

Warroad Baptist Church
May 24, 2009

“What Do I Really Want to Do?”

Call to Worship: Ga 4:19

Paul writes in Ga 4:19 “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,” The goal of Paul’s ministry was to see the life of Christ formed in believers because that’s what spiritual maturity is all about.

Illustration: (Stories for a Grad’s Heart, Compiled by Alice Gray, Remembering by Max Lucado pp. 13,14).

In a short piece titled “Remembering” Max Lucado writes: “Inside the house is a quiet bedroom. Last spring’s prom photo sits on the bedside table. A dried homecoming mum hangs from the bulletin board. Outside the house is a packed car. Both trunk and seat are full of clothes, books, and stereo. What was in the room is now in the car. The one who used to live in the room is about to drive the car ... to college. Both parent and child are stunned by the moment. What happened to childhood? Who fast forwarded the years? Why, just yesterday this child was filling the house with cartwheels and play dough – now look. He’s so tall. She’s such a beauty. The child is grown. The grown child is equally stunned. The road ahead looks lonely and long. There is safety in these walls. Protection. Security. Those pleas for independence so recently voiced are unheard today. “Just say the word, Dad, I’ll stay. Just ask me, Mom, I won’t leave.” But Mom and Dad know better. They know that love releases the loved. They know the training is over. The last bell has rung. The last class dismissed, and the application of all that has been learned has begun. And parents and child hesitate at the side of the car. There’s no time to teach new truths. There’s no time to instill values or lay foundations. There is only one word that can be said – *remember*. Remember who loves you. Remember who matters. Remember what is right and what is wrong. *Remember.*”

Few stages in life present parents and their children with as many significant challenges as when a child is graduating from High School and preparing for their future. The step from 11th grade to 12th grade is small compared to the giant leap from 12th grade into the future.

You can frame it in any number of ways, but it seems to me that the underlying desire of most young people who graduate from High School if you ask them the question, “What do you want to do?” is that they really want to be successful, to make something of themselves and for themselves. Just what does it mean to be successful?

The quickest way to find out how many different answers there are to this question is to simply ask different people – “What does it mean to be successful?”

Life is a matter of perspective. How you look at life determines how you live it. Is success in life about getting the right break, pulling the right strings, having the right personality, being in the right place at the right time, is it about knowing the right people, following the right leads, or playing your cards right? Or, is it about you just as you are and God just as He is growing in a relationship together that results in Christlikeness?

Illustration: (“A Guy Named Bill” from “Out of the Saltshaker, by Rebecca Manley Pippert - adapted)

There’s a powerful illustration in Rebecca Manley Pippert’s book “Out of the Saltshaker” about ‘A Guy Named Bill.’ She writes, “His name is Bill. He has wild hair, wears T-shirts with holes in them, jeans, and no shoes. This was literally his wardrobe for his entire four years of college. He is brilliant. Kind of esoteric (*mysterious*) and very collegiate. He became a Christian while attending college. Across the street from the campus is a well-dressed, very conservative church. They want to develop a ministry to the students, but are not sure how to go about it. One day Bill decides to go there. He walks in with no shoes, jeans, his T-shirt, and wild hair. The service has already started and so Bill starts down the aisle looking for a seat. The church is completely packed and he can’t find a seat. By now people are looking a bit uncomfortable, but no one says anything. Bill gets closer and closer and closer to the pulpit and when he realizes there are no seats, he just squats right down on the carpet. (Although perfectly acceptable behavior at a college fellowship, trust me, this had never happened in this church before!) By now the people are really uptight, and the tension in the air is thick. About this time, the minister realizes that from way at the back of the church, a deacon is

slowly making his way toward Bill. Now the deacon is in his eighties, has silver-gray hair, a three-piece suit, and a pocket watch. A godly man, very elegant, very dignified, very courtly. He walks with a cane, and as he starts walking toward this boy, everyone is saying to themselves, *You can't blame him for what he's going to do. How could you expect a man of his age and of his background to understand some college kid on the floor?* It takes a long time for the elderly gentleman to reach the boy. The church is utterly silent except for the clicking of the man's cane. All eyes are focused on him. You can't even hear anyone breathing. The people are thinking, *The minister can't even preach the sermon until the deacon does what he has to do.* And now they see the elderly man drop his cane on the floor. With great difficulty he lowers himself and sits down next to Bill and worships with him so he won't be alone. Everyone chokes up with emotion. When the minister gains control he says, "What I'm about to preach, you will never remember. What you have just seen, you will never forget." (I just love that! Isn't that great?)

Jesus left the regal stateliness of His throne room in heaven and stooped to sit down on the common ground of this earth to worship His Father with you and me so we wouldn't be alone. Jesus set the example of humble accepting grace that we might in turn find it our hearts to reach out with His unconditional love to those, like us, who are eagerly seeking to know Him more fully.

God's desire is for us know Him more richly and enjoy being in His presence with each other, no matter how different we may be. In Ro 12:9-13 we find these words of exhortation: "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."

God is the Author, Creator, Giver, Sustainer and Taker of life. God is Life. He wrote the book on life. I think this qualifies Him to say what life is all about, including what it means to be successful in life. God is the only One who has the credentials and the credibility to make the statements He does and be perfectly and absolutely accurate and true in every way in all that He says. That's His divine prerogative as God.

What does God say being successful means in the Bible? I believe God gives us the answer in 1 Jn 2:6 "Whoever claims to live in Him must walk *or live* as Jesus did." Success in life is when someone tells you that they see Jesus in you by the way you are living your life. Success in life is living like Jesus lived. Jesus lived a perfect life. No one else has ever done that. God says He wants our lives to be like Jesus' life.

Our goal as a child of God is to be like Christ – to live our life like Jesus lived His. Ro 8:29 says that God predestined us "to be conformed to the likeness of His Son."

In 2 Co 11:1 Paul said, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." Jesus' goal on this earth was to glorify His Father in heaven by how He lived His life (Jn 17:1). In Jn 8:29 Jesus said, "The One who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do what pleases Him." And in Jn 5:30, He said, "... I seek not to please Myself but Him who sent Me." Jesus lived His life to please God the Father.

Paul said in 2 Co 5:9 "So, we make it our goal to please Him ..." Success in life for the child of God is to live by the pattern that Jesus gave us and to live by His example of doing the will of His Father in Heaven and pleasing Him by how He lived His life. That's what we are to do because that is what living a successful life is all about.

One of the toughest places for effective and meaningful conversation to take place is between teens and adults. There's so much at stake for both – each is attempting to prove the value of what they have to offer the relationship but in such contrasting ways.

I think we as parents have much to learn from our children and conversely, I think our children can learn some significant things from us as parents.

Success or true meaning and purpose in life is much deeper than what you want to do. What you want for your life comes closer. What the most important thing in your life is comes closer yet. But who you are and what matters most in life most is the most compelling of all.

Everyone of us is in search of our true identity. We are trying to find meaning and purpose in life through what we do, or have, or become, or how others see us, or how we see ourselves. Who we are in the eyes of God is ultimately all that matters.

God says He knit us together in our mother's womb (Ps 139) and that he fashioned us to look exactly like we look and to be exactly who we are. We are all different, that's what makes us unique, and our relationship with God and each other is different from everyone else's. Amazing isn't it, we try so hard to be like someone else or to be who we think others want us to be and yet God has created us as His unique masterpieces – genuine originals created in Christ Jesus to be just who we are and to do the things that He's prepared for each one of us to do." (Eph 2:10).

One of our greatest fears is not being accepted by others for who we are, so we end up doing whatever we believe will make this happen. We fear rejection, being made fun of, or being excluded, being seen as an odd ball or of looking foolish, being talked about or misunderstood, so we do whatever we believe we have to so we fit in. How sad. There's an identity crisis for many people today who are trying so hard to be who they think they need to be that they don't even know who they really are.

What God offers us in a personal relationship with Him is nothing short of phenomenal. We have, as a child of God, living within us the transforming power and transcendent grace of God – the Designer and Creator of everything that is and all of it He made from nothing. That tells me that God has made something phenomenal in making you and me just as we are. We are one-of-a-kind originals. The only way to know who you are is to know God. And the only way you can know God is by believing in His Son, Jesus Christ.

As a child of God you have the absolute assurance of the unbreakable love of a perfect Father who is committed to you no matter what and He will allow nothing to separate you from His love (Ro 8:35-39). You have a sure faith that is founded in the One who will remain faithful to you no matter how badly you may fail to live up to His expectations (2 Ti 2:13). You have the steadfast hope of a relationship so strong that not even the powers of hell can destroy it. The writer to the Hebrew Christians exhorted them, "... we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure..." (He 6:18, 19).

God wants to be involved in every aspect of our lives – why? Because He's our greatest need and wants His very presence in us to be our security and confidence in any and every life situation both now and in the future. Success in life is knowing God and living your life for Him. You know you are successful when others tell you that they see the life of Christ in you.

What matters most in life? It depends on your perspective – what you value most matters most. What you're living for defines what you value most. Job's words are defining on this point, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gives and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." (Job 1:21). By the world's standard of his day, Job had everything. He was successful, well to do, was well respected by others and had a large family, which in his day, gave him significant status in his community and culture and God allowed Satan to take it all away from him. Job had been stripped of everything by the world's standard that made him successful. But, Job's words revealed what he valued most "... may the name of the LORD be praised." What do you, and what do I value most? Do we value God for who He *is* to us or only for what He *gives* to us?

I'd like to suggest that as parents and children we can both learn some valuable lessons from those who have gone before us and particularly those who have been through experiences that have taught them some valuable lessons. One such individual is Solomon, the richest and wisest man who ever lived. Having recounted his experiences and reflected on his search for meaning and purpose in life – or what it mean to be successful, offers us this sound piece of wisdom in Ec 12:13 "Now all has been heard: here is the conclusion of the matter: *Fear God and keep His commandments, for*

this is the whole duty of man.” Have such respect for and trust in God that you willingly do what He says in the Bible because this is what will make you successful in life. God wants us to live like Jesus did, because that’s what Jesus came to this earth to show us how to do.

It’s the right thing to do to dream dreams and set goals, but it’s the kind of dreams and goals that make all the difference – we are to have the kinds of dreams and set the kinds of goals that lead to God-honoring results. Paul says in Php 3:13 & 14 “... 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.”

One of the greatest challenges for most children of God is to give everything, all of yourself, all of your possessions, all your dreams and desires to God, and trust Him to give you all that you need.

What’s your top priority? What is the most important thing to you in life? More telling questions are, “Who is your top priority – you or God? Who are you living for – you or God? God wants first place in your life and in my life. He won’t take it by force, even though He has divine rights to it. God has given us a choice – to live for ourselves or to live for Him – to live like Jesus lived.

All behavior is directed toward a goal whether we realize this or not or whether we have identified our goal or not. At any given moment we do what we believe. What does God want us to do – “What am I supposed to do?” is a common refrain in Christian circles. We get caught up in behaviors to the exclusion of the goal, which is the key to it. The issue is not so much behavior, the issue is the goal – what is it? The goal is to know God so that we can live like Jesus lived. Jesus said in Jn 17:3 “Now this is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” You can’t live like Jesus lived until you know God because God is the One who empowers you to do this, apart from Him you can’t. Jesus said in Jn 15:5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing.”

What does it look like to know God and live Like Jesus? God tells us in the Bible:

“He has showed you, O man what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic 6:8).

What does walking humbly with God look like?

Dale Burke and Jac La Tour in “A Love that Never Fails” offer these insightful words entitled “Choosing Humility”

The humble can wait patiently while the arrogant wants it now!

The humble demonstrates kindness, while the arrogant don’t even notice the need.

The humble are content not jealous or envious, while the arrogant feel they deserve more.

The humble honors and esteems the other, while the arrogant brags on himself.

The humble does not act unbecomingly, while the arrogant’s manners are rude.

The humble shows a servant spirit, while the arrogant demands to be served.

The humble are not easily provoked, while the arrogant are quick to take offense.

The humble quickly forgive a wrong suffered, while the arrogant can’t rest until they even the score.

Our fullest potential is *God in us* and when I ponder the depths of this simple reality it staggers my imagination to contemplate the possibilities that this holds for everyone of us.

Paul writes in Co 1:10 “And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.”

What God tells us in the Bible is only as valuable to us to the extent that we apply it in our daily lives. God’s truths are only truly understood by experience. God’s life-changing truths are meant to change how we live our lives.

God deserves our very best, nothing less and nothing else. God wants us to get the word out, but we can't get the word out until we get the word in. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom ..." – wisdom is the ability to apply the truth to life wisely because you have learned to do this by doing it. (Co 3:16). We are to correctly handle the word of truth which we learn through personal experience in doing it. (2 Ti 2:15).

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one of you should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pe 4:8-11) That's living like Jesus lived.

I close with this prayer, "And this is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God." (Php 1:9-11).

Benediction:

"To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a kingdom of priests to serve His God and Father – to Him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen!