

“CREATED TO BE LIKE JESUS”
by Rom A. Pegram (9/11/16)

This is the 4th week in our study of a Purpose Driven Life...a life controlled, guided, and directed by God’s purposes. Our benefit is the peace given by God, where we know that our life is in balance—eternal balance, ready for this world and the next. Let me give you some reminders as we begin today:

- The first purpose was “We were planned for God’s pleasure.” It is not for us. It is for God. And, we offer God pleasure ... through worship!
- The second purpose was that “We were formed for God’s family.” The family of God, loving, belonging, and experiencing life together...

TODAY, we get into yet another God-given purpose for our lives and it is this: WE WERE CREATED TO BE LIKE JESUS... Just listen to this word from Colossians (2:7, MSG):

“You’re deeply rooted in him. You’re well constructed upon him. You know your way around the faith. Now do what you’ve been taught. School’s out; quit studying the subject and start *living* it! And let your living spill over into thanksgiving.”

So, the way we’ve been created is like this: *we are already ‘deeply rooted in Christ.’* And, we’re to continue along that path, becoming more and more like Christ (yes, the Son of God!) as we grow & progress in this life. Now, listen to this (Rom. 8:27-30, MSG):

“He knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God. ²⁸ That’s why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good. ²⁹ God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son. The Son stands first in the line of humanity he restored. We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in him. ³⁰ After God made that decision of what his children should be like, he followed it up by calling people by name. After he called them by name, he set them on a solid basis with himself. And then, after getting them established, he stayed with them to the end, gloriously completing what he had begun.”

From the very beginning, God’s plan has been to make you like his Son, Jesus... This is your destiny ... and *the third purpose of your life!* God announced his intention at the time of creation (Gen. 1:26a, TEV):

“Then God said, ‘And now we will make human beings; they will be like us and resemble us....’”

In all creation, only humans have been made in God's image. Do you know what an incredible privilege that is? Have you thought about this image in awhile? We're like God because...

- *We're spiritual*—our spirits are immortal & will outlast our physical bodies...
- *We're intellectual*—we can think, reason, and solve problems...
- *We're relational*—we can give & receive real love... AND...
- *We have a moral compass*—we can discern right from wrong, which makes us accountable to God...

Scripture tells us that all people, not just believers, have at least part of the image of God in them. Did you know that? But, in all of us, that image has been distorted or destroyed over time ... by sin (things that pull us away from God). That's why God sent his Son, Jesus, on a mission; he came to restore that image of God in us! What does that image look like? JESUS...

Now, don't get me wrong today; you'll never be God ... and you'll never be a god (little "g"); but you were created to be 'godly'—like Christ, taking on his values, attitudes, and *character*! I said a few weeks ago that "God is not primarily interested in your comfort; God is interested in your character." Becoming like Christ is 'character development' (not personality, but character development)! The fancy, theological word for it is ... *sanctification*! Let me briefly give you the process we go through, theologically...

- ***Justification*** – "just as if I" had never sinned... Here's God's gift of salvation to us in Christ; Christ came to 'cover our sins', so that's how God sees us; this is our being 'born again', but that's not where our life in Christ stops! We move to...
- ***Sanctification*** – growing to be more & more like Christ—getting us ready for life beyond this one; we need to be prepared, you know! Scripture guides us there...
- ***Glorification*** – where we become like Christ in eternity... It is only there that we can safely say ... 'we've arrived'...

So, that's the process—*Sanctification*, the third purpose for your life—created to be like Christ! But, folks ... that doesn't just happen. As in all things, there's *God's* part ... and there's *our* part...

- ***Justification*** – God's part was to send Christ so that all *could* be saved... Our part is to choose Christ so that we *can* be saved...
- ***Sanctification*** – God's part was to *provide* his Holy Spirit who could inhabit our lives ... transforming us from the inside out ... to be more & more like Christ... Our part is to *cooperate* in that process...

Know this: While *effort* has little to do with our salvation (justification), it has much to do with our spiritual growth (2nd part of God's vision for our church) or *sanctification*! Rick Warren reminds us that in God's word it says no less than 8 times to "make every effort!" So, what is that effort? What is our part, if God's already done his? Here it is...

WE MUST COOPERATE WITH GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT. Ephesians 4:22 (MSG) tells us, "Since, then, we do not have the excuse of ignorance, everything—and I do mean everything—connected with that old way of life has to go. It's rotten through and through. Get rid of it! And then take on an entirely new way of life—a God-fashioned life...." So, we must *choose* to let go of our old behaviors... Ephesians 4:23 (TEV) goes on to say, "Your hearts and minds must be made completely new...." *We must change the way we think...*

The Bible uses the word 'metamorphosis' when speaking of 'the renewing of our minds.' Very much like a caterpillar becoming a butterfly, *you can't hang onto the cocoon if you want to soar to new heights!* So, we must be about allowing God to change the way we think!

We must 'put on' the character of Christ by replacing our old habits with new, godly habits... Your character is essentially the sum of your habits ... and I'll guarantee you if you decide to drop some old, un-Christ-like habits, you'd better replace them with some Christ-like ones real quick ... or the old ones will sneak back in. That's the way habits work. Here's something else...

WE MUST ACCEPT THE WAYS GOD MOLDS OUR CHARACTER—THROUGH HIS WORD, PEOPLE & CIRCUMSTANCES. 2 Corinthians 3:18b (NLT) says, "As the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more." Here's another part of the process of *sanctification*—*our third purpose for living...*

You cannot reproduce the character of Jesus in your life ... on your own! It's only the Holy Spirit who has the power to make changes God wants to make in your life! But, it usually doesn't come like a bolt of lightning—not in my experience anyway. It's usually a whole series of gentle 'nudges' or 'whispers' that get us there. And, God uses a variety of ways to see that happen...

Pastor Rick Warren puts it this way: "Christlikeness is not produced by imitation, but by inhabitation." We have to allow it, knowing Christ *wants* to inhabit our lives ... and live his life through us! Again, the process of 'inhabiting' our lives happens through a variety of ways...

Understand God forms his character in us ... through His *word*, *people* he sends into our lives, and *circumstances* He allows in our lives...

- God's Word – provides the truth we need to grow...
- God's People – provide the support we need to grow...
- God-Allowed Circumstances – provide the environment we need to grow...

Again, we were never created to 'do it all on our own'; you cannot grow to 'Christ-likeness' in isolation; it happens in the context of *this* family we're created to be a part of... *Finally...*

WE MUST REALIZE THAT ‘BECOMING LIKE CHRIST’ IS A SLOW PROCESS.

Ephesians 4:13 (CEV) reminds us, “This will continue until we are ... mature, just as Christ is, and we will be completely like him.” I wish I didn’t have to tell you that this is a life-long process ... but it is; this is why the “I’ve arrived” attitude in people today really, really bothers me ... because, according to God’s word, we won’t ‘arrive’ until we ‘arrive’ in heaven ... and NOT BEFORE! 1 John 3:2b (NLT) also tells us, “We can’t even imagine what we will be like when Christ returns. But we do know that when he comes we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is.” This takes TIME ... so *let me say it this way...*

You are a work in progress! Don’t ever forget that! I know I’ve said this before, but there is much confusion & frustration in our lives when we forget God is far more interested in our *character* ... than anything else! Sometimes we worry, as human beings, about what God wants us to do with our lives. The truth is, we could probably do several things with our lives ... and do them well. But, God’s far more interested in *what you are* ... than in *what you do*! Remember, as Warren would say: We are human *beings* ... not human *doings*! God’s more interested in your *character*—a culmination of your habits in life—than in anything else ... and THAT TAKES TIME!

Folks, if our third purpose in this life is to become Christ-like in every way ... then we need to make a counter-culture decision to focus our lives on becoming more like Jesus! If you haven’t understood some of the changes that’ve taken place around here in the past year or so, at the root of every one of the changes you’ve seen is this purpose—to help people become more & more like Christ!

If you take just a moment to look at today’s best-selling books in a local book store ... you’ll soon come to realize that even some of God’s people have abandoned God’s great purposes for their lives; what they’re really seeking is personal fulfillment & emotional stability. Bluntly speaking, *that’s narcissism ... not discipleship*! Jesus didn’t die on the cross just so that we could live comfortable, well-adjusted lives. His purpose, dear friends, was far deeper ... and *is* far deeper! Jesus wants to make us like himself ... so that we, too, will be prepared for the life to come. Eternity’s that important! So, *this is our third purpose—our greatest privilege, our immediate responsibility, and our ultimate destiny...* Won’t you join me in this journey? Won’t you allow God’s Spirit to do a continual work in you? Let God know that you will ... every day ... then let him mold you into the very likeness of his Son, Jesus—the first restored to the Glory God intended for us...