

Metamorphosis 7-27-03

Many points taken from Purpose Driven Life chapter 22

We have been looking at the purposes for which we were created. We find in God's word that the main purpose is for us to give glory to God by worshipping Him. A secondary purpose is to belong to the Family of God. Today we will look at the third purpose of God in creating us. Simply put, it is for us to be transformed into Christ's likeness. Yes, you were created to become like Christ! Now before you yell, "blasphemy!" let me explain that you can never be God. That is the oldest lie in the book. By "the book" I mean the Bible of course. Satan tempted Eve with the promise of being a god, asserting your will over that of your Maker. New Age tells us we are all gods. The Bible tells us the source of that idea. It is as old as time. But you don't have to buy into New Age philosophy to be tempted by it. We exhibit this tendency every time we try to control our circumstances, our future and the people around us.

There is only one Creator. All others are creation. We will never be eternal for we all had a beginning. We will never have all knowledge and all power and be omnipresent. That is the domain of our Creator and we will never be like that. But the Bible not only tells us we can be like God in many ways, it actually lists those ways and instructs us to make every effort to be like that (2 Peter 1:5-7). When God created man, He made him in His image and likeness. We are spiritual beings that will live forever. We are intellectual, relational, and we have a moral consciousness. That likeness with God was severely distorted when Adam disobeyed God. Jesus came to restore that likeness.

What does that likeness look like? It looks like Jesus Christ! He is "*the exact representation of His being.*" - Hebrews 1:3 (NIV) In His case we can say, "Like Father, exactly like Son," and God's destiny for you is to be like the Son. The Bible says, "*You were...created to be like God, truly righteous and holy.*" - Ephesians 1:4 (GWT) *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... We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in him.* - Romans 8:29 (Msg)

This is one of the most miraculous things in Scripture. It is one of the hardest things for me to fathom. When I was young and idealistic and excused my faults more readily, I could see how it might be possible. But the longer I live, the more honest I am about my condition, the more I fail and make disastrous decisions, the more I marvel that God wants to transform me into the image of His Son. He wants to transform my heart to desire His glory, my mind to think as He does, and my mouth to speak His Word.

What makes it even more unimaginable is when I see Christ more clearly. His humility and passion for His Father, His patience and gentleness with His

Commented [notes1]: ⁵For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.
2 Peter 1:5-7 (NIV)

bumbling hardheaded and treacherous followers makes me marvel. He wants to make me like that! "Surely God, you can't mean you want to make me like that!" How could that be possible? But then God is God and He can do what appears to be impossible.

Jesus' first miracle was what I believe a picture of this third goal for our lives. Jesus was attending a marriage feast in Cana. In Jesus' day a marriage feast was a weeklong celebration. The host was expected to have wine for all the guests for the entire seven days. Somewhere near the end of the feast a social nightmare took place. They were out of wine! Wine was a symbol of joy and good fortune. ³When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." ⁴"Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." ⁵His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. ⁸Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, ⁹and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." -John 2:3-10 (NIV)

The Apostle Paul said that we are like an earthen vessel, a clay jar, in which a treasure has been deposited (2 Corinthians 4:7). Jesus took these ordinary pots filled with water and made some extraordinary wine. You see, wine is also a picture of the Holy Spirit. Jesus took what was common and transformed it. It turned into something of great value. Not only was it good, it was the best. There are other things that can add flavor to our life, but nothing like the Holy Spirit. He is the best. It is interesting to note that our bodies are over half water. We literally are an earthen vessel of water. Jesus can speak to water in your earthen vessel and transform it. You have a personality, but Jesus wants to infuse that personality through and through with the Holy Spirit. The greater part of wine is water, but it is water with a kick, and so is your life when it is saturated with the Holy Spirit.

God isn't making you a god, He's making you godly. Listen to this verse, "Take on an entirely new way of life – a God-fashioned life, a life renewed from the inside and working itself into your conduct as God accurately reproduces his character in you." -Ephesians 4:22 (Msg) This transformation is not about losing who you are as a personality, but about giving that personality the quality of the life of Jesus. He doesn't do away with your personality, He takes away it's weaknesses, the fallen nature, and adds His strengths. Those strengths are listed in the beatitudes¹, in the fruits of the Spirit², in Paul's chapter on love³, and in Peter's list of the characteristics of a productive and effective life⁴.

Commented [notes2]: ⁷But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. 2 Cor. 4:7 (KJV)

Commented [notes3]: Matthew 5,6,7

Commented [notes4]: Galatians 5:22-23

Commented [notes5]: 1 Corinthians 13

Commented [notes6]: 2 Peter 1:5-8

When you forget that one of God's goals for your life is this transformation of your nature, circumstances will frustrate and annoy you. You may even think that God is working against you, which is exactly opposite of what is happening. He is working for you by tripping you up. It is when everything seems against you that God is working most tenaciously for you. We have to see the need to yield to the power of Christ within us. We have to see the need to be transformed. In this struggle, the nature of Christ is most solidly established in us. It is supposed to be difficult. Earth is not heaven! Ease, comfort and wealth actually make our spiritual transformation more difficult and sometimes handicapped (Mark 10:23).

I've shared with you before about the butterfly coming out of its cocoon; it is in need of the struggle to free itself. It is the hours of struggle that forces the vessels in the wing muscles to open up fully. By eliminating the struggle we eliminate the very thing needed for flight and end up with a handicapped butterfly that is easy prey. Our goal is often ease and comfort, but if we are going to fly, if we are going to soar in the nature of Christ, we must experience the character forming struggles that push us beyond ourselves to the power and life of Jesus. When the Apostle Paul refers to our transformation, he uses the Greek word *metamorphoo*. It is the source of our word metamorphosis that describes this process.

God is not a great genie in the sky that exists to answer all your requests. God is not your servant, nor does He exist to help you in your pursuit of personal fulfillment. Remember, it's not about you. He created us with a goal in mind, the likeness of His Son. Until we realize that it takes struggle and difficulty to form that in us, we will either be severely disillusioned or live in denial. God does not heal every disease in this life, nor does He answer every prayer. The Apostle Paul boasted about his thorn in the flesh because it made him rely on God. Too often we pray in direct contrast to His will for us. We're struggling to get out of our cocoon which is working the life of Christ into areas of our life where we had been reluctant to let Him reign, and at the same time we are praying that God would just cut the cocoon open. We can't see the wonder of the experience of flight He has before us. All we've ever known is crawling. We're praying, "God release me, have mercy on me." And God is hearing, "Please handicap me, leave me alone and let me crawl again." God says, "I am having mercy on you, and you are going to soar for my glory." And we respond, "What?"

This metamorphosis takes place by the power of the Holy Spirit. *And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more.* -2 Corinthians 3:18 (NLT) That verse uses the word *metamorphoo* also. Though we must cooperate and participate in the process, it is not something we can do on our own. You cannot produce the life of Christ by trying hard and having will power. The process of this metamorphosis is called sanctification. It is the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit in you. The Bible says, "God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey him and the power to do

Commented [notes7]: ²³Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"
Mark 10:23 (NIV)

what pleases him." - Philippians 2:13 (NLT) That is wonderful news. That is what makes the incredibly miraculous quite possible. This power is at work in every believer's life. But then why don't we see more Christians acting like Jesus?

There must be cooperation. The moment you step out in faith and do what He is telling you, the strength and help are yours. The problem comes when the gentle whisper of the Holy Spirit reminds us to praise instead of complain, and we squelch it and do what we want. When He says to speak a word of kindness to someone we reason it away for fear of rejection. The more we squelch the Spirit the less He speaks to us. Why? It's because we are condemning ourselves and becoming accountable for resisting Him. He waits until we are willing to cooperate, to act in faith. Like those priests that carried the Ark of the Covenant to the Jordan River, someone put their foot in the raging floodwaters before they suddenly stopped. We look at the flood in our life, hear the command of the Spirit, and quickly reason away that gentle voice. "I can't do that!" No, and that is the point. You can't, it will take the very life of Christ formed in you to do it. We have to decide if we want comfort and pleasures and acceptance or the life of Christ in us.

This life of Christ in us starts small, like a seed the Bible says. We are like a building or a child. All of these Biblical similes imply our active cooperation and growth. It doesn't happen over night. We keep learning and growing and putting our whole heart into cooperatively obeying His leading. Every victory and stretch of faith prepares us for the next bigger challenge, but we are more prepared because we have seen what God did last time. We learn more and more to depend on the life of Jesus in us.

In Ephesians 4:22-24 the Bible lays out three responsibilities in becoming like Christ. The first is a deliberate choice to let go of our old ways of acting. *"Every thing ... connected with that old way of life has to go. It's rotten through and through. Get rid of it!"* - Ephesians 4:22 (Msg) Several passages describe the things we must get rid of: moral filth, malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from our lips⁵. Every time those things raise their ugly heads in our lives we must turn from them and yield to the life of Christ. That is what I was, not what I am becoming! That was the old caterpillar, and I'm being changed. I think God is especially pleased when those things try to reassert their place in our lives and we do the opposite. If I am tempted to slander someone, I ask the Spirit of God what good word I can say about him or her. If the Spirit of God warns me that anger is coming from my heart, I ask the Lord to help me embrace the struggle as the gift of God to transform me into His likeness. If I'm tempted to crawl – FLY!

Second, our 'thought life' must undergo a metamorphosis of its own. The word of God tells us to think on what is noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8). Have you ever noticed how man is drawn to the negative? When someone is putting another person down, others are quick

Commented [notes8]: James 1:21; 1 Peter 2:1; Colossians 3:8

Commented [notes9]: ⁸Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. Phil. 4:8 (NIV)

to be drawn in and add their own 2 cents. If someone doesn't like something we can come up with something we don't like too. It is really one of the revelations of our old nature that we can clearly see the ugliness of. The Bible tells us to take our thoughts captive and make them obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). In another passage it tells us we should have the very mind of Christ (2 Corinthians 2:16).

Third, we are told to put on the character of Christ. That is referred to as our new self. *"Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."* - Ephesians 4:24 (NIV) In other passages we are told to clothe ourselves in Christ⁶, to put on His attributes, and to put love over all of these⁷. That is our part of cooperating with the Spirit. As we step out in faith in these ways that are contrary to our old ways, we can expect the Lord to empower us and imbue us with His very own character. We will find ourselves responding in ways that surprises us. That is exciting! It brings the reality of the new life a tangible quality so that we know we are experiencing the supernatural.

When is this wonderful transformation completed? I have good news and bad news. The bad news is that it will not be finished in this life. The good news is that the moment we graduate from this life, we will see Jesus and the work will be complete. *²Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.* - 1 John 3:2 (NIV) That is why heaven is so wonderful, everyone you meet will have the qualities of Jesus. That is why hell is so horrible; no one there has one characteristic of Jesus.

If it is all completed when we see Him, why do we have to work at it now? It is the right thing, the best thing for us, the thing that will bring the best into the lives we touch. If Christ gave His life for us, can we do any less?

Will you make the counter-cultural decision to live to be transformed into Christ-likeness, regardless of the cost? Will you forsake the goals of the world to join with God in this incredibly wonderful goal He has for your life?

"Jesus did not die on the cross just so we could live comfortable, well adjusted lives. His purpose is far deeper: He wants to make us like Himself before He takes us to heaven. This is our greatest privilege, our immediate responsibility, and our ultimate destiny." Rick Warren

You and I were created to become like Christ. Incredible, amazing, but true!

Commented [notes10]: ⁵We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. 2 Cor. 10:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: But we have the mind of Christ. 1 Cor. 2:16 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: ¹⁴Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. Romans 13:14 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: ¹²Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Col. 3:12-14 (NIV)