

**CREATED TO BECOME LIKE CHRIST**  
**Romans 8:26-28**

**Purpose Driven Life Lenten Series**  
**March 10, 2013**  
**Pastor Nathan J. Thompson**

We're focusing these days on 40 Days of Purpose and are looking at God's purposes for your life. The first week we looked at, "You Were Planned For God's Pleasure." Your first purpose is to know and love God, and that's called worship.

The next week we talked about how "You Were Formed For God's Family." God wants you to learn to love other people; how to get along with and support each other in his family. And that, of course, is what the Bible calls, "fellowship."

Now today we will look at the third purpose God has for you and that is to make you like Jesus Christ. His plan from the very beginning has been to make human beings like himself. Now don't get me wrong, he's not saying that you're going to be a god.

God does not want you to become a god, but to become godly. He wants you to develop his character, his values, the way he feels, his moral character. God created you and put you on this earth to make you like Jesus.

Ephesians 4:15 says that God wants us to "*grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ.*" God's will is that you grow up, that you mature and develop. And in Jesus he gave us a model of what he wants us to look like when we grow up. He gave us a model of spiritual maturity.

Now this growing process, of course, doesn't happen overnight. It doesn't mean we are somehow zapped and immediately become like Jesus. No, growing in Jesus is a process. It is what is called "discipleship," and it takes an entire lifetime to build these qualities of Jesus.

So today we're going to look at how God helps you grow spiritually. First of all, we know he uses the Bible. It takes truth to transform us. If you really want to grow spiritually, you've got to get into this book. In fact, the more you get into it, the more you're going to grow.

You need to read it, study it, memorize it, meditate on it, think about it, apply it to your life, because it takes truth to transform us. And the second thing God uses is people. When we learn from each other, as some of you have done in small study groups, we grow and develop. God uses people in your life to help you grow and that's why you need the church.

Yet today we're also going to look at three things that God also uses to help us grow. Romans 8:28 says, "*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose.*" The truth is that God works in all the circumstances of life to bring good out of it and to make you like Christ.

In the life of Jesus we remember how he agonized at Gethsemane, how he was tempted by Satan in the desert, and how he was trespassed against on the cross. And the reality is if we are going to grow to become like Jesus, God's going to also take us through these things.

The reality, of course, is that these things don't automatically help you grow. You need to be living by faith in Jesus so your heart and faith are ready. The truth is that if your heart is not ready you may rather become bitter than better. You may rather turn away from God rather than to him.

So the first thing is that God often uses troubles in order to teach us to trust him. In the Bible these troubles are often called trials. The reality is that when things go great for us it doesn't really take any faith or character. Yet as God allows us to go through troubles and trials, he can use them to build character.

Romans 5:3-4 says, *"Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character, and character, hope."* The reality is that God is far more interested in who you are than in what you do. That's because who you are, your character, is what is going to last.

The reality is that all kinds of problems are going to come to you—troubles, trials, difficulties. And often we may say, "Why me, Lord?" as if life is supposed to be a life of comfort. Well, my friends, I hate to disappoint you but it's not. The goal of life is not comfort, but heaven.

The truth is that every problem can be used for God's purpose. It doesn't matter whether you caused the problem, someone else caused the problem, or Satan caused it. Every problem can be used for God's purpose; that is to build character and make you like Jesus.

You know Jesus went through many troubles and trials, but the greatest was the night before he was crucified. Jesus knew what he was going to face the next day and how he was going to die a horrible death to take the sin of the world on himself. And the question was would he trust God? Would he trust God even if it meant an extremely painful death?

And so he went to a place called Gethsemane and he asked his disciples to stay with him while he prayed. Notice that Jesus needed friends when he went through troubles. That's why you need the church and a small group fellowship. No one is supposed to go through troubles alone.

Jesus said in Mark 14:34, *"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death."* Now this, my friends, is major trouble. And yet I know that many of you can also say you know the feeling, you know what it is to feel like you can't make it through another day.

Now friends, if you're going to become like Jesus it is okay to say to God, "God, I don't like this. God, I want you to take it away." Jesus said, "I know everything is possible with you, God. But not my will, but yours be done." Jesus surrendered to God's purpose.

And the truth is if you're going to become like Jesus, you've got to learn to trust God completely. Even though things look terrible and seem to be falling apart, God calls you to trust him. As we go through these challenges God can teach and help us to have faith. He can teach us to walk closer to him and his love.

A second way God can make us more like Jesus is through the temptations we face. Now it is important to note that temptations are situations designed by Satan and they're intended to harm us. In fact, Satan is the father of all lies and temptation. The Bible is clear that God never, ever tempts us to do evil.

And yet God, because of the greatness of his power, can use Satan's temptations for good because temptation always provides us with a choice. And whenever I choose for God rather than Satan, Satan's plan is ruined, and I grow in my faith and character.

Always remember, my friends, it is not a sin to be tempted. Jesus was tempted and yet he never sinned. Also remember that everyone is tempted in the same way—all of us. One of Satan's tricks is to make us feel as if I'm the only one tempted in a certain way, or my temptation is worse. And yet we're all alike. And God is able to help us through these temptations.

It is also important to remember that you'll never outgrow temptation. You'll never get to the point when you become so spiritual, or old, that you're not tempted anymore. We are tempted every day of our lives. And yet when we say no to temptation and make the right choice, it is then that we become more like Christ.

Now there are two practical helps with temptation. One is to keep focused on good thoughts. Temptation always starts by getting your attention on the wrong things. And the second help is to get a spiritual partner. One of the best ways to defeat temptation is to get it out into the open. That's again why we need small groups and close friends. We need each other to help.

A third way that God can make you more like Jesus is through trespasses, and by teaching you to forgive. Now what are trespasses? These are things people do, sometimes intentionally, in order to hurt you. This is why Jesus teaches us "to forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us." And this is a difficult step, because of how we have been hurt.

Now the reality is that even though God does not cause these things, he did not even protect his own Son, Jesus, from them. For Jesus himself endured abuse and hurt. And yet what did he do? He yielded his right to get even. He put up with the pain. He responded to evil with good.

And if we're going to grow up spiritually and become like Jesus, we're going to have to learn the same thing. The truth is that you're going to be hurt. This is a fallen world. You hurt other people, and other people hurt you. And to become like Jesus, you need to learn to forgive.

God's purpose for you, my friend, is to make you like Jesus. That means that when you go through a Gethsemane, an experience of trouble, he can help you learn to trust his love. As you go through times of temptation, he can help you do the right thing. And when you go through a cross, a time of trespass, he can help you learn to forgive.

Now I don't know what you're going through these days, and yet I'm sure many of you can identify with these difficult challenges in life. Be assured, my friend, that God wants to lead you through these times. He wants to use these things to help you to grow and become like Christ, and to become his disciple.