

Romans 8:28-29; 10/30/2022

1 John 3:1-3

**CALLED TO BECOME
It's Your Call - Part 4**

Welcome to week four of these messages titled "It's Your Call." Quickly now to review: first, your calling in life is not your job, your career, your vocation. Your calling is God's purpose for your life. This call has several aspects. Your first and primary calling is to be loved by God. God created you to love you. That's the bedrock of everything that happens in your life; the very foundation of your life. You are called to be loved.

Last week we looked at the second aspect of your calling in life: you are called to belong. You weren't made to go through life all on your own. God made you to belong to his family, which is the church, and to participate in and support the church family.

The first two callings lay the groundwork for the third aspect of your call. When you allow yourself to be loved, and when you belong to God's family, you are able to become what God intended for you all along. Make note of this: My third calling in life is to become like Christ.

At our First Experiences kindergarten graduation the children are asked who they want to grow up to be. As you can imagine we get quite a few firemen and policemen, nurses, teachers, ballerinas etc. I haven't yet heard "I want to be like Jesus." I remember my childhood Sunday School class singing, "Lord I want to be like Jesus, in my heart, in my heart." Last month, when I spoke about our identity in Christ, I posed the questions "who are you?" and "who do you want to be?" The question today is this: when you grow up will you be like Christ? Growing old in the Lord is not the same as growing up in the Lord.

We've looked at these verses in the Bible before, but they're worth repeating.: *We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance and he chose them to become like his Son so that his Son would be the firstborn with many brothers and sisters, Romans 8:28-29*

Did you get that? "... with many brothers and sisters?" Once you get into God's family, God wants you to grow up and become like your older brother, Jesus Christ. There's gotta be some family resemblance. Spiritually speaking, how are you doing in that department? It doesn't mean you're going to be a god. God is God and we're not. (That's really an antidote to stress when you think about it.) But God wants you to become godly. He wants you to take on the characteristics of His family. Like Father, like Son, like brother and sister... loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, self-controlled, and merciful, like Jesus. To be like Jesus means to be filled with such fruit of the Spirit. And God wants to help you in this process. It's what we Wesleyan's call "sanctifying grace."

Five times in the Bible becoming like Jesus is compared to running a race; and it's not a sprint, but a marathon. We could call it the Marathon to Spiritual Maturity. I've never been much of a runner ... but I guess we're in a running family now that we're in Christ. It's a lifetime run, with our goal to become the man or woman God wants you

and me to be. Your calling in life is to become the person God made you to be, in your job, in your career, in your retirement, in your family, among your friends. And sometimes it will lead to a new job or career.

There are some passages of the Bible that compare the Christian life to a race to become who God wants you to be. There's wisdom for spiritual growth in these verses. God doesn't want you to be in spiritual diapers your entire life. He is calling us to ... *become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*, Ephesians 4:13. So let's look at these Bible verses and their words of wisdom.

1. **Simplify** your life. Hebrews chapter 12 begins like this:

... let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, Hebrews 12:1. The word "everything" is the Greek $\sigma\upsilon\kappa\omicron\nu$. Another translation is "burdens." A marathon runner does not wear a parka; only the essentials – shorts, a tank top, and the lightest pair of shoes to be found. If you're going to become the man or woman God wants you to be, the first thing you've got to do is get rid of excess baggage. All the diversions, distractions, detours, dead ends, and time wasters must be jettisoned. We'll also have to let go of some expectations. You can't have it your way every time. You can't always please everyone and please God. You've got to decide: did God put me on this earth to please myself, other people, or did God put me on this earth to live for Him?

2. **Don't rush** - develop patience. Did you notice the part that says, *... and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us*, Hebrews 12:1? Any long-distance runner knows he must pace himself. This race is going to take your entire life. The difference is you aren't competing with other runners, just yourself.

When you first find faith in Christ maybe you grow fast ... hungry for the Bible; you devour songs, videos, books on the Christian life and faith. You yearn for a mountaintop, spiritual experience every week. If it doesn't continue you think maybe something's wrong – with you or with God or with Christianity. Maybe you're in a hurry to become spiritually mature. But here's God's perspective: when God wants to make a mushroom, He takes six hours; an oak tree, sixty years. God wants you to be like an oak tree: deeply rooted, solid, strong, secure in faith so that when the storms of life buffet you, all the problems, pressures, suffering and sorrow, scandal and loss, plus all the financial problems that you have in life, whatever it is, won't blow you away because you're as solid as an oak tree.

Many folks have a different perspective: "Just give me the one message that'll transform my life. Give me that one experience, or let me download that app, the one that'll let me drop all my fears and hang-ups, love everybody, and give me all the patience in the world... and I want it now!"

Life is not a giant leap across the Grand Canyon. God's plan to make you the person He wants you to be is a lifetime plan. It's not a sprint. It's a marathon. So don't get impatient. There is no instant spiritual maturity. It takes time, one step at a time. Though God is never in a hurry, He is always willing.

3. Spend time each day focusing on

Jesus. Likely you've heard the old cliché, "You can't soar with the eagles if you're running with the turkeys." Who are you running with in life? Maybe there are some relationships that are tearing you down or influencing you in unhealthy ways. Here's the antidote to that: *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...* Heb. 12:2. Spend time with Jesus – five, ten, fifteen minutes a day – then you will become more like Him.

Whoever you spend the most time with is who become like. Choose your friends wisely. If you hang out with people who have no ambition, you're likely going to have no ambition. If you hang out with people who are critical, you're likely going to become critical. If you want to become more like Jesus you need to focus on him.

Read the Bible for five minutes, then talk to Jesus ... about stuff that's on your heart. Be honest. Then be quiet and listen to God. Our days are filled with noise. Find a quiet time and place. That's what Jesus did. It says, *Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives to pray*, Luke 22:39. It was His habit, His custom to spend time with God every day. Do the same. That's how you'll begin reflecting His love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 6:9).

4. Gather a team to run with you.

There's an old proverb African that says, "To run fast, run by yourself. But to run far, run with other people." [Reminds me of my father-in-law and his whaling boat that sank... They all survived by staying together.] This is why we need church. Remember, we are called to belong. With support and encouragement from others you can go farther than you think. That's why our small groups are so important. If you're not in one, you need to get in one. We all need people who encourage us, spur us on, and help us to run the race to maturity in Christ.

Hebrews 10:24 says, *Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another as you see the Day approaching.* Don't get dragged down by a crowd of people who aren't running the race of life in Christ. Stay focused on God's purpose, bring those folks to Christ, and, "Let us not give up meeting together."

5. Take each step with purpose. For a lot of years in my life I didn't do this. But I don't want to waste any more steps because I don't know how many steps I have left. None of us do, really. All the more reason for us to be more disciplined, more self-controlled, so that we can take every step at every moment of our life with purpose. It's not a matter of just tacking on God's purpose to what you want to do with your life. It's more like an athlete in training. St. Paul says, *Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training...* *Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly, I do not fight like a man beating the air,* 1 Corinthians 9:25-26.

6. When it gets hard, remember the reward! In this marathon of life, we'll go through a lot of problems and pressures, trials and difficulties, ups and downs. Good news: God's going to use it all to make you more like Jesus. The next time you ask why is this happening to me? Stop and ask: Lord what do you want me to learn from this? Realize that God can use it to build your character more like Christ.

Just remember: ... if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory, Romans 8:17. Remember, we're called to belong to God's family, therefore we're in His will and will inherit His glory along with Jesus. We can have assurance of our salvation in Christ – this is assuring grace. What do you do when you're going through hell? You keep moving, because you don't want to stay there!

7. God is cheering you on. There's this classic passage in the Bible from Philippians 3:12-14, written by Paul, the guy who wrote quite a bit of the New Testament. He says, *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me... I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

Paul isn't yet perfect, but he presses ... on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. "Called me heavenward..." that's your calling too!

Some people have the mistaken idea that God only loves you when you do things right, or once you've reached the finish line. Wrong! Nobody shames a baby for not knowing how to read. When my grandson draws a picture that is all scribbles I say, "That's beautiful!" Just the same, God's cheering you on at whatever stage of spiritual maturity you are, calling you onward.

If you're going to make it to the finish line and be the woman or man God wants you to be, there's one last step. This is one's so full of hope.

8. Realize that what you don't finish, God will! If I've reached the end of my days and there's still some of me that isn't yet transformed by Christ, God is going to finish it and bring me to perfection. I can always go back to these words in the Bible: *... he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*, Philippians 1:6. When Christ returns, or we return to Him, we'll see Him face to face and He will make us complete; we'll reflect Him. All the limps and flaws, insecurities and failures, will be gone. So, for now I can say, "I'm not what I ought to be. But thank God I'm not what I used to be and one day I will be all God made me to be!" This is God's perfecting grace that gives us hope.

***Dear friends, now we are children of God and what we will be, has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure, 1 John 3:2.* It is altogether fitting that this is one of the first lines in our funeral service.**

Maybe you've struggled in this race of life – to become God's person. Maybe you're struggling right now. Me too. Maybe you're near the close of your life and feel incomplete. Welcome to the human race. Take heart! What isn't finished in your lifetime, God is going to finish. I am so very glad for that, aren't you? Let's keep on together. I want every one of you to keep growing in the grace of our Lord and to cross the finish line into God's glory.

In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose, Romans 8:28.