

"THE PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE"

4. You were created to become like Christ

Read – Ephesians 4: 17 – 32 & 5:1,2 and 1 Peter 1: 3 – 9

By way of introduction it is important that I set the context of why I am here and what I am going to talk about up front at the start.

What am I going to talk about is important for anyone who is here visiting or for the first time or has missed our Lent theme. We are spending time in Lent as a church studying the "Purpose Driven Life" by Rick Warren. Our house groups are taking a daily reading over 40 days and then reviewing each week's readings as a group once a week and the sermon is based on that each Sunday.

What am I doing here? Well, I'm not really sure. All I know is that I went to a meeting with Alan Dempster and our minister, Ian. One that was called by Alan but one that he forgot that he was supposed to attend until we phoned him up to remind him. Then in the deeply spiritual setting of the bar of the Bowling Green pub Ian mentioned that one of the weeks of the series he couldn't do and somehow I volunteered – or was volunteered, Alan, to step in for that week. The lesson has been learnt and was a tough one to learn on the Christian journey in life. Stay away from places where the atmosphere and the company you keep could lead to you being severely compromised.

Anyway you've got me for better or worse as they say and you & I had better trust that God will make the most of it!

Now those of us who are in the middle of the series – I think it is going pretty well. I read the book in skim read fashion back in January – by some spiritual foresight I had picked a copy up in America in December in a buy 2 & get 20% off offer and kept one book and given the "Purpose Driven Life" to Celia as a Christmas present! It is amazing how God works! There I was at the next elders meeting when Ian said I'd like to take you church through this book by Rick Warren I I could say, "Ah yes, I have just bought that book for my wife as Christmas present." At least 10 bonus points to go into the little book of elders strengths and weaknesses that I'm sure must be kept somewhere by the church secretary. Fortunately noone asked what the title of the other one I bought was.... But more of throwing off the old self later!

Seriously though as we take up each subject – each Purpose – I think, I know this, I agree but it is not that new to me. And then as the book overwhelms you with verse after verse of Scripture and as you see these truths under the Purpose headings, "You were planned for God's pleasure", "You were formed for God's family" I have found it giving me a new perspective on my relationship with God and a new challenge on how I live. To do that in the knowledge that others in my church are doing the same is really a tremendous thought. With the backdrop that God has at the same time given us a new church building and is so clearly saying to us go out and tell the community about Jesus. This is clearly God's 40 day crash course for us to do that – so.....YOU HAD BETTER LISTEN TODAY, NOT TO ME BUT TO WHAT GOD IS SAYING TO US!!

We have had two of the three B's in our first 2 Purposes – Number one is BELIEVING, our purpose in life of being here to worship God. Number two is BELONGING, our purpose in life to be in fellowship with other members of God's family. Today number three is about BECOMING, our purpose in life to become like Christ. It's about Discipleship. I want to frame this in today's talk around two passages of scripture, **Ephesians 4: 17 – 32 & 5:1,2 and 1 Peter 1: 3 – 9, 13 – 21.**

The first point to make is that this is serious stuff. My progress as a disciple has been poor and slow, the churches progress over the two thousand years has been poor and slow, because I, and the church, have not been serious. Philippians 2 v 12 says, "...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling". We'll come back to this but just to ensure we understand some subtleties of words, work out is our responsibility to work at our discipleship, our spiritual growth. We do not "work for" our salvation – that has been done by Jesus. Working out is described in the book as our physical work out, how we develop our faith and our spiritual life.

1 Peter 1 v 17 adds to the seriousness with which we should treat our journey in becoming more like Christ. "Since you call on the Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear."

The seriousness is really because of our calling. In Ephesians 5 v1 we are called to "Be Imitators of God". In 1 Peter 1 v15, 16 we are told "just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do: for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy".

So this Becoming – this being created to be like Christ – is God's purpose for us on earth – to change and mould our characters slowly and surely until we become more like God, righteous and holy. And God's purpose for us will ultimately be finished in us when we get to heaven, in the words of Philippians 1 v 6 "God began doing a new work in you, and I am sure he will continue it until it is finished when Jesus Christ comes again." Why is this his purpose? – because he made us in his image. Then when sin entered us in the world that original purpose was thwarted and so in our salvation through Christ we once again can take on lives that fit with the character and spirit of God that is in us. In this the most important thing is recognising that it is the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, the giving of his blood that has enabled us to start again on this new way of life. 1 Peter 1 v20 – "He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God." So the start has to be in accepting Christ as our Saviour.

What I'd like to concentrate on to help you in your studies this week in understanding **how** we can become more like Christ is to dwell on three verses from Ephesians 4, verses 22 to 24,

"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

These verses seem to be the key of how we should work out our salvation, **how we should work on becoming like Christ.** Paul in this letter then follows these verses with a whole series of instructions that enable his readers to put off their old selves, allow God to transform themselves and put on their new selves. Paul does

this through a whole series of don'ts and do's in chapters 5 & 6 and spiritual and practical tips on how to live out our lives as Christians.

Rather than concentrate on those do's and don'ts and the very practical ways Paul instructs Christians to act I want to concentrate today on the three step process that Paul indicates is key to us becoming more like Christ. Step One is about putting off, like an old shabby coat, our old self. It describes an action on our part, a conscious decision to put off. It's at the heart of our Christian experience that whilst we are changed spiritually when we come to know Jesus as our Saviour we then have to make efforts to change our behaviours. If we don't or we are not serious about this then how easy is it for us to become the back slidden Christian returning to former bad habits and adopting a lifestyle which Paul describes here as corrupt. Here we are then right at the heart of our predicament as Christians that putting off is not that easy and in fact often, no soon as we have "put off" a behaviour as a conscious act on our part, then we soon put it back on again when our resolve weakens.

I don't know about you but I rather like things I am used to and am not so sure about new things. Shoes are one area especially. I have had a true middle class upbringing by wearing Clark's shoes from an early age. My life is littered with personal observations and experiences from my mother of how Clark's shoes are the best for my feet and how other makes and more fashionable brands are not as good. The trend for slip on shoes came and went in my youth and I have strong childhood memories of how one poor boy, who had been equipped with the latest slip-on winkle picker shoes by his uncaring mother, saw one of his slip off in the middle of an energetic game of football in the playground, rise majestically over the school fence and land on the bonnet of a passing car on the road outside. As the passing car happened to be a police car the consequences for that parental neglect were catastrophic – at least to my childhood mind. I also don't like buying new shoes – I appreciate this may be a male thing but to me new shoes mean discomfort – both in having to find a shoe shop, in having to try and find a pair of shoes as close to the original pair I had before at a reasonable price and also discomfort in having to break in a new pair of shoes. So just recently imagine my feelings when not only did I have to buy a new pair of shoes, but for reasons unknown to me since, I was persuaded by the shop assistant to break my Clarks habit and buy a pair of shoes made by Ecco. My first week with the new shoes ended with me limping across the middle of New Street station with one foot irretrievably damaged by these new Italian made shoes and cursing my foolishness at so lightly dismissing a whole lifetimes loyalty to that Somerset shoemaker. So the new ecco shoes went in the bottom of my cupboard. The old shoes came back out and my feet felt fine again. The fact that the old shoes were severely worn at the heels, gave me wet socks if it rained and looked far from smart didn't bother me for another 6 months or so.

The lesson in that diversion into shoes is that we do like to stay with things we are comfortable with. And that is true with our behaviours. How easy it is to put back on what we have taken off. Putting off in our Christian lives is a continuous exercise for us, a mindset to remember what we have been taught and to recover when we have slipped back in our behaviours. It's also being realistic that we do slip back into old behaviours and we have to humbly come back to God and ask forgiveness and start again. The two chapters in the book on temptation are excellent on recognising that we all face desires that mean we put on the old self again and show us practically how to tackle those moments. Face up to our weaknesses, look at our behaviours against the word of God if we are in doubt as to whether they are right, pray with others about the things that hold us back. I use my time on the train to Bournville as

my daily prayer spot but my problem is I continually fall asleep. So I asked a group of Christians I met with to pray for that. Now I do still fall asleep but less often as both the knowledge that I have told others about this and the working of God through our prayers has made a difference. Other areas I find difficult to share with others – sexuality is one where I have been less inclined to share with others but we must hold up our private areas of behaviour and our minds before God and test and make pure through prayer. Talk about that this week – it's an hour of discussion in its own right.

That then takes us to the **second step** of the key to becoming like Christ. That is "being made new in the attitude of our minds". Just as we should concentrate on the teachings in the Bible about things we should not do or throw off – "put off falsehood", do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, don't let the sun go down on your anger, get rid of bitterness are just some of the instructions from Paul here, we should dwell on these words about being made new.

This is not an action by us but something that happens to us. It is dependant on the first step, putting off. If we don't put off our old behaviours don't expect God to miraculously change us from within. It's true he does work in our lives despite us clinging to our old selves and he will because of his grace work through circumstances and events to tackle some of the old life issues we have. But the natural flow of the words here and the natural flow of God's spirit working in us is that first we put off and then we are changed in our attitude of minds.

What does it mean to be made new in the attitude of our minds? For me my experience is that God does this subtly and patiently most of the time rather than overnight and miraculously. Sometimes events speed this up. For example I can give you a small illustration terms of slower, more gradual change mixed with events that drive faster change. I know God has worked on my confidence and the opposite of that, fear of situations and people, over 30 years. We're all different and moulded by circumstances but I remember in my teens suddenly becoming less confident through a number of circumstances that led to various crises in my early twenties. All of this I'd describe as very private moments and ones that I battled with but it led to times when in a crowd I'd think the focus was on me all the time & I'd dread any sort of attention. Then in my twenties I've shared before in an evening service how God dealt with this significantly in my first job in charge of a production line and in charge of 35 Grimsby women packing crisps who knew no meaning of taboo subjects and certainly would never miss an opportunity to shame their green 21 year old graduate supervisor. Situations where I would go bright red and head off to the nearest office for sanctuary. The crisis drove the intervention and to this day I recall the words that God used with me in those circumstances – Psalm 34 verses 5 & 6 may have been written by David according to the biblical records but when I read them at that time they had been written in 1979 by God specifically for Keith Newton and further more he spoke them himself with calming reassurance into my heart and into my Spirit.

Then more recently I've been in situations at work of major failure in an enterprise which I shared responsibility for. This pushed against my inbuilt desire to want to manage everything smoothly & competently without disturbing the waters – a bit difficult when the project failure actually featured in the public accounts of Cadbury Schweppes. But through that I've seen God working further on my personality shaping me to be much more open with my faith and more understanding of the context of work and success in work. So I can see how over the years God has dealt

with fear of people and situations gently and carefully and freed me to lead in situations I would have run from before and emboldened me in situations I would not have had the courage to face in my old self.

So the **third step of becoming more like Christ** - being made new – what are the tips?

Put them before God in prayer, expect him to change you, be patient as he does and don't impose your timetable on him or your expected solutions. The pace I believe will be set by your willingness to put off old behaviours and your honesty with God on things you feel need to change. And remember that what we have working in us to change us to be like Christ is " his incomparably great power or us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at the right hand in the heavenly realms." Ephesians 1 v 19, 20. On other words there isn't anything in you in terms of attitude or behaviour that he cannot change, just let him.

That takes us to "putting on the new self". Again we should work out what we need to do here. It's about doing the things Paul mentions here and in his other letters, adopting the teachings of Christ in the way we live our lives..." imitating God, be filled with the Spirit, giving thanks to God, submitting to each other..."

I'd like us to go out and work on those actions in the same way as we put off the old. We need to concentrate on asking God to help us to do that and to reflect on how we behave against these instructions

However I'd like to close by challenging us to really look at the words Paul uses to tell us to put on the new self. In Ephesians 4 verse 24 he tells us to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." Now look around you here in this church, don't do that to obviously as you might embarrass your neighbour but the person sitting next to you has been put on this earth by God to be a reflection of God in his or her actions, in the way they live their lives and in the way they react with other people. And it is not an impossible expectation. We have created to that end and the blood of Jesus has put us back in a position where we are commanded to become like Christ. Furthermore we have the power of the Holy Spirit at our call to enable us to achieve the changes that God wants to make in us. Where now are our excuses that we will never be like Jesus, that we have faults built into us that stop us getting anywhere near. Embrace the truth that we are called to be like Christ. Think about the three steps & what that means for you as everyone will have a different task from God, putting off the old self, being made new and putting on the new self. So, becoming like Christ is our purpose. Let's, literally for heaven's sake, make this our goal and get on with it together as a church and as individuals.

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4. You were created to become like Christ

Read – Ephesians 4: 17 – 32 & 5:1,2 and 1 Peter 1: 3 – 9

We have each been created in the image of God, made to be like his Son, Jesus. In that likeness we are spiritual, reasoning, loving and moral beings but sin has made that image incomplete and marred. When we exist independently from a relationship with God then we adopt behaviours and characteristics that take us even further from a likeness to God's character.

However when we come to know Christ that all changes. Our perspectives change from pleasing ourselves to pleasing our new Lord. We have a model to live to and that model is Jesus. Although we cannot see Jesus we have the testimony of those who have written down, we have his words to read and understand and we see how he lived as a man but truly in the image of God.

Ephesians 4 directs us as Christians to throw off our old self, be made new in our attitude of mind and put on the new self. That means stopping certain things we do, being changed by the Holy Spirit and adopting new behaviours.

Sounds easy but we know it is not! We need the understanding of God's word and a determination to start to begin the change in our characters. Then we need the trust in God to change us and the patience on what is a long journey for most of us because of our fears, our hold on things we still like to do and our priorities that often aim for conformance to what we need to do in the world rather than what we need to do to meet God's plan for us.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS IN YOUR HOUSEGROUP

1. How is "*becoming like Jesus Christ*" different from the way most people understand discipleship?
2. What are some of the changes you have seen in your life since you became a believer? What have others noticed?
3. A year from now, how would you like to be more Christ like? What can you do today to move towards that goal?
4. Where in your spiritual growth are you having to be patient because there seems little progress?
5. How has God used pain or trouble to help you grow?
6. When are you most vulnerable to temptation? Which of the steps to defeating temptation could help you most?

SOME THINGS TO DO THIS WEEK

Day Twenty-two

I was created to become like Christ.

Remember: *"As the Spirit of the lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more"*

(2 Corinthians 3:18b)

In what area of life should I ask for the Spirit's power to be like Christ today?

Day Twenty-three

It is never too late to start growing.

Remember: *"Let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God – what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect"*

(Romans 12:2b)

What is one area where I need to stop thinking *my* way and start thinking *God's* way?

Day Twenty-four

The truth transforms me.

Remember: *"If you continue in my word, then you are my disciples indeed; and you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free."*

(John

8:31,32)

What has God already told me in his word I haven't started doing yet?

Day Twenty-five

There is a purpose behind every problem.

Remember: *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*

(Romans 8:28)

What problem in my life has caused the greatest growth in me?

Day Twenty-six

Every temptation is an opportunity to do good.

Remember: *"God blesses the people who patiently endure testing. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him."*

(James 1:12)

What Christ like character quality can I develop by defeating the most common temptation I face?

Day Twenty - seven

There is always a way out.

Remember: *"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."*

(1 Corinthians 10:13b)

Who could I ask to be a spiritual partner to help me defeat a persistent temptation by praying for me?

Day Twenty-eight: There are no shortcuts to maturity.

Remember: *"God began doing a good work in you, and I am sure he will continue it until it is finished when Jesus Christ comes again."*

(Philippians 1:6)

In what area of my spiritual growth do I need to be more patient and persistent?