

WHAT ON EARTH AM I HERE FOR? PART 4
CREATED TO BECOME LIKE CHRIST

I used to think that as I grew older, I'd have everything figured out. Well, guess what? I don't! What I've discovered is that as the years go by, I have more questions than ever. There's A LOT I don't know. I don't even know what all I don't know. Here are some of my questions; Maybe you have the answers ...

I don't understand ...

- If a pig loses its voice, is it disgruntled?
- When someone asks you, "A penny for your thoughts," and you put in your TWO cents worth, ... what happens to the other penny?
- Why is the man who invests all your money called a broker? [That can't be good, can it?]
- If lawyers are disbarred and clergy are defrocked, doesn't it follow that electricians can be de-lighted? Cowboys, de-ranged? And dry cleaners de-pressed? [seems to make sense.]
- (And one more think I don't know): If olive oil comes from olives, where does baby oil come from?

See, there's a lot I don't know; probably a lot you don't know too.

Bigger – more serious questions that we need answers to ...

- How can I raise my children to know the best pathway in life – God's pathway – when movies and TV glorify behaviors and values that aren't good or from God?
- How can I face failure in my life, yet still keep my head up and my hopes alive?
- How do I deal with a spouse or a child who is breaking our family apart?

Are you struggling with one or more of THOSE kinds of questions right now? Most of us are. Those kinds of questions don't have simple answers. They're complicated. They require more than knowing facts. They require wisdom from God to handle each one. These life-questions need maturity, God-inspired maturity.

This wisdom and maturity comes from God.

Just as knowledge grows through the years when you go to school and study, and Just as wisdom grows through the years of living and gaining experience, so too, **spiritual maturity grows through time.**

Over time people naturally grow and change. Infants get bigger physically. And they learn to feed and clothe themselves, they go to school, and grow up to become adults. At least, they should!

The same is true in your spiritual life. This growing up process in your faith is called Discipleship. Discipleship is a life-long process of transformation. Just as a baby is so very, very different from an adult, you are to become very, very different as you grow spiritually.

Let me ask you this: Does God love all people? (yes) Does God accept all people no matter who they are? (yes) Is there anything you have to do to prove to God that you are worthy enough for Him to love you or forgive you? (No) You're right! God loves all people and He wants all to be saved. God, the Holy Spirit brings you to trust in Jesus. God accepts you and forgives you – no matter how sinful you are, no matter what you've done, where you've been, or who you are. God accepts you because Jesus died on the cross to pay for ALL sins. There is no sin too big for Jesus to forgive. There is no sin Jesus didn't give His life to pay for. Heaven is a free gift. It isn't earned or deserved by any of us. It is given completely because of what Jesus has done in His living, dying, and rising to life again for you.

That is often where we stop, right there! We get those answers down before Confirmation in Jr. High, and we stop right there.

It IS true that **God accepts you as you are**, and He forgives all sin no matter what. BUT, **but ... HE DOESN'T LEAVE YOU THAT WAY.**

God wants the BEST for you. He made you! He gave His Son for you! And He wants you to be the best version of you possible -- to be like His Son, Jesus. No, God doesn't want you to be like Jesus by having long hair, sandals, and no home. He wants you to take on the Character of Jesus. To Mature to be like Christ.

God accepts you as you are. But who you are is sinful and hurtful to yourself. So God, the Holy Spirit, begins to change you. He

works change in you so you become a new person, a person filled with His blessings of peace, and inner security, and faith, and love.

We, often try to turn people into church-goers. We want more members, fuller pews, young families coming on Sunday morning. And that's good. Attending worship services is good. BUT, ... that's not the goal. **God doesn't want to make church goers. He wants to make Christ-Followers.** Do you see the difference?

Back in the 1990's, actor Dana Carvey was a regular on the TV show, "*Saturday Night Live*." One of the characters he famously played was "The Church Lady." Who here remembers "The Church Lady"?

"The Church Lady" was always judgemental. When people would do something that the church lady didn't think was right, she would sarcastically say her famous line, "Isn't THAT special!" No one could live up to the church lady's standards.

A study was done a few years ago. Young adults in their 20's were asked about their impressions of Christians. The responses are eye-opening. Young adults said that to be a Christian means you are: anti-homosexual, judgemental, hypocritical – that is saying one thing but doing another, too involved in politics, out of touch with reality, old-fashioned, insensitive to others, boring, not accepting of other faith, and confusing. Are *THOSE* the characteristics that describe what a Christians should be? Does that describe the character that God wants to develop in you? Is that the character of Jesus Christ?

God desires that each one of us continually grow to be more and more transformed to become like Christ. This is God's gift to you! God desires your inner character grow to become more and more a godly person. That you know and live according to His insight – His Word. It's rarely fast. Seldom easy. But it's worth it!

This means that your life story is the story of transformation – of growth. You will not always be as you are now! The day is coming when you will become something wonderfully better, or horribly worse. That's why Jesus came. He loves you so He came to give His life on the cross to forgive you, heal you, fix you, and change you. That change / that growth starts from inside your heart – on out. It **STARTS**

with His forgiveness of all your sins; but it DOESN'T END there. The change Jesus gives and works in you, starts now, and gets better and perfect in heaven to come.

In the Bible God speaks about **your spiritual life like a plant**. It is an **living organism** that naturally grows and changes, not a thing that is static. Jesus spoke about you being like wheat planted in the ground that grows to produce 30, 60, or 100 times the grain as the amount of seed planted. Jesus spoke about you being like a tree that is to produce fruit, and He is like a patient gardener who is patient and fertilizes the tree so that it produces fruit. Jesus spoke about Himself as the Vine, and you are the branch that is to produce grapes. Grape vines SHOULD produce grapes! If you are a vineyard owner and you make and sell wine, but your grape vine doesn't yield and grapes, then you have a big problem!

In the Bible, St. Paul describes your life as a grape vine that produces fruit. He says that if you don't know Jesus, if the Holy Spirit is not in your heart, then the Evil One has control of your life and he produces the kind of bad fruit he wants. What is that bad fruit? The fruit – the results – your sinful nature produces is anger, rage, dissension, gossip, drug abuse, illicit sex. But when you trust in Jesus, God the Holy Spirit is living in your heart. And the Holy Spirit produces fruit in your life. Your faith is alive and living and it shows. ***“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance [that's patience], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”*** A faith that is alive, produces character like Jesus' character. You grow and change constantly to become more and more like Christ.

So let me ask you: Is your faith producing this fruit in your life? Today are you more loving, more full of peace, more gentle and more self-controlled than you were a year ago? Two years ago? If I asked your family and close friends, would they say so?

If there is no fruit growing in your life, then there's a big problem!

So often, Christians don't grow in their spiritual lives. They don't grow and mature to become more and more like Christ. They **remain spiritual infants**. St. Paul reamed out the believers in Corinth for not

growing up spiritually. They were remaining as babies, and it showed in childish behavior like conflict in that church. Here's how Paul put it:

I ... could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ² I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, ³ for you are still of the flesh [that is, as spiritual babies]. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? ¹

Corinthians 3: 1-3

Does this happen in our times? Do Christians remain as spiritual infants? Yes! The unfavorable image that Christians have in the eyes of unbelievers, is often an image we have EARNED. People say they believe in Jesus, but they remain just like the people around us – materialistic, greedy, controlling, resorting to power-plays, sexual ethics are just as bad, divorce rate among Christians is just as high as among non-Christians. People may have their name on the church rolls, but not worship, not ever participate in a Bible study, not have a serious devotional time with family at home or by themselves.

Calling ourselves by the name of Christian isn't going to save anyone. Faith in Jesus as Savior saves. And real faith produces fruit.

To the believers in the church at Ephesus, St. Paul wrote in the Bible: ***attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,*** *Ephesians*

4:13-15 He is encouraging them to keep growing. He points out the blessings of a maturing faith in Jesus. How does this happen? How does a person keep growing? Paul says, ***“knowledge of the Son of God.”*** Jesus said that you grow by being attached to Jesus who is the Vine. When you stay connected to God the Holy Spirit, when you spend time with God so He fills you, then His power **CHANGES** you, **TRANSFORMS** you, **MATURES** you to the fullness of the character of Christ.

God's Word is **POWERFUL!!** When you are connected to God by worship, Bible study, personal devotion time, family devotion time, then

God works in you! God comes to you in His Word, the Bible. He is really there. The Holy Spirit is alive and working. St. Paul said ***“The Gospel is the power of God”*** The word “power” here is the word “DYNAMITE.” God’s grace can blast apart walls of stubbornness in our hearts – if, if, if we only immerse ourselves in God’s Word.

When I was growing up, I often heard, “drink your milk; it will give you strong bones.” Wheaties cereal is supposed to be the breakfast of champions. Just as we need good nutrition IN us to help us grow healthy bodies, we need God IN us to grow Christ-like lives.

How does the Holy Spirit come to us and work in our lives? Through God’s Word, the Bible.

The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to make us like the Son of God. To grow and become like Jesus, we must fill our whole lives with His Word.

God’s Word is unlike any other. It’s alive and powerful. Jesus said, ***“The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.”*** John 6:63 When God speaks, things change. Everything around you – all of this world and universe – exists because God said it. He spoke it all into existence. Without God’s Word, you wouldn’t even be alive and here today.

The Bible is way more than just a history book, or a rule book. God’s Word generates life, creates faith, produces change, frightens the Devil, heals hurts, builds character, inspires joy, gives hope in adversity, defeats temptation, infuses courage to face problems, and guarantees our eternal future. NEVER take it for granted.

God’s Word works maturity through problems in life. We need the key insight of what life is designed to be all about. See, what happens is often we get frustrated in life because we forget that God’s main goal is to grow us to become more like Christ. We often think the goal of life is to have perfect health, a comfortable lifestyle, constant happiness, the fulfillment of all our dreams, and instant relief of problems through prayer. In short, we often think the goal of life on earth is to be like heaven. Now, why would God give us heaven on earth when He’s got the real thing in store for you in eternity?

We get frustrated in life because we don't align our expectations with God's plans for your growth. We cry out, "Why is this problem happening to me?" "Why am I having such a difficult time?" Often problems happen because that's what enables us to GROW. God's desire for you is that you grow to be like Jesus. He's promised to work good – good growth in your character – out of your problems. Your problems have purpose! God NEVER wastes a problem!

One day, the devil came to Jesus and tempted Him. The Evil One said to Jesus: ***"IF you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread."*** If. IF. If you are God, IF you are holy, PROVE IT. Prove it by what you DO.

Jesus responded, Outward actions don't make a person God's. Instead, it's God's Word. It is faith in Jesus. And this faith comes from getting into God's Word. We simply hang out with God there.

I hope you hear that I am NOT telling you to DO things to PROVE that you are really a Christ-follower. I hope you are hearing that growing up into maturity in Jesus is NOT something you must DO. Becoming like Christ is not about "you got to buck up, buckle down, you gotta do this and that." Discipleship is not your choosing or your doing, any more than your physical body growing from an infant to an adult was something you had to choose to do for yourself. Growing physically is a matter of the getting the right nutrition. And spiritual maturity is a matter of you simply taking in the right nutrition.

In reality being a Child of God is NOT something ACHIEVED, but RECEIVED as a gift from God. There are many, many churches that tell you what YOU must do to grow. And to be fair, yes, there are habits you can develop to foster spiritual maturity. But the bottom line is, all you do is stop running from God. Surrender your life to God. Hang out with God by letting His Word fill you. And let the power and grace of God go to work in you. A maturing faith is a GIFT that God has been waiting for you to finally ask for! He wants so much to give this gift to you!

Let me put it this way: **Becoming a disciple of Christ is not about trying to change our lives, but about realizing that Christ has already exchanged His life for ours through His death on the**

cross. Just as Jesus has risen from the dead to new life, so He works new life in you. Your old sinful desires have been put to death when Jesus exchanged places with you and died for you. When you trust in a risen, living Savior, you are a new creation! A new person inside! Let this new spiritual life GROW!

Give your life to God to form you to be like Christ! You will be blessed! As God works in you, you will be blessed. God has the best life planned for you. This is what a life of maturing faith is like:

- **Trust** God's presence in difficult times.
- Become more **Forgiving**; letting go of anger.
- Learn more easily from **Mistakes**.
- Accept that everything in life is a **Gift** from God.
- Less inclined to try to **Control** others.
- Less **Judgmental** of people different than you.
- Much more **Generous** with money.
- More committed to **Self** care and **Family** care.
- Pray as a **First Response** to human disaster.
- Feel more **Confident** about eternal life.
- Have a clear sense of God's **Purpose** for your life

Would you like a life like this? A life filled with these blessings?

Friends, the goal of life is not to have a big salary, a big house, a new car or boat, to receive credit and recognition. No! God wants for you gifts so much better than just that stuff! God wants you to become like His beloved Son, your Savior and brother, Jesus Christ.

And because we love God, we WANT to be with God, we WANT to give our whole lives into His hands. Because we were Created to Become like Christ. Amen.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God. Philippians 1: 9-11