

Metamorphosis part 2 8-2-03

Many points from The Purpose Driven Life by Rick Warren chapter 23 & 24

We are continuing this series from the book The Purpose Driven Life by Rick Warren. This week I'm preaching on some of the highlights from chapters 23 and 24. Last week we discovered the wonderful plan that God has for us to be transformed into the image of His Son. God wants to make you like Jesus! I touched briefly on what that means and how the Holy Spirit works in us to form the character of Jesus in us. I also mentioned several ways in which we can cooperate in the process, and I want to elaborate on two of those ways this morning.

First let me explain that this effort you make will have absolutely no effect on you at all unless the Holy Spirit is working in you. I'm going to give you suggestions, but these suggestions are not formulas for spiritual growth. They are merely tools that the Holy Spirit may use to help you grow. If you did everything that every Christian advises to help in your spiritual growth, you would have to have 96-hour days. What we are after is results. It is a little bit like dieting. There are general guidelines, but each person is unique. Even though we follow the same general guidelines, the details have to be customized to our own body and lifestyle. The important thing is to be cooperating with the Spirit of God consistently.

"God wants us to grow up...like Christ in everything." Ephesians 4:15a (Msg) I had a friend in Phoenix who had a handicapped son. His son will always be an infant mentally, but his body grew into a man. It was very sad, though they loved him just as much as if he were able to mature. The same thing happens in the spiritual realm. There are Christians that have been Christians all their life, yet never learned praise instead of gossip. A baby can't help it that he is focused on himself, but as he matures, if the focus stays so self-centered as it grows, it's not so cute.

In the realm of spiritual maturity we have to realize growth is not automatic. We must intentionally commit to growth. It takes desire, effort, and persistence. When Jesus went up to Matthew and said, "Come, be my disciple", Matthew had to make a choice. Then he had to put his feet in gear. Then he had to keep up with Jesus and try to take in what He was teaching them. His original commitment meant many subsequent actions that together transformed him. What you commit to is going to define who you will become. Some people make half-hearted commitments that end up in a life of mediocrity. Some commit fully to worldly goals. That ends in disappointment and bitterness. Some make no commitments at all and just drift through life. The Apostle Peter has a wake up call. *"Since everything around us is going to melt away, what holy, godly lives you should be living."* 2 Peter 3:11 (NLT)

Commitment to Christ means making Christ-like choices and dependence on the strength of the Spirit to live out those choices. You have to let go of old routines and develop some new habits. You also need to deliberately change the way you think. *"Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."* Philippians 2:12-13 (NIV) The working out is the part we do. The working in is the part God does.

Spiritual growth is a cooperative effort between you and the Holy Spirit. That does not mean you work for your salvation, it means that what is at work within you, you must make an effort to see become a part of your daily expression. "Fear and trembling" sounds like we are suppose to take our part very seriously.

Rick Warren has an expression I can really relate to. "Change your autopilot." To change that outward expression of our life, we have to change our thought life! Behind every action is a thought. "Every behavior is motivated by a belief, and every action is prompted by an attitude." -Rick Warren *"Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts."* Proverbs 4:23 (TEV)

If you are flying a plane east and put it on autopilot, you can pull the yoke around to the west, fighting it all the way, but as soon as you relax, it is going to go back to the east. That is like trying to change your life by sheer will power. You can say, I'm not going to eat so much, but in time you end up right back in your old habits. Something has to change internally. You have to get at the root cause, the motivating factor, or you will revert to your old patterns. You have to change your autopilot for anything to last and your autopilot is your thought patterns.

The Apostle Paul wrote, *"Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think"*. Romans 12:2b (NLT) Change must begin with the way you think. *"There must be a spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes."* Ephesians 4:23 (NLT) The writers of the Bible used a Greek word that means we have to have a change of mind. It is translated into the word 'repentance'. When we think of repentance we think of someone crying in sorrow for the wrong they have done, but the Greek word means to have a mental turn around. That is the first step in our new life in Christ. Change begins in your thought life. When you think differently, you will feel differently about things, and act differently toward them. That is changing your autopilot.

I've heard testimonies of people that have had their thought processes changed in an instant, but I've heard of hundreds of other testimonies of slow gradual transformation. We used to think things could satisfy us. Every once in awhile a commercial or a scene will come your way and that old thought pattern kicks in. "Man, I've got to have that. I'll be satisfied if I get that." Maybe you will for a moment, but the transformed mind thinks like Jesus. Real satisfaction comes from doing the will of God from the heart.

The Apostle Paul told us what this natural thinking of fallen man is like. *"Those who live following their sinful selves think only about things that their sinful self wants."* Romans 8:5 (NCV) We have a word for that, selfishness. Its only concern is self-gratification. Most of the time that ends up being self-destructive.

The mind of Christ is about seeking God's pleasure. He is pleased when we serve one another out of love. *"We should think of their good and try to help them by doing what pleases them. Even Christ did not try to please himself."* Romans 15:2-3a (CEV) That is grown-up Christian thinking. Spiritual maturity is not measured by

how much Bible knowledge you have, but by how much you love. All the Bible memory work in the world will not help if the thought life is not captured and conformed. "... *we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*" 2 Corinthians 10:5b (NIV)

Many of us confuse temptation with sin. Thoughts come your way from different sources. Until you take hold of and meditate upon them, the passing thought is not sin. Once you take an evil thought and contemplate it, then it becomes sin. Christ was tempted in every way that we are, the Bible says, yet without sin. When the Devil threw Him a sinkerball, He always refused to swing. All you have to do is let it pass. Why? That is what the transformed mind does. It recognizes the source, discerns the destructiveness in going down that road, and chooses instead to yield to the Spirit and think about what is pure. It takes the selfish thought and lets it pass; it takes hold of the giving and loving thought and acts on it.

We must replace the lies with truth. Remember Budde's lesson last week that FEAR is False Evidence Appearing Real. If the false evidence that claims seeking self-gratification will fulfill you comes your way, how do you know it's false? The Word of God gives us the discernment we need. It is truth. It is politically correct to say that all truth claims are equal but it is intellectual suicide. If two truth claims contradict each other, how can they both be true!

I choose the Bible as the revelation of truth because I believe in a loving God who is concerned about mankind and powerful enough to influence the details of human life. If that is true, then He is going to make the expression of His plan, the revelation of His love, available to the entire world. That is why the Bible is, by far, the most widely translated, well-preserved, and most highly published work in history. God cares about you and wants you to know it. We could go into all the proofs that the Bible is God's word, but that is another lesson. What I want to share this morning is how it can play a role in the transformation of your thought life.

We need to separate misconceptions from truth. We need reality not illusion. Since the Bible is the revelation of God to man regarding the truth, reading and absorbing those truths will help to change the way you think. There are several ways to go about letting the Word of God change your thinking, but I want to focus on just one this morning. Take some time each day to read it. Sounds simple until you try. Could we all do with one less 30-minute TV show? We could probably do with a few hours less. Instead of those 30 minutes of news, take that 30 minutes and read a passage from the Bible. I would suggest reading through a book, a little at a time, rather than jumping around or trying to speed read. Then you are more likely to understand the context. As you read slowly through it, ask yourself who is saying what to whom? Why did they write it? How does it apply to my life? Is there a key verse that is really the main point? Is there a verse that is speaking to my heart about a situation?

Take that verse and write it down, or mark it so you can go back to it tomorrow. Leave it by your bed. When you wake up, take a moment to pray and look back

over that verse. Ask God what you should do today in response to that verse. It may simply be a change in the way you think. It may require an action. Every time your hour chime goes off on your watch, take a moment and think about what that verse has said to you. Consider for just a moment what it means to you at that second. Offer up a short prayer that the Holy Spirit help your mind to think in line with the truth of that verse.

The first step is to change your habits. Pick a time that works for your schedule. Maybe lunch hour is better, maybe early morning. Do see how wonderfully you would spiritually mature if you actually did this? If you spend a half hour reading each day, you will read through the Bible in a year! You will have carefully considered 365 verses and their application in your life throughout each day. How fast can you grow spiritually? As fast as you are willing to!

Listen to these promises from the Word of God: *"Through the Word we are put together and shaped for the tasks God has for us."* 2 Timothy 3:17 (Msg) *"If you abide in Me and My word, then you are truly disciples of mine."* John 8:51 (NASB) *"Every word of God is flawless."* Proverbs 30:5 *"Everything in the Scriptures is God's Word. All of it is useful for teaching and helping people and for correcting them and showing them how to live."* 2 Timothy 3:16 (NCV)

Rick Warren wrote, "The Word of God generates life, creates faith, produces change, frightens the Devil, causes miracles, heals hurts, builds character, transforms circumstances, imparts joy, overcomes adversity, defeats temptation, infuses hope, releases power, cleanses our minds, brings things into being, and guarantees our future forever!" How many of you need these things in your life?

Why wouldn't you want all the wonderful things the Word of God does in our life? Most of all, why wouldn't you want your thoughts transformed by the Word of God so that you start thinking inline with your Creator? It doesn't take a lot of time, but it does take a commitment. *"If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."* John 8:31-32 Do you want to be free of carnal thinking? Live in the Word! If you have a spouse, commit together and hold each other accountable. If you live alone, ask a friend to ask you if you are sticking with it. You may encourage them to do it too. *"The Bible was not given to increase our knowledge but to change our lives."* -D.L. Moody

Prayerfully bow your heads. Remember, God's goal is to transform you into the likeness of Jesus. He will work within you, but He requires your willing cooperation. The world has yet to see what God can do with a man or woman fully yielded to Him! Do you think the Holy Spirit is leading you to do this or something similar? Would you write on the communication card a little note – "I'll try!" and sign your name, and I'll call and encourage you to keep at it.