

CALLED TO BECOME LIKE CHRIST

Week 4

Today we look at the third purpose that God put us on this planet for, and we find it in [Romans 8:29](#) and many other verses, [For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son](#). God's plan has always been, [to make us like Jesus Christ](#). God wants us to develop His character, the way He thinks, the way He acts, the way He feels, His values, His moral character. Now this is a process, it doesn't happen overnight. It's not like one day all of a sudden - ZAP - we're just like Jesus. This process is called "discipleship", and it takes an entire lifetime. This week we're going to look at, ***"How does God help me grow spiritually? How does God make me like Jesus Christ?"***

We know God uses the Bible. If we really want to grow up spiritually, the more we get into it, the more we're going to grow. We need to read it, study it, memorise it, meditate on it, think about it and apply it in our life. The other thing God uses are people, and that's why last week we talked about "fellowship." When we learn from each other, we grow and we develop, and become more spiritually mature.

But, God uses more than just the Bible and fellowship. Paul writes in [Romans 8:28](#), [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](#). Does that include bad things? Painful things? Does it even include mistakes we make from sinning? Yes, it does. In **ALL** things God works for the good of those who love Him to make us like Christ. We're going to look at three unexpected ways which God uses to help us grow, and we're going to see them in the life of Jesus. Jesus had trouble in the garden. He had temptation in the desert, and He had trespasses on the cross. And if we're going to grow to be like Jesus, God's going to take us through these same experiences. One at a time. Now the problem is, these things don't automatically help us grow. Our heart has to be ready, because if it's not, we're going to become ***"bitter by these things"*** rather than ***"better by these things."***

Three ways which God uses to help us grow:

- 1) God uses trouble to teach us to trust Him;
- 2) God uses our temptations to teach us to obey Him; and
- 3) God uses trespasses to teach us to forgive.

1) God uses trouble to help us to grow

In the Bible the 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. If things just go well in our life, it doesn't take much faith, it doesn't take much character. So God has to bring some things along in our life to stretch us, to cause us to grow. Every problem has a purpose. It doesn't matter whether we caused it, somebody else caused it, the devil caused it. And that purpose is to make us like Jesus, to build character in our life. Paul tells us in [Romans 5:3-4](#), [We know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope](#).

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 Himself dying a horrible death by crucifixion. His struggle was "Would He trust God to know what was best for His life, even if it meant an extremely painful death?" Mark tells us, [They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray."](#) (Mark 14:32). Notice, that Jesus needed friends when He went through troubles. That's why we need to be part of a small group, why we need fellowship. Nobody is supposed to go through the troubles of life alone. The stress and anguish came over Him, and He said, ["My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."](#) (Mark 14:34). Now this is major trouble He's going through. But notice how Jesus responded to trouble in the next verse. ["Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."](#) (Mark 14:36).

If we're going to become like Jesus, we've got to learn to trust God completely, even when things look terrible, things are falling apart. God uses trouble to teach us to trust Him. It's easy to trust God when everything is going great in our life. The real test of our faith is, how is our relationship with God when we don't feel good? When everything is going wrong? So, the next time we get into some troubles and we say, "Why is this happening?" well, we'll know why. God is teaching us to trust Him.

2) God uses our temptations to teach us to obey Him

Temptations are situations designed by Satan and they're intended to harm us. God never tempts us to do evil and God is able, because of the greatness of His power and who He is, to use Satan's temptations for good in our lives. Temptation always provides a choice and when we choose for God rather than choosing for Satan, Satan's plan is ruined and we start to grow in our life.

Jesus never sinned, but He faced temptations. Right after He was baptised at the very beginning of his public ministry, He went through an intense 40-day period of temptation out in the desert. In [Matthew 4:1](#) we read, [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. The fact that Jesus faced temptations reminds us of some truths about temptation that help us to get through it. Firstly, it's not a sin to be tempted. Secondly, everyone is tempted in the same ways. And thirdly, we'll never outgrow temptation. We never get to a point in our life where we become so spiritual or so old, that we're not tempted anymore.

Temptation always tests whether we love God more than the temptation. When we're tempted by money, the test is - do we love God most or do we love money most in our life? When we're tempted by a wrong relationship, the test is - do we love that person most or do we love God most in our 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 commands." So ***"What do we do? How do we get through this?"*** Two helps with temptation:

1. If we want to make it through the temptations of life, we need to keep focused on good thoughts. The Bible talks about this in [Philippians 4:8](#) when it says, [Whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—think about such things](#). Temptation always starts with getting our attention, and when it gets our attention, it gets us. If we focus on the temptation, inevitably we're going to get caught up in that temptation. We can't keep the thought of succumbing to a temptation and the thought of obeying God at the same time in our mind.
2. Get a spiritual partner or become part of an Accountability Group. 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 you trust. The Bible tells us in [Ecclesiastes 4:9-10](#), [Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up](#). This step is saying, "Go tell someone else about this". They're not going to drop their jaw too far, because guess what? They've faced the same kind of temptation as us.

3) God uses trespasses to teach us to forgive

Trespasses are situations designed by other people to hurt us. Yes, there are people in life who want to hurt us intentionally, and that's why the Bible says in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us." It's one thing to handle trouble and it's another thing to handle temptation, but the most difficult way of all that God uses in our lives to make us like Christ is this one. And bearing the hurt of other people without retaliation is, without a doubt, the most important and the most difficult step in becoming like Jesus. But God didn't even protect His own Son from these things, Jesus was misunderstood, hurt, judged and abused. What makes us think we're going to be let off the hook?

In [Matthew 27:39-44](#) it says, [Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads...and in the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him...even the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him](#). And what was His response? In [1 Peter 2:23](#) it says this [When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly](#). What was His response to trespasses? He yielded His right to get even. He absorbed the hurt. He put up with the pain. He responded to evil with good. Now, if we're going to grow up spiritually and if we're going to become like Jesus, we're going to have to learn the same thing. ***"How do we do that?"***

1. Remember that God has forgiven us. The Bible says, [Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. \(Ephesians 4:32\)](#). God will never ask us to forgive anybody more than we've already been forgiven by Him.
2. Remember God is in control. When we're being hurt by somebody else, God will use it for good in our life. Remember Joseph, disliked by his brother so much, they sold him into slavery and then lied to their dad and said, "Oh, he was killed by a wild animal." And yet God had a plan in it all, as he was taken to Egypt and went through all kinds of things. Joseph had no idea why things were going wrong in his life. And yet he trusted God the whole time. He maintained a forgiving spirit. And God knew exactly where he was and had him exactly where He wanted him to be and over time raised him up to be second in command under Pharaoh saving Egypt and Israel, from starvation. And later the brothers come to this man, not realising it was Joseph, and they went to ask for food to take back to their home. And when Joseph reveals who he was, they were afraid he was going to kill them. And yet he says this, [You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. \(Genesis 50:20\)](#).

God's third purpose for our life is to make us like Jesus. And if that's true, then He's going to take us through everything Jesus went through. That means: going through a Gethsemane, an experience of trouble, where we learn to trust His love; going through a desert, an experience of temptation, where we learn to obey Him and do the right thing; and going to the cross, a time of trespass, where we learn to forgive.

But there is a promise! In [Romans 8:17](#) we read, [Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory](#).