

## CREATED TO BECOME LIKE CHRIST

*Based on Rick Warren's*

### ***The Purpose Driven Life – Part 4***

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March 14, 2004

### **The Scripture**

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. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all

things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?

It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. **The**

### **Sermon**

When I was in High School, I joined the Future Farmers of America. Every meeting began with the ringing of a bell and the question: “Future Farmers, why are we here?” That’s what these *40*

*Days of Purpose* are all about. We may not all be **farmers**, but the question of why we're here is just as valid today as it was in the early 70's.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, why **are** we here?

We're **here** because God has a **purpose** for our lives. Two weeks ago we learned that we were "Planned for God's Pleasure." The Bible calls this "Worship." Last week we discovered that we were "Formed for God's Family." The Bible calls that "Fellowship."

Today we turn to the third purpose God put us on this planet to perform. We find it in Romans 8:29 of our Owner's Manual. "*From the very beginning God decided that those who came to Him – and He knew who would – should become like His Son.*" In other words, God made us to be like Jesus. **You were created to become like Christ.** The Bible calls this **Discipleship.**

Our owner's manual says in Ephesians 4:15, "*God wants us to grow up...like Christ in everything.*" God loves babies. So do I, but

neither of us wants them to stay babies for very long. We want them to grow and mature and develop. God loves spiritual babies, freshly minted Christians, newly born again, but He doesn't want them to **stay** babies. He wants them to grow and mature and develop. He wants them to become like Christ. Write this down, my third purpose in life is to **become like Christ**.

This doesn't happen overnight. Mushrooms may spring up in a day, but oak trees take decades to develop. Those who claim instant spiritual maturity are no more solid than a mushroom. True maturation is a process. It's going to take the rest of your life to become like Jesus – so let's get started!

God gives us many things to make us more like Christ – prayer, worship, other Christians, the Bible – but sometimes He uses some pretty strange tools. You might not have thought of this before, but God can even use trials, troubles, temptations, and trespasses make us more like Christ.

The Bible says in 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 includes **bad** things, **painful** things, **destructive** things we do to each other through sin. When faced with trouble, some grow better and some grow bitter but God, if we let Him, can use some pretty strange things to help us grow.

The first of these are trials and trouble. It’s strange, but God can even use **trials and troubles** to teach us to **trust Him**. Make no mistake. We don’t **like** to suffer and God doesn’t like to **see** us suffer, but God knows that a certain amount of suffering is **necessary** for us to grow in faith. It’s **easy** to follow God when things go well. That doesn’t stretch our faith. That doesn’t strengthen our character. Sometimes God **has** to let bad things come into our lives to help us grow. Our owner’s manual says in Romans 5:3-4 “*...trouble produces patience, and patience produces character, and character produces hope.*”

Think about it. Even Jesus had to go to the Garden of Gethsemane – which means “The Olive Press” – where he was pressed down by the weight of the world. His heart was breaking. Jesus said, “*The sorrow in My heart is so great that it almost crushes Me.*” (Mark 14:34). We’ve all been there! We’ve felt so burdened, abandoned, pressed down by the cares of the world that we didn’t think we could make it through another day. You might be feeling that way right now. That’s when Jesus said, “*Father, everything is possible for You. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet, I want Your will, not Mine!*” (Mark 14:36).

Like Jesus, we need to trust God even when our world is falling apart. In fact, we need to trust God **especially** when our world is falling apart. It’s OK to complain, to say things like, “God, I don’t like this! Please take it away from me.” Jesus said those very words, but he also said, “I give myself to you. Do what you want with me. You know what’s best.”

We've got to learn to trust God like Jesus did. Whether God **causes** our trials and trouble them or simply **lets them happen** doesn't really matter. What **does** matter is that God knows what He's doing and can use even the **worst** of experiences to help us grow. We don't have to **like** it – Jesus didn't – but sometime surgery is necessary for healing. The true test of faith is whether you stick with God when your world is falling apart.

God uses trials and trouble to teach us to trust Him. That's pretty cool, but He also uses temptations to teach us to obey Him. Don't get me wrong. The Bible says in James 1:13-15, *“When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”* (NIV) Temptation does not **come** from God. It comes from our sinful desire – maybe even Satan himself – but God is stronger than sin and

can transform our temptation into opportunities for holiness. Temptation always includes a choice. Every time you are **tempted** to do evil, you are given the **opportunity** to do good. When I choose good over evil, God over Satan, the devil's plan for ruining my life is destroyed and I grow in faith. Choices, the right choices, help to grow our character.

Matthew 4:1 says, *“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.”* If Jesus was tempted and if we are created to become like Christ, guess what? We're going to face it too.

What we can learn from this?

1) It's not a sin to be tempted. The Bible says in Hebrews 4:14-16, *“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us*

*in our time of need.*” (NIV) Jesus **himself** was tempted, though he did not sin. It’s not a **sin** to be tempted, so long as you don’t give in. The Bible says in Hebrews 2:18, “*Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*” (NIV) You are not alone. Christ was tempted. He **knows** what you’re going through. He understands. That’s why he can help us.

2) **Everyone** is tempted. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 10:13, “*No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*” (NIV) **Your** temptations are no worse than anyone else’s. God’s been there before with people just like you, Jesus himself has experienced the same temptations, and Christ can help you through them if you let him.

3) You never **outgrow** temptation. Your hormones may eventually slow down and **some** things might not be as tempting as they once were,

but there are plenty of other things out there to tempt you. We're all tempted. We're tempted every day of our lives – even Billy Graham, the Pope, and Mother Teresa. Just look at what Jesus did when **he** was tempted. He said in Matthew 4:10, *“Get out of here, Satan. The scriptures say, worship only the Lord God. Obey only Him.”*

That's the point. Temptations test what you worship. They demonstrate what you love the most. If you're tempted by money, the real question is, “Do I love God more than money?” If you're tempted by a wrong relationship, the question is, “Do I love God more than that person?” If you're tempted by comfort, the question is, “Do I love God more than my comfort?” What do you love the most? Who, or what, is **really** your god. Put God first in your life or you're guilty of idolatry.

How can we **cope** with temptation? Well, **focusing** on it only makes it worse. It's like saying, “Don't think of elephants.” I bet you're thinking of elephants right now! Big, fat, gray, dirty, smelly elephants. Instead of **dwelling** on temptation, do what the Bible says in Philippians

4:8 and “*Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right.*” For temptation to take control of your life, it first has to get your attention. Most of us secretly enjoy contemplating the possibility of giving in to our temptation. That’s what makes it **tempting** in the first place and that’s what gets us into trouble. By turning your thoughts to Jesus and focusing on something else, something positive, something good and right and true and holy, you push temptation out of your mind. The elephant might hang around a little longer, stamping and trumpeting to get your attention but, once it realizes your mind has moved on, it soon leaves for greener pasture.

Don’t **resist** temptation. Don’t give **in** to it, but don’t **resist** it either. When you resist temptation, you’re **thinking** about it! You’ve entered into a spiritual tug-of-war with evil that you cannot win. If Eve had just dropped her end of the rope and walked away instead of arguing with Satan about what God meant by, “Don’t eat that fruit,” we’d be in a different place today. Don’t let yourself get in a tug-of-war with evil.

Drop the rope and walk away. Remember Philippians 4:8, “*Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right.*” Don’t wrestle with temptation – refocus your thoughts on something good – and temptation will fade away. As the song goes, “Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.”

God uses **trials and troubles** to teach us to **trust Him**. God uses **temptations** to teach us to **obey Him**. But God uses **trespasses** to teach us to **forgive**. What are trespasses? Well, if **trials and troubles** are designed or permitted by God to draw us closer to Him and **temptations** are designed by evil to lead us **away** from God, then **trespasses** are designed by other **people** to hurt us. Yes, there are people out there who **want** to hurt you. Some will hurt you by accident, but there are actually people who want to hurt you. That’s why Jesus taught us to pray, “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” That’s hard. It’s one thing to handle trials, troubles, and temptation. It’s

another to bear the hurt of another person without striking back. This, without a doubt, is the most difficult and important step you will take in becoming like Jesus

Let me be clear: gossip; criticism; misunderstanding; personal attack; verbal, physical, and emotional abuse are **not** good things. They're evil. God is not the author of evil. He does not **cause** these things, but He's powerful enough to **use** them to help us grow. Even **Jesus** was misunderstood and hurt and criticized and abused. The Bible says in Matthew 27:39-44, *"The people passing by 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."*

How did Jesus respond? He said, *"Father, forgive these people, because they don't know what they are doing."* The Bible says in 1 Peter 2:23, *"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? He yielded 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.

If we're going to become like Jesus, we need to do the same. **This** life is not heaven. **This** is a fallen world. **Everybody** sins. You hurt others – intentionally and unintentionally – and other people hurt you. If you're going to become like Christ, you need to learn to forgive. How? By being hurt and forgiving. The ability to forgive comes with practice.

Do you remember Joseph? His brothers sold him into slavery. He was false accused and ended up in an Egyptian prison. But God had a plan. Joseph had no idea why his life was so messed up, but God was preparing him for something great. Eventually, Joseph became the second most powerful person in the world and it was God's plan through Joseph to save two nations – Egypt and Israel – from starvation. You know the story.

The time came for Joseph's brothers to stand before this powerful man and beg for food. They didn't know who he was. When Joseph

finally revealed his true identity, they scared to death, and with good reason, but he said to them in Genesis 50, verse 20, *“You meant to hurt me, but God turned your evil into good to save the lives of many people, which is being done.”*

That’s spiritual maturity. God uses trials and troubles to teach us to trust, temptation to teach us to obey, and trespasses to teach us to forgive – for how could we ever become like Jesus without first learning to trust, obey, and forgive? Is it easy? No! Do we like it? No! Do we need it? Absolutely yes! I am convinced that: (1) Your greatest testimony as a Christian is how you handle hurt and (2) You are the most like Christ when you suffer to save others.

That’s what Jesus did for you and me. That’s what **we’re** called to do for each other. That’s the bad news. Now hear the Good News. The Bible says in Romans 8:17, *“We go through exactly what Christ goes through. If we go through the hard times with Him, then we’re certainly going to go through the good times with Him.”*

Will you pray with me?

Dear God, help me grow as a Christian by becoming more like my big brother Jesus. If that means going through troubled times, then I say, “Bring it on! I want Your will for my life.” If it means facing a wilderness of temptation, then give me the strength to make right choices. If it means enduring the hurts of others, then teach me to forgive as You have forgiven me. Come, Lord Jesus. Come into my heart today, that I might become more like you every day of my life. In Your name I pray, Amen.