

GROWING IN GRACE

CEDAR CREEK COMMUNITY CHURCH

How should we then live?

Practical Christian living in light of the Gospel.

WEEK 2: WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE?

INTRODUCTION

- Just by way of reminder, for this year's study, we are moving from the doctrine of sanctification to the practice of sanctification.
- Last year was about our salvation, our new position before God, our new identity in Christ and how the Bible talks about our sanctification.
- After establishing our salvation and that we are truly new creations in Christ, it is now about answering the question, *how should we then live*.
 - In other words, knowing we are born again, what does our new saved life look like.
 - If our minds are being renewed and our affections are being changed, what does it look like to live according to that reality?
 - More than that, how do we facilitate this growth in our lives so that we can live according to our new position in Christ.
- Last week we took some time to walk through church history and learn how our fellow believers sought to live for Christ and what means they appropriated for their task.
- Throughout the ages, the church knew that they must grow in their walk with the Lord, but as we saw, it was not always done the right way or with the right motives.
- Before we can come into our own day and age, we must set some guardrails or fundamental truths in place so that we do not fall into the traps of our brothers and sisters from antiquity.
- This week is the "bridge" in our teaching series.
- The goal of our class is to look at the purpose of the Christian life.
- Why should we start with looking at the purpose of the Christian life?

- In 1865 Lewis Carroll wrote *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. One famous quote from that book is, "If you don't know where you are going, any road can take you there."¹
- In many ways, that is the challenge facing the church and many Christians today. Believers know they should grow, but they are not always sure what they should be growing toward.
- Our Christian life is not merely about movement, but meaningful movement which is directed and guided by God's purpose.
- In other words, before talking about what it means to walk in the Spirit or even cultivate spiritual disciplines or habits, we must understand the purpose of the Christian life.
- After all, if God saved us and left us here rather than immediately bringing us home to heaven, there must be a purpose for our remaining days on earth. So, what is that purpose? Why are we still here? What is God trying to accomplish in our lives?

1. SAVED FOR MORE THAN HEAVEN

- **Hebrews 10:23-25** "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; [24] and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, [25] not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."
- Often times, if we are not careful, we may think that our salvation was just to get us out of this world and into the next.
 - Our salvation was not a *get out of jail free* card nor was just to have "fire insurance" for the next life.
 - Equally true is that our salvation was not only about us.
- While it is certainly true that we are no longer citizens of this world, ***we are still here***. It's not an accident that the Lord has decided not to take us home but to leave us here for this time.
- This is the initial and primary step in purposeful living...we must believe that God has something more for us than just to keep us around until He chooses to bring us to glory.
 - Do you believe that God has a present purpose for your life or do you just think you are here, waiting for heaven?

¹ https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/us/quote-of-the-day-by-lewis-carroll-if-you-dont-know-where-you-are-going-any-road-can-take-you-there-/articleshow/130443330.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

- If God still has you on this earth, it is not for you to find yourself, but for you to know Christ, serve His people, and fulfill His purposes.

Why didn't God just take us to heaven?

- The answer might shock you, God still has work He intends to accomplish in us and through us.
- God saved us for a life of faithful service, spiritual worship, intense fellowship, and growth right now in our life.
- God saved us and left us here so that we would be able to fulfill many of His purposes that reach farther than just us.
- Looking at this passage from Hebrews, we can see some of the purposes for why we are here.
 - Important to note, this is in the context of the church...the body of Christ.
 - Much of what the Lord desires to do take place in the context of the church.
- **Hebrews 10:23**...we are to hold fast our confession of hope without wavering.
 - By holding fast our confession of hope it is a sign to those around us in the church of our stable faith in the Lord.
 - A sign of maturity in the Lord is an unswerving faith when the times of testing come.
- **Hebrews 10:24**...we are to consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.
 - John Owens writes, "Love and good deeds are the fruit of saving faith. So the apostle now exhorts the Hebrews to spur each other on in these things. These duties are put in the correct order by the apostle. For love is the spring and foundation of all acceptable good deeds."²
 - There is a common saying, *people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care*.
 - We are concerned with love in the church, second to that is the works of the church. We should neither be a church without love and only works, nor a church that is loving but does not serve one another.
 - God has left us here for both.
- **Hebrews 10:25**...not forsaking coming together as a church but encouraging one another.
 - A vital part of our spiritual life is the corporate worship of God. When we gather collectively, we are able to comfort one another, exhort one another, and encourage one another.

² John Owen, *Hebrews*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 213.

- We are still here so that we can be involved in one another's lives and make sure that we walk the road together.
- Implied in the exhortation is that by not assembling together, there will be a lack of encouragement.
- This means that the Lord has you here, at a minimum, to be an encouragement to one another as you see the final day approaching.

2. SAVED TO BECOME MORE LIKE CHRIST³

- **Philippians 2:5-8** “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, [6] who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. [8] Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”
- We are to literally have the **attitude** of Christ in us.
- The word for *attitude* means “to develop an attitude based on careful thought.”⁴
- In other words, let the same kind of thinking that dominated Christ...also dominate you.
- Here are some areas where our thoughts tend to go as we think about becoming more Christlike.

What Christlikeness in not:

- **Success**
 - While success is not a sin, it is also not the gauge by which we determine our Christlikeness.
 - To the onlooking world, Jesus was not successful though He was sinless.
 - We must remember that while the world measures success by achievement, God measures our faithfulness.

³ Ideas in this section taken from Thomas Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*.

⁴ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1066.

- **Comfort**

- Again, comfort is not a sin, but if it is the point of our life, we were not saved so that our lives would be comfortable.
- When we try and avoid people, places or situations that are uncomfortable, we miss out on the work that God is trying to do to further our maturity.
- Many of our greatest times of grow into Christlikeness have come in our most difficult seasons.

- **Prosperity**

- Our Christlikeness is not measured by the amount of our possessions, the money in our accounts, or our material blessings.
- Some of the most blessed and godliest people in Scripture lived with very little.
- True prosperity in this life is knowing Christ, not in gaining possessions which will one day all go away.

- **Influence**

- Some try to measure their Christlikeness by how many people follow their leadership, know their name, or respect them.
- It is interesting that Jesus often withdrew from the crowds and would often times speak in a way that caused people to walk away from Him.
- God is far more concerned with our character than with our platform or our influence over others.

- **Knowledge**

- While gaining biblical knowledge is essential to the Christian life, it is not alone going to bring about maturity.
- It is possible to know about Christ, His birth, life, death, and resurrection without maturing more in Him.
- This is why I have said many times, the goal of knowing theology is not to gather information, but rather for our transformation.

- **Religious Activity**

- Being like Christ is not just add more spiritual things to your life.
- As we are going to learn more about, our Bible reading, prayer, praise, and service are a means of grace from God to us...the end goal of a faithful Christian life.

- It is easy to fall into this trap of doing more so that it seems like growth is happening. The problem is, it only focuses on the outside...leaving the heart in the same state.
- “The purpose of the Christian life is not to become successful, comfortable, prosperous, influential, or merely knowledgeable. The purpose of the Christian life is to become increasingly like Jesus Christ.”

What Christlikeness is...

- ...humble service towards one another.
 - Jesus did not come to earth in order to have others serve Him.
 - He came as a humble servant to set an example for us to follow.
 - True Christlikeness does not demand our rights; it does not seek out recognition or try to push our own preferences. It is willing to serve others for their good and God’s glory.
- ...increasing conformity to the character of Christ.
 - His self-sacrifice and self-denial are evident as He did not assert Himself as God.
 - While Jesus never stopped being God nor did He ever stop possessing any of His divine attributes, He willingly laid aside the independent exercise of His privileges and took the form of a servant.
 - As believers and followers of Jesus mature, their compassion, humility, holiness, and love become more and more evident.
- ...transforming desires and affections.
 - We begin to see the world through the eyes of Christ.
 - We start to have less of a taste for sin and evil and long to delight in what brings God glory.
 - Our hearts make noticeable changes in what they desire and seek after.
- ...growing obedience to the will of God.
 - You start to realize that there is never a convenient time to do the right thing.
 - When our lives begin to look like more like Christ and less like our own preferences, we are growing in obedience.
 - We understand that we will never be perfect in this, but we strive for growth.
- ...joyful submission to the Father.
 - Jesus joyfully submitted to the will of the Father...even when it cost Him His life.
 - Jesus entrusted Himself to the Father, even when He was wrongfully accused and murdered.

- Christlikeness is leaning to trust our heavenly Father more and more. Learning to trust God's perfect wisdom, His impeccable timing, and His glorious providence...especially when we don't understand what's going on.
- ...growing in love and compassion for others.
 - There was not one place of Christ's ministry that was not marked with love and compassion.
 - He gave grace to the weak, the law to the proud, and mercy to others.
 - There is no greater display of His love than His death on the cross.
 - Growth in Christlikeness is maturity, not marked with increasing knowledge, but by how we seek to love one another.
- Here's the point, since we are saved to become more like Christ, we are going to see the Spirit-produced transformation in our character, our conduct, our desires and our affections.

3. SAVED FOR TRANSFORMATION⁵

- **2 Corinthians 3:18** "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."
- Transformation starts when we behold Christ.
- "Believers in the New Covenant have nothing obstructing their vision of Christ and His glory as revealed in the Scripture. Beholding as in a mirror...Paul's emphasis here is not so much on the reflective capabilities of the mirror as it is on the intimacy of it. A person can bring a mirror right up to his face and get an unobstructed view."⁶
- As you and I gaze at *the glory of the Lord*, we are being continually transformed into Christlikeness.
 - When a believer has a continued focus on Jesus, the Spirit transforms them more and more.
- This means that our transformation is Christ centered.
- Furthermore, to be transformed is a passive verb...it is what takes place to you when you put your focus on Christ.
 - Here's where real transformation takes place...your eyes gaze upon Christ, as that happens, your thoughts and desires center on Christ.

⁵ Some ideas from Sinclair Ferguson both *Devoted to God's Church* and *The Christian Life*

⁶ *The MacArthur Study Bible: New American Standard Bible*. 2 Co 3:18.

- You are then transformed, not because you did these things, but because you did these things God is actively working in you to bring about the change.
- Lastly, our transformation is *from glory to glory*.
 - It is progressive, it is gradual, and it is lifelong.
- Last week we looked at the various ways in which the church has sought out transformation:
- **Knowledge without heart change**
 - Leaning more and more about Jesus but never being transformed by His power.
- **Disciplines without the gospel**
 - Practicing things like reading the Bible, prayer, and going to church but never understanding they are just a means and not the end itself.
- **External displays of righteousness**
 - Serving in the church, seeking other's affirmations for your work, trying to look good on the outside but forgetting about the necessity of the internal transformation.
- **Emotions over objective truth**
 - Reading the Bible but only believing what it says when you can "feel" the truth.
- It is important to keep these truths in mind, our relationship with the Lord is not just about learning more and gaining information...but it is not just about our experiences either.
- God's desire is to change the whole person from the inside to the outside.
- We must know what God desires us to know, but we must also experience that truth in our lives.
 - We experience these, not because our behavior has improved but because we have experienced a whole person transformation from the inside out.
- God is not a static and cold, simply seeking to fill our minds with information.
- His purpose is to renew our minds, soften our hearts, reorient our desires, and to ultimately change our actions.
 - Our Christian life is not about trying harder, behaving better, or becoming more disciplined.
 - It is about Spirit driven, heart transformation of our entire person so that we become more and more like Christ.
- Our transformation takes place when as we follow the leading of the Spirit of God as He is actively molding and shaping us into who He desires us to be.
- Then we have the obvious question...If God is transforming us into the image of Christ, how and when does this occur in our lives?

- According to Paul, it comes from the Lord; the Spirit.
- That's for next week...Walking in the Spirit.

4. SAVED UNDER GOD'S SOVEREIGN PURPOSE⁷

- **Romans 8:28-29** “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. [29] For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren...”
- We come back to this text often because of its richness and layers of truth.
 - This seeks to answer, why is this happening in my life.
- Our life is not left up to chance. It is not a collection of random and out of place events that only sometimes come together.
- Believers understand that God is in control **and** actively governing every detail of their lives.
- We must ask the question that since God is causing all things to work together for good...what is the good that God is accomplishing?
- You see, **verse 28** is often quoted for comfort, but **verse 29** gives us the direct meaning of what God is doing in our lives.
- When you and I say **good**, we often times define it in worldly terms. Not necessarily sinful, but just not how Paul is using it.
 - We may say comfort, ease, freedom, our rights, etc. But do you see in **verse 29** the good that God is working in us?
 - Don't misunderstand, God gives many good gifts to His children for their enjoyment and pleasure. But those gifts are not God's ultimate purpose for us.
 - It is for the purpose of becoming more and more *conformed to the image of His Son*.
- This tells us that God's sovereign purpose is not about making our life easier but about to make us more like the image of His Son.
- “Because of this truth, every circumstance becomes material in God's hands for our growth.”
- Here are some of the ways that we may think are not good, but conform us more into Christ:
- Trials and suffering:

⁷ Ideas on Romans 8:28-29 taken from Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*

- They are not random but used by God so that we would become more like Christ.
- Jesus suffered and entrusted Himself to the righteousness of God. That is one of the ways we can grow in our suffering.
- Disappointments:
 - These come when we have an unmet expectation. When we think something will or should have happened, but it didn't.
 - This helps us to keep our hope in the Lord. To strive to submit to His will and plan for our life.
 - This is also helpful in reminding us that what we get from the Lord is exactly what we need for the season of life we are in.
- Seasons of waiting:
 - It's hard to wait on the Lord. We like things done either sooner or later.
 - God's timing is perfect, never too early or late.
 - We are refined in our seasons of waiting as our hearts start to become more and more molded into what God desires.
- This shows us that believers should not ask *how can I get out of this...* rather *how can I grow through what the Lord is trying to accomplish in me?*
- Everything is used so that we may become more and more like Christ. There are not going to be less trials, but there will be measurable growth and maturity.

5. SAVED TO BECOME MATURE⁸

- **Colossians 1:28-29** “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. [29] For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.”
- Ultimately, Christianity is not merely about our conversion...it is about our maturing.
 - Our conversion is not the finish line in our walk with the Lord.
- Surely it starts with our conversion, but this is the gate into a complete and total new life with Christ.
- Paul's heart towards the Colossian church was not just *get them the gospel and move on*. It was to see them “complete in Christ.”

⁸ Ideas taken from Joel Beeke, both *Reformed Spirituality* and *Living for God's Glory*

- Notice how much emphasis Paul puts on Christ...*we proclaim Him*.
- The basis of Paul's proclamation was Jesus.
 - To proclaim means "to make known in public, with implication of broad dissemination."⁹
 - In other words, Paul was not just proclaiming Christ to a few people in the church or to those whom he thought were special, it was the normal means by which Paul knew growth happened.
 - Our growth doesn't happen because we attend more conferences, read more books, or gain more information about Jesus.
- How does he proclaim Christ?
- He does so by admonishing and teaching.
 - To admonish is to warn someone about their improper conduct.
 - To teach is to instruct someone in the way they should go.
- Do you understand how these two words go together?
 - Don't do this, because the Bible warns us not to...there are consequences.
 - Instead do this, because it is the path to blessing from the Lord.
 - By the way, this is basic biblical discipleship and how believer's put-off and put-on.
- Why proclaim Christ in this way? For a very specific purpose...to be complete in Christ.
 - Some Bibles translate complete as *perfect*. That's a good translation as it points to meeting the highest standard.
 - Paul proclaimed Christ because He is the highest standard for life. As we follow Christ's teaching, we are maturing as we become more like Him.
 - Here's where we can make some connective points...to be complete in Christ means that we increasingly show His humility, obedience, love, servanthood and submission. These character traits will continue to grow and be evident as we mature.
- This means that our maturing, our growing up is directly related to our relationship with Jesus.
- Questions to consider when thinking about *how should we then live*:
 - Am I growing in Christ?
 - Am I maturing in Christ?
 - Am I becoming more like Christ in my overall life?

⁹ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 515.

- Are my affections changing from what they used to be?
- When I look back 4 or 5 years, is there a noticeable change in direction?
 - Can you see small incremental changes?
- Do those who are closest to you see a shift in your allegiance toward Christ?
- Then in **verse 29** we have Paul's true heart of service for the church.
- His labor is not for outward change, for things in the church to run smoothly, but for those in the church to grow more and more into Christ.
- This is the true heart of a shepherd. They lead the flock, not push the flock, towards Christ.
- This is the true heart of one another ministry in the church.
 - Believers are not pushing one another to do what they want them to do, but rather to keep walking towards and with Christ.
- This task in the church is so great and takes all our energy.
- Listen to a description of Paul's work:
 - "Here is the balance of Christian living. Paul gave the effort to serve and honor God with all his might. "Labor" refers to working to the point of exhaustion. The Greek word for "striving" gives us the Eng. word "agonize" and refers to the effort required to compete in an athletic event. At the same time, he knew the effective "striving" or work, with spiritual and eternal results was being done by God through him."¹⁰
- Our maturity in Christ is not going to happen with no effort.
- It is not just going to happen because we happen to be around other believers or because we are in a church body.
- Our growth and our maturity require an intentional effort on our part. But they ultimately occur through God's power working in us as we are pursuing Christ.
 - This is why Paul can say at the end of **verse 29** "...striving according to His power, which mightily works within me."
 - It was never about Paul and what he could do, but always about Christ and what He was already doing in and through Paul.
- Paul gave all he had for the church to proclaim Christ to them because he knew that the only way they would mature is if they knew more and more about Jesus.

¹⁰ *The MacArthur Study Bible: New American Standard Bible. Col 1:29.*

- In all of this, God has saved us for more than heaven, He is making us like Christ, He is transforming us through His sovereign purposes, He is maturing us through His power.
- Why is this...it is so that He would be glorified.

6. SAVED FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

- **John 15:8** “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.”
- As we have discussed before, the fruit in our lives has multiple purposes.
- It is there to glorify God to the onlooking world.
 - That is the external purpose. We bring glory to God when we serve those around us through the Spirit of God.
- The second reason is it brings an internal confirmation of our sonship with God.
 - The fruit in our lives provides internal evidence that we genuinely belong to Christ and are growing as His disciples.
- What does it mean to bear fruit for God:
 - There is the internal fruit from God like love, joy, peace, patience.
 - There is the external fruit from God like kindness, goodness, being gentle and showing self-control.
 - When we use our skills and talents in the service of others, we bear fruit for God.
- Here’s the key, it is impossible to bear much fruit without being abiding in Jesus.
- The fruit in our life is a direct result of the Spirit working in us. As we abide in Jesus through our study of the Scriptures, prayer, fellowship, and other disciplines, we then walk in the Spirit.
- By walking in the Spirit, we are going to be fruitful...glorifying God and proving your place in His family.
- We must keep these truths in mind:
 - Sanctification is difficult.
 - The battle against our own sin is real.
 - Our growth can feel slow and unimpressive at times.
- Everything we have discussed tonight ultimately points to this reality: “God is glorified when His people increasingly reflect the character of His Son.”

- We must also remember that God has promised to finish what He has started.
 - **Jude 1:24-25** “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, [25] to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”

CONCLUSION

- This gives us an idea that the purpose of our Christian life is not just to get us to heaven.
- Our salvation is not primarily about us. Rather, it is about becoming more like Christ, about being transformed by His Spirit and maturing in our daily walk with Him.
- That means that when we are here on earth, our life is then to glorify God in all we do. It is also to grow in maturity so that we can show Christ more and more until He calls us home.

LOOKING AHEAD

- **How does God accomplish all of this? Where does the power come from for Christian living?**
 - It is through the ministry and power of the Holy Spirit.
 - It is not through our self-effort; though we must exert our strength.
- **What are the means that the Spirit uses in our practical daily living to bring about this change in our hearts and minds?**
 - This is where we will look at our spiritual disciplines and how the Spirit of God uses our daily living to conform us more into the image of Christ.