

SE112507

THANK God YOU'RE HERE

4. To Be Used By God.

Thank God you're here! Let me summarize where we've been in this series: The Bible says you're here to be in a vital, active, living, relationship with God. When a person becomes a Christian there is evidence that that person is now in **right** relationship with God; that that person is not just a Christian in name only, but a new creation.

- First, that person has peace of mind...
  - o John 14:27. "I am leaving you with a gift — peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give isn't like the peace the world gives.
  
- Secondly, the way you know you're a True Christian is that you begin to have a ravenous hunger for God's Word...
  - o 1 Pe 2:2-3 You must crave pure spiritual milk so that you can grow into the fullness of your salvation.
  
- Third the way you know a person has crossed from spiritual death to life is that there is spiritual fruit coming out of their life increasingly.
  - o Gal 5:22-23 But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
  
- The fourth way you know a person has crossed from death to life is a growing desire to serve and love the world.
  - o Mt 5:14-16 You are the light of the world — like a city on a mountain, glowing in the night for all to see. Don't hide your light under a basket! Instead, put it on a stand and let it shine for all. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.
  
  - o This is what we'll spend the rest of our time on today. Thank God you're here, to be USED by God – to shine out in the night, to fulfill the purpose God has for you, to be a preserving agent in a rotting and darkened world, to be a champion of the things God champions and to hate the things God hates, to advance the causes near the heart of God, to be his change agent and ambassador in this world.
  
  - o No sooner had I become a Christian than I started looking differently at that institution that was both the bane of my existence, the dominant feature of my way of life and the source of my pride and joy – HIGH SCHOOL. My High School became a mission field. I stopped seeing it only as classes and friends, teachers and grades and getting ready for college (and a place to be rejected by females). It was still that, but now I saw it differently.

- I saw my high school as a dark place that needed some light. I saw it as a rotting place and I was the salt called to rub in there and keep it from decay. I saw it as a foreign country and I was an ambassador to it.
- So I looked for opportunities for conversations, relationships, good deeds I could engage in to direct people to the God who had bought me and loved me. I saw my High School as the Titanic wreck. That's how Christians see the world.
  - It was in one hand a disaster from which I must flee, and one
  - the other hand, it was opportunity; a tragedy which called out for intervention.
    - The people were floating in the water and I had gotten in the life boat,
    - so now it was my duty to go back in.
- Now I understand how that all sounds to people today. Who was I to think I had the answers for everyone else? How arrogant to want to push my religion down everyone else's throat!
  - Well, all I can say is that there was no pushing of religion, and I didn't think I had all the answers, but some things I felt I knew:
  - I knew what it was like to be a High School student without hope and without relationship with God, and I knew what it was like to be one with. Jesus Christ had made that difference for me.
  - SO, it was a no-brainer for me. I was on a mission from God to maybe steer some hearts back to the life boat.

So all these I found out were Signs of Spiritual Life:

- peace with God
- hunger for God
- change through God
- mission from God

Now, are there signs of life in you? Some of you might have stalled out in your spiritual growth because you think growth is only about finding the next thing to cram into you, the next church activity, the next bit of knowledge, the next sermon, the hot speaker – but now you're growing bored with church, because none of it is "scratching the itch". Cynical.

## **TURKEY**

You know what that uncomfortable feeling is? Let me give you a picture:

You know how you felt on Thursday after the Turkey, on the couch, watching the games? It's not just the tryptophan that's making you queasy, it's a little physical principle we like to call:

***too much in and not enough out.***

## VIOLIN

Nicolo Paganini was a great Italian violinist, and he willed his very expensive violin to his home city of Genoa – on one condition: The violin was never to be played. Just sit on display – no one could use it, just have people look at it. That's it. There's a funny thing about wood however. You handle it and use it, it retains it's value and appearance. You leave it alone and it begins to rot.

And so Paganini's marvelous violin is today decaying in it's case under glass – as a museum piece – forever a reminder that a life without usefulness, or service quickly loses meaning.

## ORCAS

Let me give you another illustration. Our family went on a little excursion to Orcas Island a while back and while we were climbing mount Constitution, I was amazed how that one solitary, relatively small mountain, all by itself on an island, had it's own water ways, lakes, streams, year round rivers.

We saw many as we climbed the trails.

Then, we came to this one open glade with a pretty stream flowing down into a pool. And then we were hit by the stink. Why? Because the pool was stagnant. It had no where to flow. It had lots and lots of input, but it had no output.

A Christian life that has no mission, no output, quickly begins to stagnate and stink. It can have all sorts of pretty streams of knowledge and sermons flowing into it, but if there is no outflow, the person begins to wither and, to keep the analogy going, these folk begin to be spiritually toxic to others who come near, either with their cynicism or their selfishness.

## GREATER THINGS

Some of you maybe have been cowed into thinking that it's presumptuous of you to think God could USE you. Well, let me try to push against that a bit by reading you a statement that Jesus made that must have made his disciples go slack jawed. This is what He said:

John 14:12 “The Truth is, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father”

Think about that! What an outrageous statement! If I'm those disciples when I hear that, the first thing I do is flash back to all the incredible things I've witnessed in the last 3 years. The man who is saying this is:

- the same person who chased away **blindness**
- the same man who called **Lazarus** back from the dead after he was decomposing in a tomb for four days.
- This is the person who was caught in a violent **storm**, and when he said “chill out!” the storm suddenly subsided.
- This is the man who turned **water** into chardonnay.

Was he referring to these things when He said His followers will do even *greater works*? Well, if you read ACTS, it's true that the apostles ended up healing the sick and even raising the dead. But that can't be what Jesus was talking about!

- Those weren't **greater** deeds than Jesus had performed;
- a few of them were **equal**, but none were *greater*.

So, what exactly what was he saying? Well, the chief thing Jesus did wasn't physical miracles it was *spiritual* miracles. Those were the **greatest** miracles He did. Why? Well think about it...

- the people Jesus raised from the dead ended up dying again at some later time.
- The water that He turned to wine was consumed by the wedding guests.
- The sea Jesus calmed had other storms – as it does to this day.

Ah, but the people's lives that turned 180° as they experienced heart transformation, forgiveness and acceptance from God, and lasting peace of mind – those are miracles that go on forever! So, Jesus was saying His followers will achieve even greater ***spiritual results*** than He was able to accomplish during a three-year ministry limited by geography and time.

Sure enough, his disciples proclaimed in Christ's name, and on the very first day, **3,000** people had their lives changed forever.

***That's about 20 times the number of committed followers than Jesus gathered during his entire lifetime - and this happened in one morning!***

When Jesus said His followers would do greater works than Him, He was saying His followers would be USED by God to have an impact on people which would endure for all of eternity.

But today, just the idea of directing someone spiritually is considered offensive. Because so many of have done it so poorly, like they were selling a car not talking about the God who made us. And yet there are others who are more excited to talk about the last car they bought than their God who has given them,

- peace,
- power
- hope and
- mission.

Does that make any sense? No. Somewhere in the middle is the right attitude to have. I like to think about God using me to direct others to Life in Jesus Christ – not as a high pressure sell thing – but rather as one beggar who has found bread directing other beggars.

**Think about it like this. Illus:** Baskin' Robins.

Does it make any sense to bask in God and enjoy him and not invite others along? Problem: Either, A) we aren't really enjoying God, or B) we're just plain selfish. You know what Jesus disciples said to others after they had met him? It wasn't "" It was just "Come and see?"

- Wouldn't it be wonderful if each of us who has tasted of God's goodness, invited another human being "Come and See?"
- What if "COME and SEE" was just a part of our conversations and relationships?

- What if our life with God was so rich that it wouldn't make any sense to NOT say "Come and See" – we have this place to bring them.

Now, those first Christians wouldn't only impact people's spiritual lives. Jesus came saying God's Kingdom had come! Era of God's FAVOR had come!

- Dorcas understood: she was an early Christian known for her mission:
  - o The Bible describes it like this: "She was always doing kind things for others and helping the poor."
- Transformed people in the early church literally transformed the Roman Empire by love. One church father quoted outsiders looking in on those early Christians:
  - o "Look, how they love one another and how they are ready to die for each other"
  - o They fed orphans and took in abandoned babies, women streamed into the early church because it was a haven from Roman misogyny, that used them as sex objects, got them married by age 13 and left them to starve after they were widowed.

Jesus planted the idea amongst his followers that they were MADE for mission. That they were made to be USED by God to do greater things.

Can you hear what Jesus is saying to his Followers?

- He saying, "the Year of Jubilee has arrived. Partner with God, he longs to lavish favor on a broken and needy world.

I mean this inspires you, right? We don't just want to be consumers our whole lives, do we? Spiritually reborn people have a God given need to want to **produce** something, not just consume spiritual resources. To give you the idea, here's the list of things, "ordinary people" have produced just here at AC3:

- a benevolence ministry (Seeds of Grace) that serves 120 needy families a week...
- free meal a week, one a month Master's feast.
- The Board distributes 5% of all our generous giving to the under privileged in our town and more recently around the world. Last week, \$30,000 dollars to Malawi!
- regular AC3 YOUTH went on a mission to improve life among poor children in Mexico
- AC3'ers have gone to Brazil to teach about God's love and help educate the poor in Brazil
- AC3'ers have gone to Malawi to find a way to address the AIDS, orphan and poverty crisis there (Malawi night Sun.)
- Regular AC3'ers have developed Time Out, to help parents raise happy, whole kids,
- they've visited the sick, and those in prison, and the homeless in Seattle
- they've started counseling those recovering from alcohol or other addictions,
- they've developed from scratch a KK ministry that touches dozens of children with love and truth every week!
- they've opened up their homes to promote prayer, community and love for God,
- they're inspiring and moving people to consider spiritual truths through the arts
- they've generated enterprises that teach and build into children

I mean, the sky's the limit! So what greater work will you do? The Bible says:  
Eph 2:10 **For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.**

I mean, doesn't that excite you just a little bit? Your purpose in being welcomed to Christ is to do the good things God PLANNED for you to do? It might not be big by the world's standards, but if it's a God ordained thing, God Almighty, Creator, using you as his instrument – WOW!

*What could be better than that?*

Where will you start? How do I go about FINDING OUT how God wants to use me? I want to offer some advice for how to approach God using you.

### **1. WITH HUMILITY.**

We have to be brutally honest here, because things like ego and self-promotion have a habit of polluting our motives. So we should be suspicious of any dream whose purpose revolves around our promotion or glory.

Luke 14:11 says,

*For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted.*

### **2. WITH POWER**

There's a major problem if you're trying to pursue your dream without God. You want God to use you? Then you have to at some point make him the key component in the equation.

Several decades ago in India, a nun went to her superiors one day and announced, "I have three pennies and a dream from God to build an orphanage." Her superiors looked at each other and then said to her,

"Well, Teresa, you can't build an orphanage with three pennies. With three pennies, you can do nothing."

She smiled and said, "I know. But with God and three pennies, I can do anything."

### **3. WITH GIFTEDNESS**

In other words, is this dream consistent with our talents and abilities and personality? God wants to use you in a way that will fulfill who He designed you to be, not to shoehorn you into something that stifles you.

Ever grabbed the wrong bag at the airport? Some people are living out of someone else's bag.

1 Corinthians 12:7 says each follower of Jesus Christ is given at least one divine enablement to create a unique, YOU SIZED package to serve God and others. Gifts such as teaching or administration or counseling or mercy or giving or hospitality.

If you don't know what your gift is, my advice is to check out our Network seminar which we'll be running in the new year.

#### **4. WITH BOLDNESS**

You don't need more permission than what's already been given. So go boldly! Jesus said, this is the Kingdom come:

- the sick are healed
- the hungry are fed
- the strangers are taken in
- and good news is preached to the poor

So find your spot in making that happen and just do it. After you've humbled yourself, sought God's power, found your giftedness... then Go! And go boldly in faith.

Where? Check your heart. What irks you? It's a clue. What boils your blood? What is the defining injustice around you? What breaks your heart? What messes you up every time you think of it? What are you totally passionate about?

Some of you don't know where to start.

"It all looks good from where I sit. I'm not needed. There are no threats, we're totally comfortable, I'm just going to live and let live."

Well, if that's you, wake up! The Kingdom NEEDS you. We asked the police officers of Marysville to fill out a survey and they did not say, "it's all good". We asked them to:

- Name the defining evil in our community, what is the greatest threat? 6 out of 8 said, drugs, specifically meth.
- Then we asked what's the cause of this threat. Here were their answers.
  - o Family environment
  - o Boredom
  - o Teens with nothing to do (no hope!)
  - o Poverty
  - o Alcoholism

I mean, take your pick friend! Maybe this isn't your passion. What is? There is a mission out there that stirs your soul.

#### **CONCLUSION**

For me it was the local church – I had a vision: functioning, prevailing local churches could change a community by the gospel they steward. I flew in to Africa over a month ago now and on that plane flying in, I remember feeling overwhelmed. How do you change a whole continent mired in poverty, crisis, and corruption? On a macro scale the need was emotionally crushing.

But then, I got down from 30,000 ft from the macro to the micro. And I saw on farmer trying to live, one orphan trying to survive, one AIDS victim with only a couple years to live. Then I

saw one church holding out light, truth for their souls and love for their bodily need. I saw one church change a village, with food education, redemption hope to live on.

Then the day before we flew out, I saw one man who came from a one of those villages had a vision to lift the entire country of Malawi out of poverty in the next 10 years. I flew in, in despair. The day we flew out I wrote in my journal:

- Maybe AC3 will be used to change a leader, who changes a church, that changes a village that changes a culture that maybe, must maybe! Changes a whole country.

Whatever your “greater thing”: whether it's to impact one kid or one community or one country or one continent... make sure:

- you approach it with humility
- you approach it with power
- you approach it with giftedness
- you approach it with boldness