

Behaving Like Christ in Knowing Yourself

A New Creation – Unit IV: Session 2

July 8, 2018

We are starting to wind down our series *A New Creation*. Over the course of the next three weeks we will be trying to bring it all together. This last unit is on “Behaving Like Christ” which is God’s ultimate goal for our lives as Christians. The word “Christian” actually means “little Christ.” God’s ultimate desire for everyone’s life here on earth is to be a little Christ. I don’t know if anyone else has discovered it, but I have discovered that is a pretty large task that God has given us. In fact on our own, to even begin to come near accomplishing the task that God has given us, is an impossible task. If you think you can grasp it by your own will, your own power, your own abilities, your own determination, than you have failed to grasp what the Christian life is all about.

I am approaching the end of my two year program in Chicago entitled “Transforming Community.” My last two retreats are next month and then again in November. The whole idea of the program is to help Christian leaders focus on being transformed into the image of Christ. One of the guiding quotes or phrases of the program is from a man by the name of Robert Mulholland, who unfortunately passed away just a few years ago at a relatively young age. Mulholland said that “Christian Spiritual Formation is “the process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others.” I was really pretty excited about entering the program and there have been lots of good things about it. But there have been others parts about it that have been a real “kick in the teeth.” I have discovered that maybe I wasn’t as far along in the process of Christian spiritual formation, or the Christian journey (however you want to phrase it), as I thought I was. Which is probably why some have now gone back through the program twice, and even a few, three times. But I kind of look at it like my high school experience. When I finally graduated from four years of high school, yes four years (and there were times my parents wondered if it might not take longer). But at the end of my four years of high school, the very last thought that would have ever crossed my mind, was going back and starting over.

The title of the message today is “Behaving Like Christ in Knowing Yourself.” How good do you really know yourself? We think we know ourselves, but do we really? The Bible tells us that we are all made in the image of God. In the image of God he created us, male and female (Genesis 1:27). If that was our complete makeup we would be in great shape. But being in the image of God is not our complete makeup.

Shortly after the creation of human beings, we experienced the fall, thanks to the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. So we all have this mixture of good, made in the image of God, and bad or sin, capable of great evil and deception inside of us. It is a constant battle during our life here on earth.

Psalms 139, our Call to Worship this morning, is one of the greatest psalms, if not one of the greatest passages, of Scripture in all the Bible:

*O LORD, you have searched me and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.*

*You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
Before a word is on my tongue
you know it completely, O LORD. Psalm 139:1-4 (NIV)*

God knows us much better than we know ourselves. David ends Psalm 139 with these words:

*Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting. Psalm 139: 23-24 (NIV)*

David is not really crying out for God to know him. God already knows David, both what it is in his heart and his thoughts, his mind. What David is pleading with God for is for God to show him what is in his heart, reveal to him the offensive ways which are inside of him.

The more we know ourselves the more we know God, and the more we know God the more we know the truth about ourselves.

God created each of us uniquely, with unique talents, abilities and passions. God created each of us for a purpose, His purpose, to bring glory and honor to Him and to extend the Kingdom of God here on earth. The earlier in our lives we discover God's purpose for our lives, the better. Speaking from my own personal experience, it will save a lot of heartache and pain.

Ephesians chapter 4 begins with these words, *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.*

If one is a Christian, then he or she has received a specific calling from our Lord. Do you know what yours is? Are you using it.

I like to read the writings of some of the great Christians of the past. They just seem to go so much deeper, and as a general rule, more biblically sound than many of the Christian writers today. This week I have been reading a little from Charles Spurgeon who lived in the 1800's. Of course it's hard to read just a little from Charles Spurgeon because he was so wordy, even in his sermons. And you guys complain about a 20-25 minute message ☺. But this was a gem: "Remember, brothers and sisters, that if you and I are now committed to faith in Jesus Christ, it is too late for us to retire." What Spurgeon was saying is that for committed Christians there is no such thing as retirement.

In our Sunday school lesson today the writers divide the section up into two different parts: The first part focuses on our natural abilities and interests; the second, on our spiritual gifts. Our natural gifts and abilities are given to us at birth. Hopefully we discover them as we grow. We are most happy and satisfied when we're operating out of our natural talents, abilities and interests. If we're not functioning out of our natural talents and abilities, we tire much easier and we can become very easily frustrated. Is there anybody here who tried working at a job which was outside of their natural talents, abilities and interests? One of my early jobs was trying to sell life insurance. It didn't last too long. In fact I might have been able to get renewals but I don't

think I sold one new policy. My second full-time job was working at a manufacturing plant which at least was a job I could do for a time, but I knew it wasn't in my primary giftedness and interests. I knew I wouldn't be happy doing that for the rest of my life. It was only when I discovered that I enjoyed working with people, being outside, and the challenge of something different each day that drew me to police work. That was when I found my niche which I believe God created me for, at least for the first half of my working years. I looked forward to work just about every day. In fact there were many times I thought to myself I would be doing this even if I wasn't getting paid. That's really when you know you have found your calling. That's why so many mothers are able to sacrifice so much of themselves in raising their children.

But we need to be careful with natural talents, abilities and interests. Our natural talents and abilities may not always bring glory and honor to God. Often we try and glorify ourselves instead of the God who blessed us with our natural talents and abilities. Just about any calling and/or profession can bring glory and honor to God, or not! "When a natural ability or talent is dedicated to God and filled with God's Spirit, it becomes a gift God can use.

The first half of our Sunday school lesson today tries to help you discover your natural talents and interests.

The second half of our lesson today talks about spiritual gifts. Whereas our natural talents and abilities can be used either to further God's purpose for our lives or not, our spiritual gifts are almost always used to further God's purposes. Our lesson today points out seven truths about spiritual gifts:

- 1. Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift.** (Many have more than one). And yet, **No one receives all the gifts.**

... Each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.
1Corinthians 7:7b (TNIV)

The primary lists of spiritual gifts are found in the Bible in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4.

- 2. You can't earn or buy a spiritual gift.**

... May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money.
Acts 8:20 (NIV)

We can't buy any gift of God with anything. Nor can we earn it. That's what makes it all a gift. All that we receive from God is a gift, grace, which is why it should all be used for His glory and honor, His purposes!

- 3. Spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit for the benefit of others.**

Each one, as a good manager of God's different gifts, must use for the good of others, the spiritual gift he has received from God. 1 Peter 4:10 (GNT)

- 4. The church is to operate on the basis of spiritual gifts rather than elected office.**

Throughout its 2,000 year history the church has fallen woefully short on this one. We try and operate just like the rest of the world. We try and operate out of our natural talents and abilities.

He is the one who gave these gifts to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Ephesians 4:11 (NLT)

5. We discover our gifts through ministry.

God has given each of you some special abilities; be sure to use them to help each other ... 1 Peter 4:10 (TLB)

6. We are to develop the gifts God gives us.

Put these things into practice; devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress.
1 Timothy 4:15 (NRSV)

7. Correct use of spiritual gifts will produce fruit of the Spirit.

... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control... Galatians 5:22-23 (NRSV)

In the Sunday school material it gives a list of spiritual gifts, mostly from those three passages from Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. I would encourage you to read it over and check which ones you think might apply to you, and to talk among one another, those that might know you well.

And then on that list there are five of them on that list which are underlined. They are from the list in Ephesians 4:11, which some refer to today as APEST – Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd and Teacher. Some believe that list contains the primary callings that each of us receives. For any church to be functioning in a healthy manner, in the way God designed it to function, each of those five primary callings need to be adequately represented.

Apostle – is a “go getter.” He or she likes to take risks, doesn’t like the status quo. He or she wants to start new ministries and has a strong desire to minister to unreached people, usually in their settings. As a general rule apostles don’t stay in one place for too long.

Prophet – A prophet is one who wants to make God’s word known through public proclamation. He or she challenges people when they do not appear to be living the way God intended for His people to live. They have a desire for people to repent and to return to living a life that reflects the Kingdom of God.

Evangelist – is mostly concerned about lost people and usually has the ability to easily share his or her faith with others, to invite unbelievers to accept Jesus as their Savior and to invite them into a committed life of following Him. Usually they themselves are not so good with the follow-up, but they are comfortable with sharing with unbelievers and inviting.

Shepherd – cares about people. He or she cares mostly about the people that are already in the fold. A shepherd has deep compassion for people, especially when they are sick or hurting. They'll go visit them, send them a card, or call them.

Teacher – Someone with the primary spiritual calling of teacher has a desire to learn the word of God him or herself and then to explain it to others. He or she has a desire to communicate biblical truth that will inspire greater knowledge and faithful discipleship. Not all people with the natural ability to teach have the spiritual gift of teaching, though they may.

Which one of those five do you think is your primary calling? Again, talk to the people in your Sunday school class. Unfortunately for too many years the church has believed that it is the responsibility for the pastor, or pastors, to fill all those roles, instead of each member trying to discover their calling and seeing how they fit in and fulfilling their own roles. It says in Ephesians 4:12, that it is the responsibility of the leaders, which should come from all five of those positions, whenever possible, "to prepare God's people for works of service."

We need to be careful here, especially as Mennonites and Anabaptists, who place so much emphasis on service. In fact sometimes we even pride ourselves on our service. Pride is sin no matter what we pride ourselves in. We need to remember that we cannot earn our salvation by serving God. Our salvation is a free gift from God which comes through faith in Jesus Christ as the living Son of God who came to earth, lived a sinless life, and died on the cross, for the forgiveness of sins for all who put their faith and trust in Him. It is only through Jesus' death, then His resurrection, and our faith, that we become a new creation. A New Creation which is called to serve Him with both our natural talents and abilities, and our spiritual giftedness.

We are to take all of them and give them over to Christ. Quite fittingly, one of my devotions yesterday was entitled "Using Your Gifts to Serve Others."

"Today, and every day, you will encounter many a situation in which you can use your abilities to 'accomplish' something that God will give you to accomplish to serve His purpose(s). Therefore, as you are going about your necessary business, tell the Lord that this power you are using (to think, plan, organize, build, tear down, study, travel, etc.) is in submission to His purposes. Ask Him to show you how to channel the power you have received from Him into service."

Also in my devotion time this week I discovered an old hymn entitled "I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go." I discovered that it was written some 150 years ago by a Canadian hymn writer by the name of Mary Houghton Brown who lived from 1856-1918. The hymn speaks to those who have accepted a call on their lives and have been charged with a specific task.

"I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go"

*It may not be on the mountain's height
Or over the stormy sea;
It may not be at the battle's front
My Lord will have need of me;
But if by a still, small voice he calls*

*To paths I do not know,
I'll answer dear Lord with my hand in thine,
I'll go where you want me to go.*

*I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord,
Over mountain, or plain, or sea;
I'll say what you want me to say, dear Lord.
I'll be what you want me to be.*

*Perhaps today there are loving words
Which Jesus would have me speak;
There may be now, in the paths of sin,
Some wanderer whom I should seek,
O Savior, if thou will be my Guide,
Though dark and rugged the way,
My voice shall echo the message sweet,
I'll say what you want me to say.*

*There's surely somewhere a lowly place
In earth's harvest fields so wide,
Where I may labor through life's short day
For Jesus the Crucified.
So, trusting my all unto thy care,
I know thou lovest me!
I'll do thy will with a heart sincere,
I'll be what you want me to be.*

Our response song this morning is a slightly more contemporary hymn, written by a missionary by the name of Frank Houghton around 1930, but contemporized just a few years back by Keith & Kristyn Getty, entitled "Facing a Task Unfinished."