

Lord, Please Change Me!

✖ Because of his keen observations of how God works in nature, scientist and educator George Washington Carver probably had as much insight into life as he had knowledge of plants. He once commented on the fact that people often assume, when they can't see anything growing above the ground, that nothing is happening beneath it.

I've often made that mistake in my own life and in the way I've assessed situations regarding other people. Because of the many challenges facing our world and the church today, we may be tempted to think that positive change is a long way off; but that may not be true for the body of Christ or for its individual members.

Those outside the church who are longing to see Jesus may also be tempted to think that nothing is going on among God's people because they don't see much happening on the "surface." They, like believers and unbelievers everywhere, are desperate for a revelation of the true, living God.

I believe that for their sake God wants to raise the profile of the kingdom. This will require that believers become more conscious of the role we play in displaying His glory through our lives.

In her book *Placed in His Glory* (Charisma House), Fuchsia

Pickett states that one aspect of God's glory is His moral beauty and perfection of character that is beyond our natural comprehension. I believe God desires for His church to not only see a revelation of His glory but also be a revelation of His glory. He wants to reveal Himself in our midst so that we can then reveal Him to the world.

Chosen by God

Isaiah the prophet told the Israelites that although they were to recall the miracle of their escape from Egypt by the hand of the Lord, they were not to see themselves as they had been before they were delivered—forsaken and enslaved. He wrote: "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!" (Is. 43:18-19, NIV). Israel's deliverance marked a transition for them, and they had to acknowledge the fact that they had a new identity; they were the people of God.

God related to Israel in an unusual manner. He called them "My chosen, the people I formed for Myself that they may proclaim My praise" (vv. 20-21).

As believers we also are a distinct people from all the other peoples of the earth. Our uniqueness is based on the fact that we are a part of Christ's church, His body.

Interestingly enough, Peter's words in the New Testament

nearly echo those of Isaiah's. He wrote that we are "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that [we] may declare the praises of Him who called [us] out of darkness into His wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

Peter continues: "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (v. 10).

Just as Israel was told to recall what God had done but move on from there, so we are told to come to a new place of understanding that we are not now who we once were.

We can remember the facts of our prior existence—indeed we should remember. But we must focus the better part of our energies on acknowledging our new identity as God's people, recipients of His grace and mercy, who honor Him with our praises.

We are no longer alone, bereft of a loving Father to provide for us. We have a new identity, a new family, a new purpose, a new inheritance and a new expectation.

We are chosen, royal, priestly, holy and able to make declarations of praise to God and about Him. As Abraham's spiritual descendants and heirs of the promises given to him, we are formed by God for Himself just as the natural descendants of Abraham were.

Isaiah said that a people God formed for Himself would "proclaim His praise." According to Strong's Concordance, that means "to

boast on Him.” Peter said that the people who belong to the Lord will declare His praises.

To “declare” means “to publish; to make known by praising or proclaiming, to celebrate” (Strong’s). God’s praises are “His virtue, moral excellence, perfection and goodness of action” (Spiros Zodhiates, The Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament).

Those outside the family of faith should be able to observe the grace and glory of God resting on us. And they will notice if we walk as people of virtue, moral excellence and exemplary character who boast about our God.

But how is this played out in real life—yours and mine? Knowing our individual weaknesses, our tragedies and triumphs, how do we become who God says we are? How do we “clothe [ourselves] with the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 13:14)?

Spiritual Formation

The apostle Paul addressed the Galatians as “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you” (Gal. 4:19). In the original language, the word for “formed,” *morphoo*, is used here to “[express] the necessity of a change in character and conduct to correspond with inward spiritual condition, so that there may be moral conformity to Christ” (Strong’s).

Most of us have survived a great many heartaches and tragedies. These were all designed by the enemy to break our spirits.

But because of God's grace, the devil's efforts failed, and we are still standing.

You would no doubt confess that before you experienced some of the difficult things in your life, you were a different person.

Every test you went through exposed something in you (good and bad) that had been hidden, maybe even from yourself.

But God enabled you by His Spirit to overcome your struggles, and in the process you were changed. The situations the enemy had designed for your destruction became places of promotion as you learned to yield your struggles to the Lord.

Part of the process of change has to do with our acknowledging that though we live in this world, we are not of it. Jesus lives inside us. However, we have lived in the world for a period of time, and we continue to bear many of its characteristics.

God has put in us all we need in order to develop godly character, but the process through which His attributes increase and our flesh decreases requires time and patience. It can't be hurried—or faked.

What we do is important, but why we do what we do is far more important. To God, the motivations of our hearts matter more than

outward appearance.

However, the culture in which we live does not embrace this truth. Today, you and I are given value based on how we appear, what we do, and our ability to sell other people on the notion of our importance.

Perseverance—that is, the patient endurance of trying circumstances while one is submitted to God’s transformation process—is a radical idea. Nevertheless, God’s character is manifested and His glory revealed when we humble ourselves so that He can be exalted in us (see James 4:10).

The apostle Paul assures us that the process is already underway to make us more like Christ. He wrote: “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18).

Why We Need to Change

In his book *Experiencing God*, noted Bible teacher Henry Blackaby points out that God’s overarching purpose, according to His Word, is to fill the entire earth with the knowledge of His glory (see Hab. 2:14). Blackaby says that to that end, God initiates encounters with us at various times in our lives and through various circumstances

that will propel us toward our particular destiny as we join with Him in what He is doing in the world.

We've heard the saying before: "It's not about us." God first chose us and then filled us with His Spirit for a reason.

In a subsequent book by Blackaby and Avery Willis Jr., *On Mission With God*, the authors comment: "[God] doesn't enter your life to pamper you or indulge you. He comes to involve you in the greatest adventure of life—experiencing His glory as you accompany Him on His mission. By joining Him on His mission, you will experience God and be forever changed in the process.

"You are not just a channel through which God does something, but you are a transformed part of His eternal purpose to make you and all peoples of the world like His Son for His glory."

God moves dramatically in us, not just to make us happier people or to fix all our problems (although His will for us encompasses these things, too). But He works in us to transform us into men and women who will exhibit His nature on the earth and give the world a glimpse of Jesus.

Our faithfulness to God is going to demand constant, radical transformation throughout our lives. And it will require that we fully embody the truth of our having been made new creations in Christ.

But because the change we need happens in intimate fellowship with Him,
a byproduct of our transformation is that we'll also get to know Him in
a deeper way.

It's Safe to Surrender

As a seminary student a few years ago, I often thought of my father when I was in class. He was a godly man who studied the Bible voraciously, especially during the latter years of his life. I would think, Daddy would have loved being here.

Unfortunately, he never had the opportunities I've had. But he loved me dearly, always made me feel safe and modeled a hunger for God's truth.

The more I observed him, the more my dreams became similar to his. I wanted what he wanted because I loved him, wanted to please him and was totally secure in his love for me.

In Ephesians 5:1, Paul wrote: "Therefore be imitators of God [copy Him and follow His example], as well-beloved children [imitate their father]" (The Amplified Bible).

As dearly loved children of our heavenly Father, we have the privilege of intimately relating to Him. The God of the whole earth wants to reveal Himself to us and transform us so that we begin to look, act, speak and think as He does.

A contemporary rendering of 2 Corinthians 3:18 beautifully expresses the assurance we have that He will finish the work

He's begun

in us: "Nothing between us and God, our faces shining with the brightness of His face. And so we are transfigured much like the

Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God

enters our lives and we become like Him" (The Message).

As we steadily focus our hearts on Christ, He continually reveals Himself through His Word, through prayer and in worship. We have

the ability, as Blackaby and Willis put it, to "adjust our lives to Him

and join Him on His mission." And what an awesome adventure it is!

Our transformation is orchestrated by One who is perfectly loving, faithful and compassionate in everything He does. We can

embrace the processes He chooses.

Deep within us the Holy Spirit's work may be hidden from view, but that doesn't mean nothing is happening! In fact, before you

can even say, "Lord, please change me," the work has already begun.

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