we are called to make. We are called to become like Christ, to deny ourselves, take up our crosses and follow Him. We can only grasp His love for us by walking in His shoes, by traveling life's journey as He did. Traveling on this road, we acquire the characteristics necessary to enrich our lives with God's love and to reap the earthly rewards of developing a relationship with our Creator. Through His example, Christ taught us how to love God and love one another. We can only love God, if we are humble, meek, and come into agreement with Him by repenting of our sins. We can only express love for others, if we are willing to be merciful, compassionate, patient, kind, and willing to forgive. We can only act in love for others when we deny ourselves, and seek to give, rather than to receive. By walking in Christ's shoes and

living life as He did, God is more intimately revealed to us. We gain an understanding of God that is not possible, unless we persevere in that journey toward perfection.

God intends for us to be "conformed" to the image of Christ. Patiently, He guides us, prods us along, and little by little He transforms us. He takes us like a ball of clay and molds us more and more into the image of Christ. He teaches us humility, meekness, mercy, and love. He guides us along the path of righteousness. When we allow the Holy Spirit to transform us, little by little we spiral up the path toward Christ. We become more and more like Him. We experience setbacks. We continue to struggle and repent. At times, these are painful lessons. The further along the journey we go, we learn to be content in our circumstances and find opportunities to be lights in the world. We learn to appreciate the present. We thank God for our blessings. We let go of the past. We look in hope to our future salvation, our future perfection.

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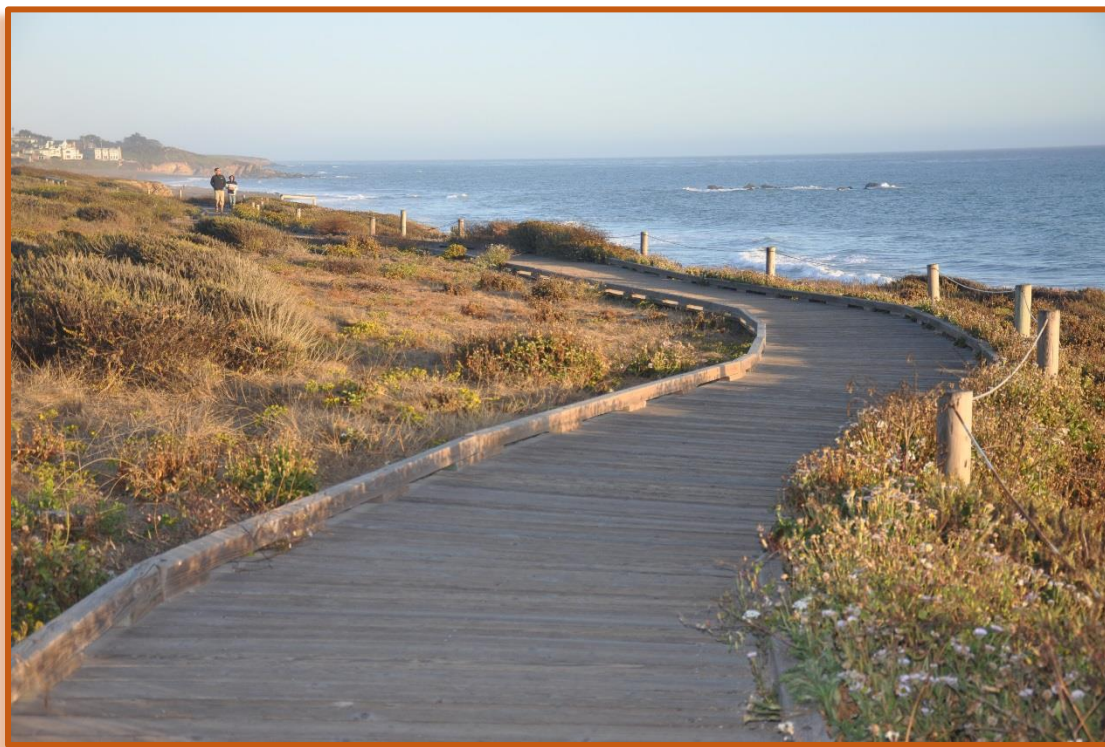
Can People Change?

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The more our spiritual eyes are opened, the more we realize how unworthy we are. We more readily recognize evil in ourselves. We discover just how self-centered we really are. We no longer comfort ourselves by believing we are better than most. Our new standard is Christ. It is Christ who we try to emulate. It is Christ's example we follow. Again and again, we fail to be perfect. However, in faith, we are confident that Christ is always with us, guiding us and loving us, despite our weaknesses and failures. We can travel through the trials and tribulations of our lives, lost, not knowing the love of God or we can trust Christ and seek to be like Him.

Our journey is actually the stages we move through as we experience a metamorphosis. We are born into this world as a caterpillar. We crawl around looking for the light. When we discover Christ, we slowly learn to die to our caterpillar selves, and are gradually transformed into a chrysalis. During this stage we are focused on Christ. We are fed by the Holy Spirit and live for Him. Throughout our lives, God calls us to be Christ-like. Our entire lives, everything we experience, is intended to develop in us the attributes of Christ, to come closer to perfection. Finally, when the time comes, Christ calls us out of this life, and we experience the final stage of metamorphosis. We are perfected into the butterfly we were always meant to be.

Life's journey may be filled with winding paths full of obstacles. The attributes of the Beatitudes strengthen us and help us overcome the challenges we face.



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Book Signing – August 27, 2017

Hosted by **St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church**
Northridge, CA



I will be signing copies of my book, ***A Journey Toward Perfection***, after the church service during coffee hour in the Grand Ballroom. The church service begins at 10:00 a.m. Books will be available for purchase.

JOIN US! I am looking forward to seeing you!

[For more info, follow this link-----> Book Signing](#)

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