

# Biblical Life Transformation

## Real Character Growth over Time

Who am I? What am I like? How do I become different?

These questions are at the core of what it really means to be a Christian, a follower of the most important man in human history, the Lord Jesus Christ. We talk glibly about becoming like Him, treating others like He did, saying things like, “If we were all more like Jesus, the world would be a better place.” True but sometimes we just speak into the air or say what we think would be acceptable or make us look better to others, repeating trite comments we have heard but have never really thought about. He was and is the Son of the living God, the only truly righteous one in existence, the One Who defines righteous and good. He is transcendent in His goodness, so far beyond our normal understanding that there is no comprehension of it possible for our natural human mind.

So we revert to the standard ideas we can understand and ask, “What am I doing?” or “How can I do things differently, better?” The issue is not what we are doing, that is only the most obvious, the easiest thing to see. The critical issue is what is behind what we are doing. The roots of our doing, our actions, lie in who we are, our character, deep within. This, our character, must change as we follow Christ. Then what we do will follow and change appropriately. We must become like Him, deeply. We must become *partakers of the divine nature!*<sup>1</sup>

## What is Character Growth?

One of the words for character growth in the New Testament is *metamorphao* (μεταμορφω). It is common to hear that we get our English word *metamorphosis* from this. The caterpillar and butterfly make a nice illustration and it is a good one for this word. However, the Greeks never thought about butterflies when this word was used.

It was a religious word for the most part, signifying the changes a member of a mystery religion was said to go through “by magical change into divine form.”<sup>2</sup> Even more pertinent was the usage in non-biblical Jewish literature of the period just before Christ, signifying “a miraculous change of form . . . which the blessed receive after the resurrection.”<sup>3</sup> The word was only used four times in the New Testament, twice of Jesus’ change when He was transfigured on the mountain<sup>4</sup> and twice of the change God works in the believer by the Holy Spirit<sup>5</sup>. All four uses were passive verb forms of some kind, never the popular “metamorphosis,” the noun.

This dramatic background sets the stage for the metamorphosis God wants to bring about in our lives, giving us portions of His actual *divine nature*, more like Jesus’ transfiguration than either of the extra-biblical uses above.

**This is what Metamorph Ministries is all about, true, personal, inward transformation to increasingly have the character of Christ as our own character.** This overview is the first

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter 1:4, NASB95. All following scripture references are to the NASB95 unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> J. Behm, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), IV:757.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. <sup>4</sup> Matthew 17:2; Mark 9:2. <sup>5</sup> Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18.

in a series of points that describe what character growth is and the process a Christian goes through to achieve the character of Christ as his own. From this character flow all Christian attitudes and actions. Each point below will look at one of the five principles of spiritual and character growth. These five principles are not activities or disciplines but operational mechanisms, dynamics that God uses to get at the root of who we are and to replace our character with that of the Lord Jesus Christ. These five principles are: 1) God's word - its effect upon our thinking, 2) the Holy Spirit - the power or ability to be different, 3) faith - connects us to the source of power (the Holy Spirit). These three are like three legs of a stool that depend on one another to function properly. The other two principles, 4) obedience – the arena for testing and working out changes and 5) suffering – an integral part of the death and life cycle that, as parts of us die, we are enabled to be replaced with Christ's life and character.

There are other things that fall under one or the other of these principles. But these five principles give us an overarching framework to better understand what is going on in our lives, how God is *working in us that which is pleasing in His sight*.<sup>1</sup> May we be encouraged to be more receptive in faith to God's master plan.

## God's Word

In the last section we discussed the depth to which God is at work to develop our character. **He wants to transform us into someone else, a different person, more like Him.** To effect this, the Scripture describes five dynamics that come into play.

The first dynamic is God's Word, *that by it you may grow in respect to salvation*.<sup>2</sup> We are talking, here, about more than just the Bible. We also mean God's word, what He says, in a more subjective sense. One can read the Bible and miss God's Word, what He is saying at the moment. To hear Him, dynamics two and three, the Holy Spirit and faith must also be at work. These first three dynamics form a triangle, with each one being an indispensable leg.

**Our transformation begins with the word of God**, just as the universe itself came began when God spoke. It is difficult to think of a more powerful force. *He spoke and it was done*,<sup>3</sup> it is said of creation. His mighty word also *performs its work in you who believe*,<sup>4</sup> transforming us *by the renewing of your mind*.<sup>5</sup>

How does this transformation happen? 2 Corinthians 3:18 has an interesting picture of the process. While we look at Jesus, *as in a mirror*, we are *transformed into the same image*. The source of this change is *from...the Spirit*. As Jesus, the Word of John 1:1-4 and 14, is revealed in Scripture and daily experience, we see Him like in a mirror, our true identity in Christ. *As He is, so also are we in this world*.<sup>6</sup> We see more of what God has made us to be, as we get to know Christ, and this knowledge of God changes the way we think of Him and of ourselves, also, transforming us *by the renewing of your mind*.

Much should be said about "the knowledge of God" in the New Testament. *Knowing* (lit: *the knowledge of*) *Christ Jesus my Lord* was spoken of by Paul as greater than anything that might be compared to it (*all things . . . surpassing*).<sup>7</sup> Peter devotes a large portion at the beginning of his second letter to the knowledge of God, including *granted to us everything pertaining to life*

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<sup>1</sup> Heb 13:21. <sup>2</sup> 1 Pet 2:2. <sup>3</sup> Psa 33:9 <sup>4</sup> 1 Thess 2:13. <sup>5</sup> Rom 12:2. <sup>6</sup> 1 Jn 4:17. <sup>7</sup> Phil 3:8

*and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him.*<sup>1</sup> One can understand the emphasis placed on the knowledge of God when one understands the process of personal transformation into the image of Christ. The previous paragraph explains that personal transformation happens as we look at the Savior and understand that as we get to know Him, we are getting to know who we are in Him, *as in a mirror*. That is the real self we now have access to. It is our eternal self that will be realized fully when we see Him<sup>2</sup> and it will last forever. Now we see *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ*,<sup>3</sup> and it incrementally changes us as we see it more clearly day by day. *This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*<sup>4</sup> Hopefully more will be said of the knowledge of God under a different cover.

The episode of Mary and Martha shows there is nothing more important than listening to God's word - nothing. Mary sat at the Lord's feet, *listening to His word*.<sup>5</sup> This is more than Bible study or the Scriptures themselves. We must not think that we have life in the Scriptures by itself and miss Christ, like the Pharisees.<sup>6</sup> He is the word that was in the beginning with God<sup>7</sup>, the living word of Hebrews 4, living, active and sharp.<sup>8</sup> The word of God we are talking about here is dynamic and gives life when it is believed. *It is not an idle word for you; indeed it is your life.*<sup>9</sup> We must not only read and meditate but we must listen with faith<sup>10</sup>, intending to do what God says. Our work and time spent in the Scripture have real meaning, if we listen. ***Listen that you may live.***<sup>11</sup>

## The Holy Spirit

This article is looking at the **five dynamics**, which function to move the believer in the direction of achieving the character of Christ. The first was the **word of God**, which alters the way we think. The second dynamic, now, is the **Holy Spirit**, God's actual presence in those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ.

A key passage from our last discussion, 2 Corinthians 3:18, also speaks to the subject here, *transformed . . . from . . . the Spirit*. Simply put, God the Spirit must work in us the alterations we see in the mirror, as we look at the glory (person/character) of the Lord Jesus. **No amount of human effort can accomplish this. It must be received by faith** from the presence of God within us, the Holy Spirit. Faith is also an essential part of the triangular dynamic that includes the word of God and the Spirit, and will be discussed in the next point below. But as Jesus is the source of life<sup>12</sup>, so is the Third Person of the Trinity. *It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing.*<sup>13</sup>

The Spirit and the word of God are co-workers and are mentioned together many times. The most colorful reference is to the word of God as the "sword" of the Spirit,<sup>14</sup> a metaphor refined in Hebrews 4:12, "sharper than any two-edged sword." John, in the Olivet Discourse (John 14-17), refers to the Spirit of truth, who will come to be with us and help us keep Jesus' command-

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Pet 1:3, 2-8. <sup>2</sup> 1 Jn 3:2. <sup>3</sup> 2 Cor 4:6. <sup>4</sup> Jn 17:3. <sup>5</sup> Luke 10:38-42. <sup>6</sup> Jn 5:39. <sup>7</sup> Jn 1:1, 14. <sup>8</sup> Heb 4:12. <sup>9</sup> Deut 32:47. <sup>10</sup> Gal 3:2, 5. <sup>11</sup> Isa 55:3. <sup>12</sup> I John 5:11. <sup>13</sup> John 6:63. <sup>14</sup> Ephesians 6:17.

ments.<sup>1</sup> He will also *teach you all things* and *testify about Me*.<sup>2</sup> Again, this collaboration of Spirit and word of God is to no avail without faith.<sup>3</sup>

The Spirit's presence and work in us to implement the word we hear as we look at Christ and His glory, is the contact point of actual, experiential relationship with God. His Spirit has become "one spirit"<sup>4</sup> with ours and it is at this level that we have fellowship<sup>5</sup> and **common existence with our Creator, we are one with Him**. The Spirit of life gives freedom,<sup>6</sup> life and peace to us as our minds are renewed and focused on God's word and His concerns.<sup>7</sup> The power of the Spirit is necessary for all of this, since our worldly humanity struggles against the eternal relationship we now have with the Father, keeping us from what we want and need.<sup>8</sup>

The Spirit's goal in all this is to transform who we are, not just what we do. We can do things that look good but fall short of His glory<sup>9</sup>, because our motives are wrong or because we generate it ourselves. The struggle described in Galatians 5:16-24 pits the flesh and its "deeds," against the "fruit" of the Spirit. This fruit is His great task under the new covenant, the ministry of righteousness,<sup>10</sup> and is the emphasis of the New Testament. God is after our transformed lives, our character, the fruit of the Spirit, not certain behavior or actions, however good and right.

**Righteous behavior follows, it does not precede, righteousness itself.**

Let us give way to the Holy Spirit as He uses the word of God to transform who we are into who Jesus Christ is, the very righteousness of God.<sup>11</sup>

## Faith

This article is looking at the **five dynamics**, which move the believer in the direction of actualizing the salvation righteousness imputed to us by faith. The first is the **word of God**, which alters the way we think. The second dynamic is the **Holy Spirit**, God's actual presence in a person with faith in Jesus Christ. The third dynamic we will now look at is **faith**. These three dynamics are co-dependent, like the legs of a three legged stool. Any one of them is no good without the other two.

The Church needs a New Reformation. Faith came to be properly applied to salvation in the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and fostered an exciting and fresh spirit that continued for a generation or two. The idea of grace and eternal life freely received from God was so powerful and "new" that it enriched even the "post-salvation" lives of its adherents by their emphasis on it. However, the roles of faith and personal growth in the maturing Christian life were obscured in favor of adherence to standards of behavior and doctrine.

**Salvation** by grace through faith is fairly secure truth, now, though we must never take it for granted. However, perhaps the time has come for **living** by grace through faith to get equal time.

Faith is a critical element in two biblical triangles. 1 Corinthians 13:13 contains the popular triangle of Christian virtues, faith, hope and love. The second is the triangle of Christian transformation, Word of God, Holy Spirit and faith, derived from the compilation of scripture given in this article.

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<sup>1</sup> John 14:15-21 (context). <sup>2</sup> John 14:26. <sup>3</sup> Hebrews 4:1-3. <sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:17. <sup>5</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:14. <sup>6</sup> Romans 8:2. <sup>7</sup> Rom 8:4-6, 12:2. <sup>8</sup> Galatians 5:16-18. <sup>9</sup> Rom 3:23. <sup>10</sup> 2 Cor 3:9. <sup>11</sup> 2 Cor 5:21.

One may have both the Holy Spirit and the word of God but they are of no effect for growth and transformation without faith. In other words, faith allows God's Word and Spirit to work. Faith completes the triangle of transformation and life is birthed, over and over again, in the case of the maturing believer. Without faith, or any of the three legs of this triangle, there is no triangle, only a line with a sharp bend in it, a beginning and an end, with no circulation. *Without faith it is impossible to please Him*<sup>1</sup> and *the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God*.<sup>2</sup> Both scriptures indicate the critical nature of faith.

The role of faith in undermining fear is an important subject in itself.<sup>3</sup> Suffice it to say that fear is about things that have not happened, things that are not seen. That is the realm of faith. Both fear and faith seek to make the future or unseen things more concrete. They seek to anticipate what is not yet and expect what has not yet arrived. They form our expectations and seek to realize what is not yet reality as though it were. They are competitive realities and cannot occupy the same place in life. Each undermines the other even eliminates it. Faith will replace fear in us. *Do not be afraid any longer, only believe*.<sup>4</sup> Love, also, is an antidote for fear.<sup>5</sup>

So, faith is important, but what is it? How do I do it? On the first question, much can be said. Vernon Grounds is correct, saying that a whole system of theology is necessary to explain faith.<sup>6</sup> We will only speak of two things by way of definition: faith deals with the invisible and it is non-meritorious.

In Hebrews 11:1, faith is explained in a statement that equates it to two nouns, both linked to the unseen realm. It deals with things *hoped for*, and *things not seen*. Paul refers to this also in 2 Corinthians 4:18, *We look . . . at the things which are not seen*. In the materialistic, visual and sensory world we live in, this is an important element of faith to remember. The various kinds of validation we often seek (show me, let me see it!) would actually void and incapacitate our faith, not help it. "Proof" would eliminate faith.

The verse indicates that faith itself is the substance and proof of truth and of our relationship with the Savior, not visual evidence or logical/mental clarity, both of which **follow** faith/believing. Faith is equated to its abstract invisible object, what is believed, in a way that gives it reality. It is not so much an action requiring effort as it is a state or basis of something's existence. It is at least as involved with the object itself as with the one having and exercising it. Faith is inherent in the object believed, primarily, then it is possessed by the one believing. This is what is said and drawn from Heb. 11:1, much this writer still needs to learn and experience about these things.

The second element of definition, that faith is non-meritorious, is fairly self-evident when one is discussing salvation but blurs when day-to-day life is the issue. *To the one who does not work, but believes . . . his faith is credited as righteousness*.<sup>7</sup> This and other scripture form the basis for salvation being unmerited, undeserved, because it is a gift given on the basis of faith, faith that is placed opposite works. Only faith can preserve grace, *For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace*.<sup>8</sup> Grace and faith operate the same way in our daily lives as they do in our salvation and new birth. Pride in our faith and effort we make to

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 11:6. <sup>2</sup> Galatians 2:20. <sup>3</sup> Mark 5:36; Luke 12:31-32; Matthew 14:28-31. <sup>4</sup> Mk 5:36. <sup>5</sup> 1 Jn 4:18. <sup>6</sup> Vernon C. Grounds, "The Nature of Faith," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 6 no. 4 (1963):125. <sup>7</sup> Rom 4:5. <sup>8</sup> Rom 4:16

maintain it is totally unjustified. We must learn to think of faith and believing in a passive way, as receiving and resting, receiving from the Father and resting in His provision. This way, both in salvation and daily life, Christ will get the glory He deserves. *I live by faith in the Son of God.*<sup>1</sup>

The second question, four paragraphs above, is next, “How do I do it?” The way the question is phrased is the way we usually think about faith. This way of thinking about faith, as something we “do,” as an active exertion of energy, a work, is part of the problem we have in living life and following the Lord Jesus Christ. It is why we continue to struggle with His reality and the reality of spiritual things in general. He and things pertaining to Him are fundamentally abstract from our viewpoint in a visible world. So faith is really the only way we have to interact with them. We must receive from Him<sup>2</sup>, not strive and exert ourselves in an effort to please Him and be worthy of help with the issues before us in life. Faith is without merit, in terms of our standing and personal value, yet it is a critical leg in the triad of virtues (faith, hope and love) for scripture says we live by it. *We live by faith, not by sight.*<sup>3</sup> It is how we live, the mechanism of our daily lives. It is how we love and how we hope.<sup>4</sup>

Faith is more associated with things like receiving in John 1 and presenting ourselves to Him as available instruments or tools in Romans 6<sup>5</sup>. Matt 11 says, *Come to Me . . . and I will give you rest,*<sup>6</sup> of His provision and consolation. Gal 2:20 has us dead and living by faith. Rom 4:5 equates not working with believing. All these and more speak to the passive nature of the *work of faith.*<sup>7</sup> The equative statement in John 1:12 stands as a good “active definition,” *as many as received Him . . . to those who believe.* Believing is receiving.

Faith is the third, essential leg of the stool, along with God’s Word and the Holy Spirit, to complete the triad of biblical transformation and change us into *the divine nature*.

## Obedience

1 Peter 1:2 says we are chosen, saved, to obey Jesus Christ. Obedience speaks to the end result of our salvation in Christ as we live out that salvation in this life. It is a misrepresentation of our secure relationship with God to think or say that obedience is optional now that we know Christ. The implication would be that obeying the Savior relates only to the realm of salvation, something we would do to be saved. Of course, it would be a serious error to think that we would be saved by our works or something good in ourselves, something we might do to earn our standing with the Judge. That would certainly be an impossible hope.

So, obedience is not optional. It’s the natural result and/or purpose of the gracious relationship we have with God through Jesus Christ. To obey is not a requirement for salvation or standing with God but Peter makes clear it is important as the purpose or result of that new birth and ongoing relationship. *Like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16 because it is written, “YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.”* Being holy results in holy behavior, which is obedience. It is the “natural” response of true relationship as we follow Him. He is the reason for the character changes made in us. These changes happen *for I*

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<sup>1</sup> Gal 2:20. <sup>2</sup> Jn 1:12. <sup>3</sup> 2 Cor 5:7. <sup>4</sup> Gal 5:5-6; Rom 15:13. <sup>5</sup> Rom 6:13. <sup>6</sup> Matt 11:28. <sup>7</sup> 1 Thess 1:3. 2 Thess 1:11. <sup>8</sup> 1 Pe 1:15–16.

*am holy.* Obedience is there because we respond to His holiness, His character, to be like Him, *beholding as in a mirror* His glory. As we see Him, we become like Him. John says, *when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.*<sup>1</sup>

Salvation is a onetime experience that changes the day to day trajectory, not just the end result of our lives. Philippians 2:12 says, *just as you have always obeyed, . . . work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who is at work in you.* Paul sees that obedience is a part of fulfilling or *working out* our salvation, growing into it. The second part of this comparative statement completes the first part. To *obey* is to *work out your salvation*. Furthermore, God is at work as we work out our already established relationship with God. Working out our salvation is what is happening as the first three dynamics of transformation form Christ in us. It does not happen as a result of our own efforts. It is the result of God's word transforming our mind, God's Spirit working the transformation in us and our faith receiving this working of His word and Spirit.

Linkage of obedience to our personal character growth is also spoken of in Romans 6. Verses 15-23 speak to the condition of being free from condemning law and instead being ruled by grace. This section argues for the logical result and benefit of living for righteousness, the result of obedience from the heart and freedom from sin. Paul uses the metaphor of slavery to speak of living for either sin or righteousness and urges that we present or give ourselves, our bodies, to righteousness with the outcome of sanctification, personal character growth. This is the stated benefit of grace, that we can now voluntarily follow what is good, being slaves of God and reap the end result of an eternal quality of life. This kind of life is the outcome of sanctification, our character growth in the fruit of the Spirit. The progression through the section is being committed (as slaves) to obedience (16-17) then to righteousness (18-19) then to sanctification (19d-22) then to life (22d-23). The Holy Spirit in this section urges us to *now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.*<sup>2</sup> Obedience results in growth.

Some indications that obedience brings God's blessing in a general way are seen in the following passages. The slave faithful in a few things, in Matthew 25, will be put in charge of many things.<sup>3</sup> We experience God's love as we keep His commandments.<sup>4</sup> Also, Psalms 81:13-16 says, *Oh that My people would listen to Me, That Israel would walk in My ways! I would quickly subdue their enemies. . . 16 "I would feed you with the finest of the wheat, And with honey from the rock I would satisfy you,* again, showing God's blessing on the obedient. Finally, a powerful passage from Isaiah 55:1-3ff. *Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And delight yourself in abundance. Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, According to the faithful mercies shown to David.* It is a timeless principle that God has always blessed obedience. So He still does. As we obey, we are blessed to grow and become *partakers of the divine nature*.

Two observed, practical functions of obedience in our growth are, first, to bring us into new areas of life and ministry to bear fruit and, secondly, to bring new or further conflicts to deepen our faith and provide opportunity for the death and life cycle to work.<sup>5</sup>

First, God wants to stretch us to expose more of His glory in us and deepen our knowledge of

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<sup>1</sup> 1 John 3:2. <sup>2</sup> Ro 6:19. <sup>3</sup> Matt 25:21, 23. <sup>4</sup> 1 Jn 5:3. <sup>5</sup> 2 Cor 4:10-11.

Him as we encounter new and/or deeper parts of our character that need work. Without this stretching we would probably be content to rest on laurels of past accomplishments and think we had arrived, allowing pride to take root. This pride would separate us from our Lord and Savior and take most of the excitement and sense of accomplishment out of our lives. We would get bored and probably get into all kinds of trouble and hurtful, painful ways that would degrade our eternal experience of reward and fellowship with the Lord Jesus and others. No, it's much better to go forward and continue to fight and lay down our lives for the Lord Jesus and others. *For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.*<sup>1</sup> *And He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.*<sup>2</sup> *Forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal.*<sup>3</sup>

The second practical function of obedience in our growth is to contribute to our suffering. What! To continue to grow, our Lord must allow new or further conflicts to deepen our faith and provide opportunity for the death and life cycle to work. Suffering is an indispensable tool in the hand of God to bring greater glory to Himself through the greater glory achieved in our lives. The challenges brought on by obedience serve to deepen our need for the Savior and His Spirit and further the death and life cycle needed to show the *life of Jesus* in us.<sup>4</sup>

## Suffering

*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*<sup>5</sup> Paul had thought about this. He “considered” it. He had plenty of occasion to reflect on what he suffered for Christ and the conclusion was to not compare it to our future glory with Christ when He is revealed. However, it would not be suffering if there was no pain, even to the point of simulating death, deep pain.

It is our contention that it is not enough to give answers to our pain that don't respect the depth of its painfulness or give good reason for it, reason that is worth enduring the suffering. It's not enough, in our view, to simply say it's for the glory of God and we must accept God's will and be content to understand one day. Those answers are not untrue but Scripture reveals there is more to the story. Suffering allowed by a loving and all powerful, sovereign God must make sense and have a purpose and reason that transcends the pain He allows, may I say the pain He causes. It must be worth enduring. Because we are all allowed to suffer to our limit, it must be worth our whole lives, everything our limit means, everything we have to give, all we have to offer. What could possibly be worth pain like that? What could possibly be worth our death? That's what it feels like, right? Turns out that's actually what is happening emotionally, psychologically.

Maybe something like showing the light of Christ to a dark world would be worth it. Something like clarifying the character of God to lost people made in His image. Like

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<sup>1</sup> Rom 14:7–8. <sup>2</sup> 2 Co 5:15. <sup>3</sup> Php 3:13–14. <sup>4</sup> 2 Cor 4:10–11. <sup>5</sup> Ro 8:18.



*manifesting the life of Christ in our mortal flesh.*<sup>1</sup> To become more like Christ may sound insignificant when in or faced with the pain we experience but, with appropriate reflection, the glory achieved in our own lives and those around us, to say nothing of the privilege of compounding glory for the living God, all of which will last for eternity, is of overwhelming value and significance and we are honored to be involved. The thought itself of becoming *partakers of the divine nature*, steals our breath and stuns our senses. That's what it's all about.

That's the "reason for everything". The answer to all the "why" questions we ask. "Why me?" "Why this?" "Why now?" The "reason for everything" is that we would become *partakers of the divine nature*. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 4 describes the various trials and sufferings he had been through as being *afflicted in every way, perplexed, persecuted and struck down*. He followed each description of his suffering with a contrasting outcome that gives the end result of these problems, *but not crushed, despairing, forsaken, destroyed* he says. Verses 10-11 give his understanding of what was going on in these sufferings. The hard part of the process is described here as *the dying of Jesus* and *being delivered over to death* and the end result as *the life of Jesus . . . manifested*. It is clear that Paul considered the trials and suffering he went through to be part of the process of having Christ *formed* and *manifested* in him, partaking of the *divine nature*, the character of divinity itself. The honor of suffering is part of the transformation process.

There appear to be **three classes of suffering** in the New Testament. Though different words are used in each case, "tribulations," "trials," and "discipline," the outcome is the same, deeper character, like that of Christ. Again, this outcome is the "reason for everything," the answer to all our "why" questions.

The three passages we will refer to here are, Romans 5:3-5, James 1:2-4, and Hebrews 12:4-11. Not everything will be said about these passages that could be said but we will try to speak to what is pertinent to our discussion about growth and the purpose for suffering.

**Romans 5:3-5** records the aftermath of salvation, declaring in verse one that after justification by faith, *we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ* and stand in grace. Freedom is achieved! Paul says joy follows, in this new state, joy in hope of God's glory (5:2), joy in tribulations (5:3), our concern here, and joy in God in verse 11. This is a proud joy, a reason for boasting or a deep satisfying joy. The NASB95 uses the word "exult"<sup>2</sup> to try to convey this kind of joy, glorying in our salvation and tribulations.

Paul, here, expends some ink trying to explain the new relationship we now have toward and with the kind of problems he calls "tribulations."<sup>3</sup> They produce certain effects in us, character qualities that reflect the love of God (verses 3-5). Before one could "exult" or "boast" in tribulations Paul mentions that we must know or understand what comes from tribulations and so he lists a few of the positive results of tribulations such as perseverance, the ability to go through or endure bad things, and proven character, which is the backbone to do the right thing when it is difficult to do. These things are analogous to the *fruit of the Spirit* or the *divine nature* that the

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor 4:11

<sup>2</sup> Καυχῶμαι - boast, glory, pride oneself, brag. BDAG. <sup>12</sup> Gal 4:19.

<sup>3</sup> θλίψις - trouble that inflicts distress, oppression, affliction, tribulation ; Of distress that is brought about by outward circumstances. BDAG.

Spirit works in us to *form Christ*.<sup>1</sup> We grow through tribulations.

In **James 1:2-4**, we find a different kind of suffering the writer calls *trials, temptations*,<sup>2</sup> defined in context by apposition as, *the testing of your faith*. Again, as in Romans 5, joy is to be associated with trials, having certain knowledge about what trials produce. James says these trials produce “endurance,” the same word translated “perseverance” in Romans 5! Here the *perfect result* of trials is to become *perfect* (mature) *and complete*, with all one needs for life. That is a good outcome from suffering. It is a perfect outcome! Again, we grow through trials.

The third and final classification of suffering in the New Testament is represented by the word *discipline*<sup>3</sup> in **Hebrews 12:4-11**. This word represents training and instruction in a broad sense even used in 2 Timothy 3:16 as one function of the Scripture. However, there is a sense included that refers to the physical aspect of training, physical suffering, as part of the training to do right and to correct wrong attitudes and actions, corporeal punishment. The word is used in this way in the Septuagint of Isaiah 53:5 of the suffering of our Savior, *The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him* (NASB95). Also, the passage under consideration in Hebrews clearly uses the word in this physical sense and compares it to scourging that requires endurance (Heb. 12:6-7). Also, as with the two classes above, the clear outcome of this discipline is *so that we may share His holiness* and that *afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness*<sup>4</sup>. So the outcome of this third kind of suffering is also growth, that we *may become partakers of the divine nature*<sup>5</sup>.

The realization that God turns the pain we experience into personal growth and further Christ-likeness, so that *the proof of your faith . . . may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ*<sup>6</sup> helps mitigate the pain we experience some or even a lot. This is an important part of the process that advances the growth that will overcome areas of our life that have troubled and held us in chains for, perhaps many years.

## Summary

It is actually possible to understand how we become “*conformed to the image of His Son*.”<sup>7</sup> We have taken a quick look at the five principles, the five dynamics of real and lasting biblical growth and personal transformation. God’s word, the Holy Spirit, faith, obedience and suffering are the things that work together in the lives of willing believers to get us through the barriers that keep us from becoming the people we want to be. God has put it in our hearts to be someone we are not presently and He has provided all we need to get there. The additional factor of time is all that is needed to grow constantly toward, the goal inspired by the cross to be like our Savior. *To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.*<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gal 4:19

<sup>2</sup> Πειρασμός - an attempt to learn the nature or character of something, test, trial; or, an attempt to make one do something wrong, temptation BDAG.

<sup>3</sup> Παιδεία - guidance for responsible living, upbringing, training, instruction, discipline, correction BDAG.

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 12:10, 11. <sup>5</sup> 2 Pet 1:4. <sup>6</sup> 1 Pe 1:7. <sup>7</sup> Romans 8:29. <sup>8</sup> Eph 3:21.