

On Purpose, 7

Very Becoming Believers

Chapters 22-24; July 20, 2008

So far, we've covered two of the five purposes in Rick's book: We were created to believe in something: God. We were created to belong to something: His body. And today we're beginning our *third* created purpose: We were created to become like something: Jesus. God's plan has always been to make us like His Son:

God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us." - *Genesis 1:26 NLT*



In all creation, only humans are made in God's image. We can't understand *everything* this implies, but we do know some aspects: like God, we are spiritual: we have everlasting souls. Like God, we are intellectual: we think and we reason. Like God, we are relational: we give and receive love. Like God, we are moral: able to tell right from wrong.

Like any good father, God wants His children to bear His image.

You were ... **created to be like God** in true righteousness and holiness. - *Ephesians 4:22a;24b NIV condensed*

Notice how Paul qualifies this: ... in "righteousness and holiness"

We're not meant to be little *gods*. In fact, that's the *oldest* temptation in the book! Satan promised Adam and Eve that if they would only follow his advice, "You will be like God" (*Gen 3:5*).



Whenever we try to control our circumstances or other people in an *ungodly* fashion, we're taking the enemy's advice and trying to be a little god. I'm not called to be God; I'm called to be *godly*. We were "created to be like God"; to bear His image by taking on His values, His attitude, and His character.

We may have been *created* in God's image, but our reflection, our representation is incomplete and damaged and distorted by sin. So, what does a complete and undamaged image of God look like? It looks just like Jesus!

... the visible image of the invisible God. - *Colossians 1:15 NLT*

... the exact likeness of God. - *2 Corinthians 4:4 NLT*

... the exact representation ... - *Hebrews 1:3 NIV*



Question is: How do we *become* like the *visible* image of Jesus? Hard work! Salvation is free but transformation takes effort.

Bearing God's image isn't automatic and spiritual growth doesn't just happen. As God's children, we have to be *deliberate* in our devotion.



Jesus tells us (*Mark 10:15*) to be child-like in our trust and faith, but Paul warns (*1 Corinthians 13:11*) us to put the child-ish ways behind us. An old believer isn't always a mature believer. Childish thinking is self-centered and self-seeking. Babies, by nature are *completely* selfish. They think only of themselves and their own needs.

This is what we're called to leave behind.



God wants His kids to grow up. But I must *want* to be less self-absorbed. So many believers settle for the false fulfillment of temporary, selfish satisfaction. Jesus didn't die on the cross so I could live a self-centered, self-serving, self-satisfied life. He died for me, so that I could be *with* Him and be *like* Him.

... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. - *Philippians 2:12-13 NIV*

The Lord reveals two aspects to our spiritual growth here:

- A. There's a "work out", which is *my* responsibility.
- B. There's a "work in", which is *His* responsibility.

It doesn't say to "work for" your salvation, because you can't add anything to what Jesus already did. People go to the gym and "work out" in order to *develop* the body that they've already been given.

And we're warned to mature "with fear and trembling". That simply means to take our spiritual *development* very seriously.

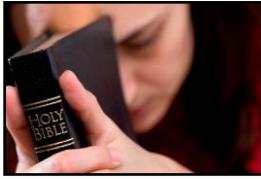


I'm going to give you "The Godly Work Out"; three exercises that will "work out" your salvation and build your core into the visible image of Christ:

1. Replace lies with truth

When Jesus asked God to sanctify/purify His disciples, he said:

Sanctify them by the truth; **your word** is truth. - *John 17:17 NIV*



Sanctification requires revelation and revelation requires the Word of God. The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to make me like the Son of God. If I'm not in His Word, His Word won't be in me. Believers are plagued with Bible *anorexia*; starving themselves spiritually, and *refusing* to feed on the "bread of life".

If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine ... - *John 8:31b NAS*

The Bible must become the counsel that I use for *making* my decisions and the benchmark I use for *evaluating* the results. So many troubles come into our lives because we base our choices and decisions on flawed and unreliable authorities, like: emotion, tradition, passion, peer-pressure, and culture. Each of us must eventually settle, once and for all, the issue of whom and/or what will be the ultimate authority in our lives.

Once we begin replacing lies with truth, we must ...

2. Establish godly habits

Character-*building* habits are called "spiritual disciplines." This includes: Bible reading, prayer (alone or with someone), meditation, memorization, journaling, fellowship, studying, etc. Anything that, when practiced *regularly*, will *repeatedly* bring you back to God, and sensitize you to what He's saying.

Look what Paul said to Timothy concerning his "exercise plan":

Be **diligent** in these matters; give yourself wholly to them ... **Persevere** in them ... - *1 Timothy 4:15-16 NIV condensed*

Diligence and perseverance are *crucial*, because consistent choices produce habits.



Consistently wise choices produce good habits and consistently unwise choices produce bad habits. I will become whatever I repeatedly practice. Consistent choices produce habits; and habits can develop us, or destroy us, but either way they will ultimately *define* us.



Would you consider a husband who is faithful *most* of the time a faithful husband or an unfaithful husband? I can't claim to be kind unless I'm *habitually* kind. I can't claim to have integrity unless I'm *habitually* honest (when it's not convenient). My habits *define* my character.

Christlike character is the result of *consistently* making Christ-like choices ... which brings us to the third exercise:

3. Step out in faith



When Moses died, Joshua took over leading the Israelites to the Promised Land. He had led them only six miles when they were blocked by the Jordan River, at full flood stage. This was a crucial test of Joshua's leadership. But, Joshua prayed and God performed a miracle and they walked through on dry land.

However, Joshua told them that God expected a little something from them as well:

And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the LORD ... set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap. -
Joshua 3:13 NIV condensed

God didn't stop the rushing water *until* they waded in! He wanted them to step out in faith in spite of their fears and feelings. And they did. And He dried up the water just as he had for Moses at the Red Sea, a generation before. We give God the opportunity to work "in us" every time we "step out" and do the godly thing in spite of our fears and feelings. This is what it means to:

... walk by faith, not by sight ... - 2 Corinthians 5:7 NAS 95



The Jordan runs along a fault-line where two tectonic plates meet and slip against each other.

Landslides will dam the entire river until enough pressure builds to clear away the obstruction.

... [as] their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam ... -
Joshua 3:15b-16a NIV

God set this miracle into motion long before Joshua was even born! The miracle here was in the timing. God wants us to act first; to move ahead in spite of our weakness, when we *don't think* we have the power or strength or perseverance or wisdom or love to pull it off. And when you do, you'll discover He was ahead of you all along! If the priests had waited for the waters to stop before taking that next step, they'd still be waiting for God to act! Are you going to wade into the water or wait on the shore?

If we're going to live life "on purpose" we must understand:

1. I was created to become like Christ.

Q: Which areas of your life are the *least* Christlike?

2. Spiritual growth takes deliberate devotion.

Q: Which spiritual disciplines are you careless with?

3. Only the truth can transform me.

Q: What would *others* say is the ultimate authority in your life?