

[Slide 1]

CREATED TO BECOME LIKE CHRIST
The Purpose Driven Life - Part 4

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Before I begin this morning - I need to start by saying -

- (i) firstly God is good; and
- (ii) secondly - God I am sure challenges me most when I have to give a talk usually - no always its on the area I am struggling with the most.

Every time the talk hits home so hard - so don't look at me and think - its alright for her - she's got it sorted - I've not - I'm learning and God is using these 40 Days to show me just how much I need to grow.

Having done the 40 Days of Purpose last year - I said to my homegroup at the start of this year - its going to be interesting to see how much I've grown - and I'll tell you what - I've got a long way still to go.

But praise God for these 40 days and for the challenges we're going to look at this morning - because He's given us time - this time now - this moment right now, and each moment before He returns to progress and move on in living my life with His purpose!

Everybody needs a purpose and that's why we're spending 40 Days of Purpose, looking at God's purposes for your life.

Now week one we looked at, "You Were Planned for God's Pleasure". Your first purpose is to get to know and love God. That's called **Worship**.

And the next week we talked about how "You Were Formed for God's Family". God wants you to learn to love other people and get along in His family, and the Bible calls that **Fellowship**.

Today we look at the third purpose that God put us on this planet for, and we find it in Romans 8:29:

[Slide 2]

*"For from the very beginning God decided that those who came to Him - and He knew who would - should **become like His Son**".*

Now God's plan has always been, this is the third purpose, **to make you like Jesus Christ**.

[Slide 3]

This may seem like an unusual topic for Mother's Day, but there are many parallels between discipleship and parenting. On this day we not only to honor mothers for having babies, but for raising children. Similarly, in the Christian life, we not only celebrate people coming to Christ and being BORN again, but today we will focus on what it takes to grow in Christ.

Now, don't get me wrong, let me be clear, He's not saying you're going to be a god. You will never be a god. Maybe in your own mind you think you're a god, but I've got news for you - you're not.

God doesn't want you to become a god; He wants you to become godly.

He wants you to develop His character, the way He thinks, the way He acts, the way He feels, His values, His moral character. God wants to make you like Himself, and that's God's third plan for putting you on this planet, to make you like Jesus.

[Slide 4]

Look at the next verse, Eph. 4:15, read it with me aloud, "*God wants us to grow up...like Christ in everything*". Now what does it mean to grow up? It means to be like Christ. God's will for you is that you grow up.

God wants us to mature and develop, and what does spiritual maturity look like? Just take a long look at Jesus Christ.

Now unfortunately a lot of people grow older but never grow up.

Now there's a process. This doesn't happen overnight. It's not like one day all the sudden - PING - you're just like Jesus. It's a process, and this process is called "*discipleship*", and it takes an entire lifetime. [Slide 5]

We're going to look at - How God helps us grow spiritually? How does God make me like Jesus Christ?"

God uses the Bible. It takes truth to transform us. If we really want to grow up spiritually, we've got to get into this Book. The more we get into it, the more we're going to grow. We need to read it and study it and memorise it and meditate on it and think about it and apply it in our lives, because it takes truth to transform us.

Another thing God uses is people, and that's why last week we talked about fellowship, that when we learn from each other we grow and we develop.

[Slide 6]

God uses people in your life to help you grow, and that's why we need fellowship.

Let me dispel something for you - none of you are ever going to be this

[Slide 7]

- You're never going to be a lone ranger Christian.

But, God uses more than the Bible and He uses more than fellowship.

We're going to look at three things that you may have not thought God uses, but He does.

[Slide 8]

Let's look at this next verse, Romans 8:28 "*In all things God works for the good for those who love Him, who have been called according to His purposes*". That's Romans 8:28.

Romans 8:28, tells us God works **all** things for good to make us like Jesus. And you say, "Oh, what does that include?" - **ALL**

Does that include bad things? Painful things? Does it even include mistakes we make from sinning? **Yes, it does.**

It doesn't say most things it says all things. In all things God works for the good of those who love Him.

We're going to look at three very unexpected tools, and see them in the life of Jesus Christ.

- He had trouble in the garden.
- He had temptation in the desert, and
- He had trespasses on the cross.

And if you're going to grow to be like Jesus Christ, God's going to take you through these same experiences.

Now the problem is these things don't automatically help us grow. We have to have our hearts ready, because if our hearts aren't ready we're going to become bitter by these things rather than better by these things.

So let's pray now - "Lord help me prepare my heart that I may grow more like you not grow bitter."

[Slide 9]

Firstly (and you may want to write these things down), God uses **trouble** to teach us to **trust Him**. God uses trouble to teach us to trust Him.

Now in the Bible this word "trouble" is often called "trials", and "trials" are situations designed by God to draw us closer to Him.

They're not designed to hurt us; they're designed to help us.

Now, if things go great in your life, it doesn't take any faith, it doesn't take any character. So God has to bring some things along in our life to stretch us, to cause us to grow, and these are called troubles or trials.

God wants to build character in you. How does He do it? Look at Romans 5:3-4

[Slide 10]

"...trouble produces patience, and patience produces character, and character produces hope".

God is far more interested in what you are, your character, than He is in what you do, your career.

Why? Because you're not taking your career to heaven with you, but you are taking your character. That's what's going to last.

And so God says that the goal of life is character, not your career, and the goal of life is character not your own personal comfort.

Until we understand this life isn't going to make sense. All kinds of problems are going to come into our lives, troubles, trials, difficulties, and we're going to go "Why me Lord? Why is this happening to me?" as if our life is supposed to be a life of comfort.

This is not heaven. One day we'll be in heaven and we're going to spend millions and billions of years there, but this is not heaven. And if you keep thinking you're going to have heaven on earth, you're going to be very disappointed.

This is not the place for comfort. This is the place for character development. And one of the things it takes is

trouble...troubles produce patience, patience produces character, and character produces hope.

Every problem has a purpose. However it was caused; every problem has a purpose. And what is that purpose? It's to make me like Jesus Christ, to build character in my life.

Jesus went through many troubles and trials in His life, but His greatest was the night before He was crucified. Because He knew what He was going to have to face the next day. He was going to take the sin of the world on Him. He was going to die a horrible death by crucifixion, and the question was "Would He trust God?"

Would He trust God to know what's best for His life, even if it meant an extremely painful death? And that's what He had to struggle with.

He took His disciples to a garden, and He asked His disciples to stay with Him while He prayed. Jesus needed friends when He went through troubles. That's why you need a small group. That's why you need fellowship. Nobody is supposed to go through the troubles of life alone.

Jesus' response to trouble was "*Father' He said, 'everything is possible for You. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet, I want Your will, not Mine!'*" (Mark 14:36).

Now if we're going to become like Jesus, this is the first lesson we're going to have to learn. When we go through trouble, it's OK to say to God, "God I don't like this", "God I want you to take it away", "God I know it's possible for you to take it away".

Jesus said "I know everything is possible with You. Yet, this is what's best for me. **Your will be done in my life**". Jesus surrendered to God's plan.

If we're going to become like Jesus Christ, we've got to learn to trust God completely, even when things look terrible, things are falling apart, we're going to have to learn to trust God completely just the way Jesus did.

God uses trouble to teach us to trust Him. It's easy to trust God when everything is going great in your life. The real test of our faith is "How do we relate to God when things don't go well? When everything is going wrong".

So, the next time you get into some troubles and you go "Why is this happening?" - well, you'll know why. God is teaching you to trust Him. He's giving you the opportunity to trust Him.

There are a couple of things we can do to help when we face troubles.

[Slide 11]

Number one, keep a **spiritual journal**.

[Slide 12]

God told Moses to do this when they spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness. In Numbers 33:2 it says, "*At the Lord's direction, Moses kept a written record of their progress*".

Now when I say keep a spiritual journal, I'm not talking about a diary. A diary records what we did today a journal what we learnt - and 10 years down the line what you learnt today will be more important than what you did - we and others can learn from the experiences we go through.

Another good thing about keeping a journal is that it helps you see your progress. Most of us don't realize how much we've changed, and we forget what we used to be

like and we can look back and see "Look, I am making progress. I am more like Jesus than I used to be".

And that's an encouragement when you get discouraged.

[Slide 13]

And number two - remember **the reward**.

In eternity God is going to reward your character development. The Bible says this

[Slide 14]

"Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2Cor. 4:17). Paul says, "You know what, what we're going through isn't going to last, and even if it lasted a lifetime, that's nothing compared to the number of years you're going to spend in eternity." He says, "What we're

going through now is light and temporary, but we're going to be rewarded for our character in heaven".

[Slide 15]

There is a second surprising way that God works in our lives to make us look more like Jesus. He uses our temptations. God uses our **temptations** to teach us to **obey** Him. Now I think it's important to be clear about the definition of temptation, what we're talking about. Temptations are situations designed by Satan and they're intended to harm us.

God never tempts us to do evil. The Bible is very clear about that.

God never tempts us, but God because of the greatness of His power and who He is, is able to use Satan's temptations for good in our lives because temptation always provides a choice. And when I choose for God rather than choosing for Satan, Satan's plan is ruined and I start to grow in my life. And choices are needed to develop character in our lives.

Jesus faced temptations. He never sinned, but He faced temptations. Right after He was baptized at the very beginning of his public ministry at the age of 30, He went through an intense 40-day period of temptation out in the desert. Look at what the Bible has to say in Mat. 4:1,

[Slide 16]

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil".

Now, if Jesus faced temptations, guess what? You and I are going to face temptations, too.

We need to remember that it is not a sin to be tempted. But it is a sin to give in to temptation.

We also need to remember that everyone is tempted in the same ways, all of us.

One of the ways that Satan tricks us is he makes us feel like our temptation is better than anyone else's, like "I'm really bad, I've got this great temptation, I've thought of this thing, this temptation, nobody in all of human history has ever thought of". No you haven't. Your temptation is just like everyone else's. We're all alike. And God is able to help us through these temptations.

It's important to remember that you'll never outgrow temptation. You never get to a point in your life where you become so spiritual or so old, that you're not tempted anymore. We all are tempted throughout all of our lives.

But it's also important to remember that Jesus teaches us in His experience that every temptation is an opportunity to do good, to make the right choice. It's a chance to become more like Jesus Christ. Notice what Jesus did when he was tempted,

[Slide 17]

Mat. 4:10, Jesus said "Get out of here, Satan' Jesus told him. 'The scriptures say, worship only the Lord God. Obey only Him'".

He confronted the temptation.

Here's the point. Temptation always tests whether you love God more than the temptation. It's always a test of what do I love the most in my life. When I'm tempted by money, do I love God most or do I love money most in my life?

Who do I love more? God or that temptation that's come into my life.

Obedience...choosing to say, "yes" to God...it's a matter of love. It's not a matter of duty. The Bible tells us that Jesus said, "If you love Me, obey My command".

So what do we do when we are tempted? Two helps with temptation.

Number one, if you want to make it through the temptations of life we all face, keep focused on **good thoughts**.

[Slide 18]

The Bible talks about this in Phil. 4:8 when it says,

[Slide 19]

"Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right".

Temptation always starts with getting your attention, and when it gets your attention, it gets you. If you focus on the temptation, inevitably you're going to go down the road, and you're going to get caught up in that temptation.

Once you turn your thoughts and focus on something positive, obeying God, good, right, true, those things that God would have us think about, then all of a sudden you've pushed out the temptation.

Let me give you just a tip about temptation. When you're tempted, don't resist it. Because as you're resisting it, guess what you're doing? You're just thinking about the temptation! You're getting into a spiritual tug-of-war with Satan, and he always wins!

You don't resist it, you just drop the rope and you walk in a different direction and you think about something different. This is a verse a great verse when temptation strikes: "whatever's good, whatever's right, whatever's true".

Keep focused on good thoughts.

The second tip is get a **spiritual partner**.

[Slide 20]

I know none of us like to talk about our temptations, but one of the ways to defeat them is to be open about them, to bring them out into the light. Get a spiritual partner, someone who can help you - someone you trust.

[Slide 21]

The Bible tells us in Eccl. 4:9-10, "*You're better off to have a friend than to be all alone...If you fall, your friend can help you up*".

But here's the question. What temptation are you facing right now and how could God use that temptation as you choose to obey Him as an opportunity for you to grow in character?

God wants to make you like Jesus Christ. It's the third purpose that He put you on this planet for. He wants to build your character now so you can be rewarded in eternity.

This life is not what it's all about. This is preparation for eternity. And so today we've looked at two of the ways that God uses. (1) God uses trouble to teach us trust, and (2) God uses temptation to teach us to obey.

[Slide 22]

(3) Number three - God uses **trespasses** to teach us to **forgive**.

Now what are trespasses?

Well, if trials are situations designed by God to draw us closer to Him and temptations are situations designed by the devil to draw us away from God, then trespasses are situations designed by other people, designed to hurt us.

Yes, there are people in life who want to hurt you intentionally, and that's why the Bible says in the Lord's Prayer, we're to pray, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us".

Now this is the tough one. It's one thing to handle trouble and it's another thing to handle temptation. But the most difficult tool of all that God uses in our lives to make us like Christ is this one.

Bearing the hurt of other people without retaliation is, without a doubt, the most important and the most difficult step in becoming like Jesus Christ because it often involves being misunderstood, being criticized, being judged, being hurt physically or emotionally or verbally, it may involve abuse.

Now let me be clear...these are not good things. These are evil things, and God is not the author of evil. God does not cause these things. God hates sin. But He didn't protect His own Son from these things.

His own Son was misunderstood and hurt and judged and abused, and what makes us think it's going to be any different for us?

You see, on the cross Jesus Christ not only carried our sins, He also endured enormous abuse from the people who were right there.

Mat. 27:39-44, it says "*The people passing by (looking at Jesus on the cross) shook their heads and hurled insults at Jesus...and the elders made fun of Him...Even the bandits who had been crucified with Him insulted him in the same way*".

And what was His response?

[Slide 23]

Look at the next verse, "*Jesus said, 'Father, forgive these people, because they don't know what they are doing'*".

In 1 Pet. 2:23 it says this "*They called Him every name in the book and He said nothing back. He suffered in silence, intent to let God set things right*".

What did Jesus do? What was His response to trespasses? He gave up His right to get even. He absorbed the hurt. He put up with the pain. He responded to evil with good. That's what Jesus did.

[Slide 24]

WWJD wrist band - used to wear when young - should get one now to remind myself in every situation - in every circumstance "WWJD" - What Would Jesus Do?

Now, if you're going to grow up spiritually and if you're going to become like Jesus Christ, you're going to have to learn the same thing.

The truth is in life you're going to be hurt. This is not heaven. This is a fallen world. Everybody sins. You hurt other people. Other people hurt you. We hurt each other intentionally and unintentionally. You're going to be hurt often in life.

And if you're going to become like Christ, you have to learn to forgive. So, how do we do that?

Well, how can you learn to forgive if you've never been hurt? You can't! You can't learn to forgive unless somebody's hurt you. And yet forgiveness is one of the primary qualities of God and God wants you to learn to become like Him. So there are hurts that are allowed in your life in order to make you like Jesus.

Now again, this is the toughest one, so let me give you two tips. Two little helps for when people harm you intentionally or unintentionally.

[Slide 25]

Number one, remember that God has **forgiven me**.

The Bible says

[Slide 26]

"Forgive others, just as God forgave you because of Christ" (Eph. 4:32). God will never ask you to forgive anybody more than you've already been forgiven by Him.

[Slide 27]

Number two, remember **God is in control**.

Look at the life of Joseph - betrayed by his brothers, taken to Egypt, falsely accused thrown into jail - but all the time he remained true to God and God was in control - he had Joseph in just the right place to raise him up to be second in command in Egypt and as a result save many people from famine. Including his own brothers who did not recognize him but came to him for food. And when he told them who he was they were afraid but Joseph's response:

[Slide 28]

He said this *"You meant to hurt me, but God turned your evil into good to save the lives of many people, which is being done"* (Gen. 50:20).

That is spiritual maturity. Realising God uses trouble to teach us to trust, and God uses temptation to teach us to obey, and God uses trespasses to teach us to forgive, because we can't become like Jesus without learning to trust and obey and forgive.

Our greatest testimony as a believer is how you handle hurt. How do you respond when other people hurt you? Do you respond like Jesus did? And we are most like Christ when we suffer in order to save others.

Who do we need to forgive?

God's third purpose for your life is to make you like Jesus Christ. And if that's true, then He's going to take you through everything Jesus went through.

That means He's going to take you through a Gethsemane, an experience of trouble, where you learn to trust His love.

He's going to take you through a desert, an experience of temptation, where you learn to obey Him and do the right thing.

And He's going to take you to the cross, a time of trespass, where you learn to forgive.

But there is a promise.

[Slide 29]

Look at these verses. *"We go through exactly what Christ goes through". Here's the good news, "But if we go through the hard times with Him, then we're certainly going to go through the good times with Him"* (Rom. 8:17).

Now, I don't know what you're going through, I don't know. I know what I am going through. I don't know what you are going through.

But I do know how God wants you and He wants me to respond to it, regardless of what it is.

Philippians 2 verse 5 says this:

[Slide 30]

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5).

Let's commit this verse to memory this week!