

Sermon: Created to become like Jesus
Text: Romans 8:28 – 29
Date: November 2, 2008 AM
Place: Jesup First UMC

I am confident of one thing above all else this morning: God loves you and God has a purpose for your life. In fact, God has five purposes for your life. You were planned for God's pleasure; that's worship! You were formed for God's family; that's fellowship! And you were created to be like Jesus! Romans 8:29 says: **"From the beginning, God decided that those who came to Him – and He knew who would – should become like His Son."** God wants you and me to be like Jesus. And so, He works within us, molding us and shaping us, until we begin to think, act, and feel the way Jesus thinks, acts, and feels.

You know, I love babies. Nothing is cuter or more precious than a baby, but babies are meant to grow up. If a baby doesn't grow, something is wrong. And so it is with us. Ephesians 4 says: **"God wants us to grow up ... like Christ in everything."** Now, that doesn't happen over night. Growing up takes time; it's a process and we call that process, "*discipleship*." And God wants to spend the rest of your life, making you like Jesus.

Now, how does He do that? What does God use to make us more like Jesus? ***Well, first, God uses the Bible to make us more like Jesus.*** When we read, study, meditate, memorize, and apply God's Word to our lives, we grow spiritually. God uses His Word to help us grow!

Second, God uses people to make us more like Jesus! When we enter into true fellowship like we talked

about last week, we grow spiritually. God uses other people to help us grow!

Now, Paul said: **“In all things, God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purposes.”** Paul didn’t say “everything that happens to you is good”; he said, “God can use everything that happens to you for good.” So, this morning, I want us to think about three unexpected tools God uses to make us more like Jesus.

FIRST, GOD USES TROUBLE TO TEACH US TO TRUST HIM! Romans 5:3 says: **“... trouble produces patience, and patience produces character, and character produces hope.”** Now, everybody goes through troubles and trials. Everybody! And it’s during those hard times, when the walls seem to be crashing in around you, when we have to make a decision: who do I trust? Do I trust in God or do I trust in me and my own abilities?

Now, Jesus had His share of troubles, especially the night before He was crucified. He knew what was going to happen; He knew that He was sent to die for the sins of the world and the real question was: who do I trust? And in Mark 14, Jesus cries out to God: **“The worry in my heart is so great that it almost crushes me. Everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering from me. Yet I want your will, not mine.”** In His hour of greatest trouble, Jesus trusted God!

You know, if you’re going to be like Jesus, you’ve got to learn to trust God completely, in the good times and in the bad, in the triumphs and in the tragedies. And you see, that’s the real test of our faith. You

prove your faith is real by trusting God in the midst of trouble.

Now, let me give you a couple of suggestions that will help you grow through times of trouble. **One is: keep a spiritual journal.** Numbers 33 says: “Moses kept a written record of their progress.” That’s what a spiritual journal is; it is a written record of spiritual progress. When you have struggles, write it down. When you have victories, write it down. Keep a spiritual journal.

Another suggestion is: remember the reward. II Corinthians 4 says: “Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” Troubles are temporary; heaven is forever. Troubles may be gloomy, but heaven is glory!

Everybody goes through troubles and God wants to use our troubles to teach us to trust in God.

SECOND, GOD USES TEMPTATIONS TO TEACH US TO OBEY HIM! Now, God doesn’t tempt us, but God allows us to be tempted because in our temptation we are faced with another decision: will I obey God or give into my desires? Everybody is tempted! Everybody! Now, the things that tempt me, may not tempt you, but everybody is tempted!

Jesus was tempted. Matthew 4 says: “Then, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” Now, if God allowed Jesus to be tempted, guess what, you’re going to be tempted too.

Now, what can we learn from Jesus’ temptation that will help us. **Well, one is: it’s not a sin to be tempted!**

Jesus was tempted, but He never sinned. Martin Luther said: *“You can’t keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can stop them from nesting in your hair.”* It’s not a sin to be tempted.

Another thing to remember is: everyone is tempted! Now, Satan will make you think you’re the worse person in the world because you were tempted. But the Bible says temptation is common to man. Everybody experiences it.

Another thing to remember is: you never outgrow temptation! You’re never too old to be tempted. You’re never too mature to be tempted. You never outgrow temptation.

Now, every temptation is an opportunity to obey God. Matthew 4 says: **“Get behind me, Satan. For it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God and obey Him only.’”** Temptation asks me: who will I obey? God or my own desires? And Jesus said: **“If you love me, you will obey my commandments.”**

Now, two things will help you overcome temptation. **First, keep focused on good thoughts!** Philippians 4 says: **“Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right.”** You see, temptation always starts in the mind; whatever gets your attention gets you. If you sit around contemplating it, you’re a goner; but if you will focus on God and His Word, you can overcome temptation.

Second, get a spiritual partner. Ecclesiastes 4 says: **“You’re better off to have a friend than to be alone ... if you fall, your friend can help you up.”** Everybody

needs somebody to keep you accountable and to pick you back up when you fall.

God uses temptation to teach us to obey Him!

THIRD, GOD USES TRESPASSES TO TEACH US TO FORGIVE! You know, intentionally or unintentionally, people can hurt you quicker than anything else. That's why Jesus taught us to pray: "*Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.*" Now, this is hard because human nature says, "*If you hurt me I'm gonna hurt you too,*" but God's way is the way of forgiveness.

When Jesus was hanging on the cross, the people insulted Him and the elders ridiculed Him and it would have been easy for Jesus to give it right back to them, but Matthew 27 says: "*Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them because they do not know what they are doing.'*"

Jesus responded to trespasses by forgiving. And if we're going to be like Jesus, we must learn to do the same thing. People are going to hurt us and the people that are the closest to us are going to hurt us the most. But when we forgive, we grow and become more like Jesus.

So, here are two things to think about when others hurt you. **One is: remember God has forgiven you!** Ephesians 4 says: "*Forgive others just as God forgave you because of Christ.*" If God can forgive us of what we have done to Him, surely we can forgive others. **Another thing to remember is: God is in control.** Others may intend to hurt you, but God can still use it for good. Joseph was betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery, but later, he said to his brothers: "*You*

meant to hurt me, but God turned your evil into good.
God is in control.

God uses trouble to teach us to trust; God uses temptation to teach us to obey; and God uses trespasses to teach us to forgive! Because you see, we were made to be like Jesus. And so, you and I must go through the same things Jesus went through. God will allow you to go through a Gethsemane to learn to trust. He'll allow you to go to a desert to learn to obey. And He'll allow you to go to a cross to learn to forgive. But here's a promise: **"We go through exactly what Christ goes through but if we go through the hard times with Him, then we're certainly going to go through the good times with Him."**

Let us pray!