

**LIFE ON PURPOSE 4**  
**“WE WERE CREATED TO BE LIKE CHRIST”**

*“Let your roots grow down into Christ and draw up nourishment from Christ, so you will grow in faith, strong and vigorous in the truth you were taught. Let your lives overflow with thanksgiving for all God has done.” Colossians 2:7*

I want to look with you today at how God desires, and designs for us to grow. It is one thing to begin the Christian life, it is quite another to steadily continue the life long process of growing. Billy Graham used to say: “it takes 5% effort for a person to become a Christian, and 95% effort to remain one. As we discussed while studying John Wesley, “we are either growing closer to God or further away from God, there is no standing still when it comes to discipleship. But instead of focusing on the traditional ‘steps to Christian Maturity’: Bible study, Prayer, Fasting, and other classic disciplines, (which have merit all their own, don’t get me wrong), I want to explore with you how God develops the likeness of Jesus in each of us, how God creates or develops our Character. Listen to another introductory quote from PDL:

“God’s ultimate goal for our lives on earth is not our comfort, but character development. God wants us to grow up spiritually and become like Christ.” That’s what our scripture verse aptly reminds us.

John Wooden, that great UCLA basketball coach often reminded his players: Be more concerned with your character than with your reputation. Your character is what you really are while your reputation is merely what others think you are.

And I want to get before you this profound statement from Rick Warren regarding Character, because each of our answers to this question this morning will involve a choice or decision on our parts. “Nothing shapes our character more than the commitments we choose to make. Our commitments can **develop** us or they can **destroy** us, but either way, they will **define** us!”

I believe God ‘grows’ or ‘matures’ us multiple ways, but primarily in these three:

## **1. GOD MATURES US THROUGH GOD'S TRUTH.**

*"And now I entrust you to God and the Word of his grace – His message that is able to build you up and give you an inheritance with all those he has set apart for himself." Acts 20:32*

*"Make them pure and holy by teaching them your Words of truth." John 17:17*

Truth is an illusive commodity in our world today. When the most respected leaders of this country can vehemently state before us conflicting images of the same event, and each claim their perspective to be "true", truth has been compromised. Cal Thomas, the LA Times reporter and FOX Contributor said during a lecture series I attended once: "To claim to know the truth is to automatically be labeled close minded." Though stated some 13 years ago, I'm afraid his judgment is more accurate now than it was then.

A pastor I read about, starts each confirmation class with a jar full of jellybeans, (not unlike the ones our youth enjoyed on Wed. night). He asks his students to guess how many beans are in the jar, and on a big pad of paper writes down their estimates. Then, next to those estimates, he helps them make another list: their favorite songs. When the lists are complete, he reveals the actual number of beans in the jar. The whole class looks over their guesses, to see which estimate was closest to being right. Then the crafty pastor turns to the list of favorite songs. "And which one of these is closest to being right?" he asks. The students protest that there is no "right answer"; a person's favorite song is purely a matter of taste. This pastor, who holds a Ph.D. in philosophy from Notre Dame asks, "When you decide what to believe in terms of your faith, is that more like guessing the number of beans, or more like choosing your favorite song?" Always, pastor Belynsky says, from churched veterans to new converts, he gets the same answer: Choosing one's faith is more like choosing a favorite song.

Is that how God has revealed Himself in His Word? One of many other legitimate and worthy choices? Is that what Jesus claimed for Himself, or does; "The Way, The TRUTH, The life, ring a bell.

In order to be grown-up by God, we must maintain a proper understanding and personal experience with God's Truth, as it is primarily revealed to us through His Word.

There are three steps:

1. We must **accept** its authority.

Many of our troubles occur because we base our choices on unreliable authorities; culture ('everyone is doing it'), tradition ('we've always done it...'), reason ('it seemed logical'), or emotion ('it just felt right'). The most important decision we can make today is to settle this issue of what will be the ultimate authority for our life! I care not which definition of Biblical revelation you choose to define you, whether it's inerrancy, or infallibility, perfect, or flawed. If you submit yourself to the authority of God's Word, God will soon help us figure out how it got here, and how we are to use it!

2. We must **assimilate** its truth.

Knowing about the Word, is different than knowing the Word. Knowing about Jesus, and knowing Jesus are two radically different things! There is plenty of Biblical knowledge afloat in the Kingdom and in the Body of Christ, but there is a discernable lack of assimilation of God's truth into today's world. I believe this is one of Rick Warren's greatest gifts, his ability to directly relate God's ancient Word to those of us living in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We need to assimilate, incorporate, interact, interject, intersperse, and interpose God's Word, and it's truth into our lives, and our world.

3. We must **apply** its principles.

Knowing the truth is fine, but until we apply it, we're only half done. We all laughed at this quote in my group on Wed. night: "The truth will set you free, but first it may make you miserable!" God's Word exposes our motives. God's truth reveals our human falsehood, and most of us would just as soon take a pass.

A. W. Tozer spoke of it this way: “The unattended garden will soon be overrun with weeds; the heart that fails to cultivate truth and root out error will shortly be a theological wilderness.” We can know the Bible front to back, but unless we yield our own misappropriated authority, to the Bible as ultimate authority, and allow God to apply it directly to our lives, then our lives will never change.

## **2. GOD MATURES US THROUGH LIFE’S TRIALS.**

*“We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us – they help us learn to endure. And endurance develops strength of character in us, and character strengthens our confident expectation of salvation.”*

Romans 5: 3-4

It’s going to get a bit tougher the further we go today. I know that most of us have been through, (or are currently going through) some tough times in our lives. None of us, whether Christian or seeker, is immune from the pain and difficulty that this life affords! But what many of us often overlook or under appreciate is how God uses the difficulties that come our way, to make us more like Jesus. Certainly, he was no stranger to suffering, and the worst we face, pales in comparison to Jesus, but God still wants us to draw a life lesson from Him.

I’m not saying that God causes all the bad things that happen in our lives. I’m also not saying that any of us are immune from the wrath or judgment of God. What I am saying is that we need to remember the point from which we launched. God’s ultimate purpose for our lives is our Character Development, that changes how we consider tragedy, or how we look at trials. It’s reminiscent of the underlying principle from the marriage series, that God’s purpose for marriage is not our happiness, but our holiness.

We often grow the most, when we are hurt the deepest. We often find worship most meaningful, when we are most needy, or most vulnerable. We often find the most comforting truths in God’s Word when we are most uncomfortable. We will never come to know that God is all we need, until God is all we’ve got.

Tying a knot at the end of our rope and hanging on is all we can sometimes manage, but that ain't bad as long as God is your rope!

The great 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm reminds us that Death is a valley, a place of lush beauty, and place where stuff grows, a place of life. What a mixed up metaphor the shepherd Psalmist paints. But he also reminds us this valley journey is one we pass through. Only those who refuse to seek God end up living in the shadow of Death's darkness.

Here are three simple reminders to help us remember that God uses the good as well as the bad parts and experiences of our lives, the difficult circumstances, the unfair treatments, and even the down right bad things of our lives, to develop our character, and make us like Jesus.

1. **Refuse** to Give Up
2. **Rejoice** and Give Thanks
3. **Remember** that God's Plan is Good, because God is good.

A few years ago, following a difficult season in my life, I came to learn an important lesson about being hurt, and I did so partly, through a hymn. The lesson is: "When once you've been hurt to the core of your being, and you survive, there is freedom in living, knowing that you can never be hurt that badly again." Unless you have been hurt that deeply, you have no frame of reference for what I just said. And if you have been hurt like that recently, and are still smarting, then this lesson is designed to remind you; there is hope, because God is Good. Here is the Hymn. Note especially verse three:

"O Love that wilt not let me go, I rest my weary soul in thee; I give thee back the life I owe, that in thine ocean depths its flow may richer, fuller be.

O Light that followest all my way, I yield my flickering torch to thee; my heart restores its borrowed ray, that in thy sunshine's blaze its day may brighter, fairer be.

**O Joy that seekest me through pain, I cannot close my heart to thee; I trace the rainbow thru the rain, and feel the promise is not vain, that morn shall tearless be.**

O Cross that liftest up my head, I dare not ask to fly from thee; I lay in dust life's glory dead, and from the ground there blossoms red life that shall endless be." 480R

### **3. GOD MATURES US THROUGH OUR TEMPTATIONS.**

*"But remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you will not give in to it." I Corinthians 10:13*

Let's start with this quote: "On the path to spiritual maturity, even temptation becomes a stepping-stone rather than a stumbling block, when we realize that it is just as much an occasion to do the right thing as it is to do the wrong thing. Temptation simply provides the choice." Remember: our commitments can develop us, or destroy us, but which ever we choose, they will define us.

Most of us think of temptation and being tempted as bad things. We often feel like the guy walking in the mall who cranes his neck watching the bare midriff, halter-top, mini-skirt walk by, while his wife states rather matter of factly: "Well, I hope that was worth the trouble your in."

Temptation is not a bad thing, yielding to it is, but in and of itself it reminds us that we are human, it reminds us that life is full of choices, it reminds us that we must have Satan's attention, and it reminds us that to get out of it... (we should avoid all malls), no, we should live in continual dependence on God!

There is a progression to temptation that I think is helpful.

1. A **desire** is identified inside of us.

Most temptation affects us because it identifies or reveals a desire that is within us, and many of those are legitimate desires, by the way. Some temptation legitimately comes from Satan, or the evil one, but much temptation is often a result of our own lame thinking! And most temptation begins in our most vulnerable area: Our mind!

2. A **doubt** is introduced into our minds.

Next, we begin to doubt. We doubt whether we'll be caught, we doubt the consequences, we doubt God's Word, and His valuation of the potential sin. We might define our doubt with this word: Justify. We are so good at justifying our actions, choices and behavior, and most are based on an underlying doubt.

3. A **deception** is invented and placed before.

We convince ourselves that we need this distraction, that no one will be hurt by this action, that we'll be forgiven, etc. etc. There are two equally damning lies Satan wants us to believe: 1) Just once won't hurt. 2) Now that you have ruined your life, you are beyond God's use, and might as well enjoy sinning. Adam and Eve were deceived and came to believe that they could/would become like God, not by following his laws and commands, but by eating an apple! How stupid? Not much more stupid than some of the things we try to convince ourselves!

4. A **disobedient** act is inspired and we choose it.

Finally there is a disobedient action before us, and we choose it. It all starts rather innocently, we see something, or someone, we want it, we plan it, we justify it, we believe it, and then we do it. How do we fix it, how do we not give in to the seemingly ever-present temptations around us? On the old TV show "Hee Haw," Doc Campbell was once confronted by a patient with his arm in a sling while explaining how he broke his arm in two places. The doc replies, "Well then, stay out of them places!"

Overcoming the temptations that we create or encounter begins in our minds. The essence of sin, is wrong thinking. Most victories are won in our minds; lost there too! So guard your hearts, but fortify your minds, and watch God grow you as you win victories, and even as you struggle through defeats! God will grow and mature us, as we resist the devil and run from temptations!

I want to close with the most profound discovery in this section. God uses a standard to measure our development along the Spiritual pathway, and that measure is the fruit of the Spirit. God says, those who are growing will evidence great love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

But here is the interesting mark: “God develops the fruit of the Spirit in our life by allowing us to experience circumstances in which we’re tempted to express the *exact opposite quality!* Character development always involves a choice, and temptation often provides that opportunity. For instance, God teaches us love by putting some unlovely people around us. It takes no character to love people who are lovely and loving to you. God teaches us real joy in the midst of sorrow, when we turn to Him. Happiness depends on external circumstances, but joy is based on our relationship with God. God develops real peace within us, not by making things go the way we planned, but by allowing times of chaos and confusion. Anyone can be peaceful watching a beautiful sunset or relaxing on vacation. We learn real peace by choosing to trust God in circumstances in which we are tempted to worry or be afraid. God uses the opposite situation of each fruit to allow us a choice. Integrity is built by defeating the temptation to be dishonest; humility grows when we refuse to be prideful; and endurance develops every time you reject the temptation to give up. Every time you defeat a temptation, you become more like Jesus.”

Every time you submit yourself to the authority of God’s Word, you become more like Jesus. Every time you survive a trial, and come out standing, you become more like Jesus. Every time, one at a time. Growing deeper.

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