

No longer I . . . but Christ

So this week in only a way that I can I lost my flash or thumb drive. The sad thing is that it contains so many things that I thought were important. One of the most important things it contained was this week's sermon. It was about Thursday when it came up missing and I looked for it nearly all day. Finally I gave up and decided to start over.

It is the beginning of a series that is going to be centered in the weeks to come around one verse of scripture. I would like us to say this verse together. It is found in Galatians 2:20.

My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.
Galatians 2:20 NLT

There is a difference between enduring the Christian life or enjoying it. Many people that are part of the church often have the hope of heaven but in between the initial experience of saving faith and the final experience of seeing Jesus often their lives are characterized by frustrations and failures.

Many times people become frustrated with the programs and structures that make up our churches and just long for something real that they can believe in every day. Of course only God can bring transformation to our lives but the Bible states that, "*If My people, will humble themselves and pray, and seek (His) face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*" (2 Chronicles 7:14)

The key to living a credible and acceptable Christian life is to have Christ indwelling and living in us. This is made possible by the Holy Spirit. Even Jesus when He was on this earth depended on His Heavenly Father through the power of the Holy Spirit.

There is a pattern to follow that I think is more of an answer than a formula. But I want to introduce this series to you by looking at this first. There are five essential stages of life that we must walk through to experience God like He wants us to.

1. We must have an awareness of our need

To make this transition into the Christ centered life one must be aware of their need. When we take an honest look at ourselves and where we are in our relationship with Christ it is not unusual to find ourselves hungering and thirsting for better things. To be made aware of both the need and the answer is a gift that could only come for God.

Self-awareness is very valuable but really hard at times to achieve. Pardon the personal illustration but it seems fitting. Twice in my life I have been motivated by a photograph. Once in about 1996 and once about five months ago. One was a picture taken by my son and the other was taken by a camera here at Williams Street. After looking at the first one I lost about 68

pounds. After seeing the one taken a few months ago again it has been motivating. One was a still shot (although things were moving in it) and the other was taken from the online feed. (In that one I looked like an egg with legs). What was the motivation? Becoming self-aware. On a much deeper level we must strive to be self-aware in our relationship with God.

It was while Jesus was in the middle of a crowd that He shouted out the answer to our deepest need:

³⁷ On the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, "Anyone who is thirsty may come to Me! ³⁸ Anyone who believes in Me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from His heart.'"³⁹ (When He said "living water," He was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in Him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet entered into His glory. John 7:37-39 NLT

On the last day of the feast of tabernacles, the Jews drew water and poured it out before the Lord. It is thought that Christ was referencing this. If any man desires to be truly and forever happy, let him appeal to Christ, and be ruled by Him. This thirst means strong desires after spiritual blessings, which nothing else can satisfy; so the sanctifying and comforting influences of the Holy Spirit, were represented by the waters which Jesus called on them to come to Him and drink. The comfort flows plentifully and constantly as a river; strong as a stream to bear down the opposition of doubts and fears. There is a fullness in Christ, of grace for grace. The Spirit dwelling and working in believers is as a fountain of living, running water, out of which plentiful streams flow, cooling and cleansing as water.

What flows out of your heart and mine? Think about that for a few seconds. What flows out of our hearts is whatever we put into it. Are you aware of what is flowing from your heart?

If it is not the living water that should be flowing and you are aware at all you will have and experience an agony in your soul.

2. We will have an agony in our soul

In this day of prosperity centered preaching and teaching not many believe anymore in the benefit of sometimes being in agony in our souls. It would be great if everything was perfect all the time in every way. But that is not reality and we must face the facts that sometimes we may drift in our walk with God and when that happens we are in the dangerous position of not thinking with God's wisdom and aid. He offers to help us but we have to want His help.

It is critical that if we are there that we find the energy and strength to hunger and thirst after righteousness more than anything else.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Matthew 5:6 NKJV

The question that you must ask yourself today is do I possess spiritual self-awareness? Are you really conscious about where you are with God in your life? If you are and the answer is I am not in a good place there will be an agonizing that you will deal with.

If you feel that don't suppress it. Don't ignore it. Don't bury it. Don't run from it or God but do whatever you have to do to press in closer to God and own where you are. He is our only hope.

Again, Blessed are those who hunger and thirst. . .”

3. There must be an abandonment to the Savior

Dr. W.A. Criswell talks about the kind of faith we have by comparing it to an operation. If you've ever had surgery, you go in and the anesthetic is administered usually by a mask. They tell you to count to 3 and you'll be out. They put the mask over your face and you think to yourself that the gas is never going to be able to knock you out. You confidently count 1, and then you're out like a light. You put yourself into the hands of the surgeon completely. You're as helpless as a newborn baby. It is not only the committal of our lives- it is not only full trust, but it is the abandonment of any hope of any kind in anyone else or in any other way. It is a resignation of ourselves to Christ. There is nothing else to save. There is no one else to turn to. As the Lord said to His apostles, "*Will you also go away?*" John 6:67. And finally Peter answered for the Twelve, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that You are that Christ, the Son of the Living God.*" John 8:68 It is the abandonment of any other hope save in Christ.

¹³ *Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God.* Romans 6:13 NLT

Christians should devote every part of the body to God and to His service. Their tongue should be consecrated to His praise, and to the office of truth, and kindness, and compassion; their hands should be employed in useful labor for Him and serving others; their feet should be swift in His service, and should not go in the paths of sinfulness; their eyes should contemplate God's works and to promote thanksgiving and praise; their ears should not listen to words of this world or filth, but should be open to catch the voice of God as He utters His will through His word. He speaks to us every day, and we should hear Him; He spreads His glories before us, and we should survey them to praise Him; He commands, and our hands, and heart, and feet should obey.

In this journey we are taking today we must answer where we are and then consider total abandonment to God.

Read Romans 12:1-2 and make it your verse for change and abandonment to God.

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all He has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind He will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship Him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. Romans 12:1-2 NLT

Billy Graham tells the story about a little child that was playing with a very valuable vase. He put his hand into it and could not withdraw it. His father too, tried his best to get it out, to no avail. They were thinking of breaking the vase when the father said, "Now my son, make one more try. Open your hand and hold your fingers out straight as you see me doing, and then pull." To their astonishment the little fellow said, "O no, dad, I couldn't put my fingers out like that because if I did I would drop my dime."

Smile, if you will but thousands of us are like that little boy, so busy holding on to the world's worthless dimes that we cannot accept liberation. You know the problem with this illustration is whatever you are holding onto may be worth a lot more than a dime but the question is, Is it worth more than an unhindered relationship with God. Let go, and let God have His way in your life.

4. There must be an appropriation of faith by the Holy Spirit

What this means is simply that you and I cannot do this on our own. You will need God's help and power to do it. And to receive that you will need faith to allow the Holy Spirit to work.

Let me ask you this one question: Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the law of Moses? Of course not! You received the Spirit because you believed the message you heard about Christ. Galatians 3:2 NLT

Just as you receive salvation by faith so too will you receive the exchanged life by faith. Just as we accept Jesus by faith as our Savior, we also accept the Holy Spirit as the One that helps us and guides us into all truth.

If you and I are to be lead into this surrendered life it will be because we have allowed the Holy Spirit to inhabit our lives and that only happens by faith.

Henry Blackaby - the author of "Experiencing God" writes: "We should attempt things so great that they are doomed to failure unless God intervenes."

I used this in the past year but it is so easy to understand I want to use it again. The power of the Holy Spirit is not just for salvation, but transformation, a process that might be slow and gradual. The difference might look like this:

You can take ten gallons of gasoline and release a tremendous amount of power and energy by

just dropping a lighted match into it. It makes a dramatic onetime impact. But there is another way to release the energy in that gasoline. Place it in the fuel tank of a new Honda, designed to get 30 miles to the gallon. The high tech engine will use those ten gallons of gasoline to take a person 300 miles or more.

Explosions may be spectacular, but the sustained, controlled burn has staying power. You don't want to be a flash in the pan; you want to make a difference in this world over time. You want to last for the long haul. You don't want the Holy Spirit to just save you for heaven; you want Him to use His power to transform your life. You want Him to use you in this world for kingdom purposes.

5. There must be an abiding in Savior

This truth was taught by Jesus in the days just before His death.

"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in Me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from Me you can do nothing. John 15 NLT

What does it mean to abide? Think about that for a minute with me will you? Abiding in Christ is simply obedience to His will.

Those who obey God's commandments remain in fellowship with Him, and He with them. And we know He lives in us because the Spirit He gave us lives in us. 1 John 3:24 NLT

Abiding does not suggest struggling or striving. It is not tiresome or hard to abide. It is resting. It is staying connected. It is a place of peace and safety.

In one of the anthem songs I grew up with we sang with all of our hearts these words:

"When all around my soul gives way He then is all my hope and stay. On Christ the solid Rock I stand all other ground is sinking sand."

The surrendered life that abides in Christ is a life of full surrender. We talk about it often. It's easy to talk about and harder to live at some points but it should always be our goal.

Surrendering to God is where we find our most lasting peace. It's true. You can fight it. You can ignore it. You can forget it but the truth of it is it never goes away. If you can find it in yourself to let go and let God in all the way there will be an incredible result.

The result will be a life of abundance in Christ.

Neil Orchard was talking with a farmer about his soy bean and corn crops. Rain had been abundant, and the results were evident. So his comment surprised him: "My crops are especially vulnerable. Even a short drought could have a devastating effect." "Why?" Orchard asked. He explained that while we see the frequent rains as a benefit, during that time the plants are not required to push roots deeper in search of water. The roots remain near the

surface. A drought would find the plants unprepared and quickly kill them.

Some Christians receive abundant "rains" of worship, fellowship, and teaching. Yet when stress enters their lives, many suddenly abandon God or think him unfaithful. Their roots have never pushed much below the surface. Only roots grown deep into Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:6-7) help us endure times of drought in our lives.

The abundant life with Christ is one to be desired.

Are you willing to let go of your desires? Are you willing to allow God to have His way with you? Are you willing to place yourself in God's hands and trust Him with your life?

Dying with Jesus by death reckoned mine,
Living with Jesus a new life divine,
Looking to Jesus till glory doth shine
Moment by moment O Lord, I am Thine.
Moment by moment I'm kept in His love
Moment by moment I've life from above;
Looking to Jesus till glory doth shine,
Moment by moment, O Lord, I am thine.

Series breakdown

Not I, but Christ

Not I, but Christ and His death

Not I, but Christ and His life

Not I, but Christ and His faith

Not I, but Christ and His love

Dissecting the verse

Death's positives

Directions for life

Deepening our faith

Deliberate love