

THE ROAD TO CHANGE
How God Meets Your Deepest Needs – Part 7
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We all come to worship with certain needs and we look to the church to fulfill those needs. We look to God to fulfill those needs. One need we all have is the need to CHANGE. We have a deep need to grow and mature in our faith. When we come to Christ, God starts us on a journey. He starts us on a road to change. When we enter into a relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ, the very Spirit of God enters into our hearts and begins to change us from the inside out. That's what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

In this sermon series we are looking at the different names for God in the Old Testament. The name we are going to focus on today is *Jehovah-M'Kiddish* which means, "***I am the God who sanctifies you.***" God meets our deepest need for change. He works within us to make us more like Him. First, God changes our heart and brings us to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. That's called *regeneration*. The moment we come to faith in Christ, and by that I mean, the moment we recognize our sinfulness and trust in what Christ has done for us on the cross, dying our death and paying our penalty, at that moment we are justified before God. He no longer holds our sins against us. We are saved, but we still have our old nature to contend with. Once we come to faith, God starts us on the road to change. You see, God loves us the way we are, sinners in need of saving, but he loves us enough to not leave us the way we are. He keeps on working in our hearts to change us and make us more like Christ. That's what it means to be a Christian. John Calvin, the founding father of our Presbyterian faith, says, "The mark of a true Christian is a teachable spirit." The authentic Christian longs to be changed by God, transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

The Bible says, "***What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore for the old life is gone. A new life has begun!***" 2nd Corinthians 5:17. This new life is a process of becoming more and more like Christ. In talking about this process, the apostle Paul says, "***I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection! But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be. No, dear brothers and sisters, I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven.***" Philippians 3:12-14

Being a Christian means we have entered into a process of becoming all that God wants us to be. He wants to take our disappointment and turn it into contentment. He wants to take our sorrow and turn

it into joy. He wants to take our anxiety and turn it into peace. He wants to take our bitterness and turn it into understanding. He wants to take our sinfulness and turn it into holiness. He wants to transform us into people who mirror and reflect His character. He wants to meet our deepest need to change.

How does God do that? How does he meet our deepest need to change? How does He transform us into the image of Jesus Christ? He does so by enlisting our cooperation. His Spirit works together with our spirits to transform us. Our *sanctification* – our becoming like Christ is not only up to God, nor is it only up to us. It is a working together with God – a cooperation between the believer and the Believed. Our *regeneration* is *monergistic*, meaning God alone does the saving, but our sanctification is *synergistic*, meaning God working together with us to bring about a holy and righteous nature within us.

What can we do to cooperate with God on this road to change?

The FIRST thing we can do is RECOGNIZE THAT OUR SANCTIFICATION (our becoming like Christ) IS A JOURNEY. It is God who supplies the power to change and the model of what we are to change into – what we are to become like. Even still it takes a lifetime of tapping into that power and striving to be like Christ to reach that goal. Not one of us is perfect. Not one of us has arrived. We are all on the journey. The same God who started us on the road to change when he brought us to faith, will keep on working together with us to bring about our Christ-like character. The apostle Paul declared this truth when he said, *“I am confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ’s return.”* Philippians 1:6. Folks, that’s good news. God’s not going to give up on us. He’s not going to allow us to be a casualty along the road. He’s going to take us the distance. What He began when He drew us into a relationship with him, He will continue to work with us to complete. That’s good news. It’s also a comfort to us when we mess up. God’s not done with us yet. We’re still on the journey.

The SECOND thing we can do to cooperate with God is to SET OUR SIGHTS ON OUR FINAL DESTINATION. Our final destination is a sinless and holy life. In the Old Testament we see how God took a bunch of wandering nobodies and gave them a new destination. He said, *“set yourselves apart to be holy for I the Lord am your God who makes you holy.”* Leviticus 20:7-8. He turned a bunch of nobodies into some bodies by setting them apart from all the other peoples of the earth. He set them apart to be holy.

As God’s new community, the church, we too are set apart for holiness. Hebrews 10:10 says, *“What God wants is for us to be holy.”* We are set apart to be like Christ. That’s what it means to be a Christian. We are called to holiness. We’re not called to a holier than thou attitude or to parade our

holiness for others to see. We're set apart to mirror and reflect the character of Christ and imitate Him. That is to be our final destination.

2nd Corinthians 3:18 says, *“As the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like Him and reflect His glory even more.”* Our final destination is not to become more religious. Being religious is not what we are to be about. There was a guy in my high school who went to a revival meeting and “got religion.” He started going to church every Sunday and went to prayer meetings and Bible study during the week. He memorized lots of Bible verses. But he was as mean as ever. He came to our youth group meeting one Sunday night and started preaching to all of us kids. Our youth pastor got angry and told him to leave. The pastor told him, **“When your life begins to demonstrate the character of Christ, then we’ll listen to you and not until.”** Then the pastor made the kid leave the building because the kids kept shouting scripture verses at us. Our youth leader was protecting us from a religious fanatic. We don’t need more religious extremists in the world. 911 has certainly taught us that. We need people who have as their final destination the character of Christ. There is no substitute for holiness in our lives. We are to work together with the Holy Spirit in our journey to become like Christ.

The third thing we can do to cooperate with God on the road to change is to ASK HIM TO HELP US WITH THE ROADBLOCKS. Roadblocks are the areas of our lives that impede our journey and block our way to becoming like Christ. Roadblocks are thoughts and behaviors that keep us from making any real progress in becoming like Christ. Roadblocks take many forms. They may be behaviors that are sinful. They may be thoughts that are sinful. Roadblocks just keep appearing, sometimes when you least expect them.

2nd Corinthians 7:1 says, *“Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence and awe for God.”* What is polluting your character and impeding your journey toward Christ? Maybe it’s a critical spirit. Maybe what is impeding you is pride or gluttony or greed or lust or anger or malice or envy or drunkenness or sexual sin or apathy or laziness. All those things represent our old nature that was put to death with Christ. We are told to *“Throw off your old evil nature and your former way of life, which is rotten through and through, full of lust and deception.”* Ephesians 4:22. How do we do that? These things are so entrenched in our lives, so fixed in our personalities. That’s why we need to ask God for help. We can’t get rid of all the road blocks on our own.

The fourth thing we can do to cooperate with God is to LEARN HOW TO REFUEL. If you refuse to refuel before trying to make the day’s spiritual journey, you’re not going to get very far.

You need to refuel daily. You need to turn to God each day to be refueled. Psalm 23 says, *"He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness...."* Psalm 23:3

If we are going to make the journey we have to refuel. This means we have to spend time with the Lord each day. Developing the daily habit of reading God's Word and talking to God will help you to refuel in your journey to becoming like Christ. Coming to worship on Sundays is not enough. It takes refueling spiritually each day to make any real progress.

What will it look like when we refuel, when we get to know God better? The Bible says, *"As we know Jesus better His divine power gives us everything we need for living a godly life. So make every effort to apply these promises to your life. Then your faith will produce a life of moral excellence. A life of moral excellence leads to knowing God better. Knowing God leads to self-control. Self-control leads to patient endurance and patient endurance leads to godliness. Godliness leads to love for other Christians, and finally you will grow to have genuine love for everyone."* 2nd Peter 1:3-8. We should all be striving to know Jesus better so we can be better people. Moral excellence, self-control, patience, godliness, and genuine love for others are things we should all be striving for. That's the kind of person we were all created to be and it takes refueling to get there.

The fifth thing we can do to cooperate with God in our journey to becoming like Christ is to PAUSE ALONG THE WAY TO CELEBRATE THE PROGRESS. We need to focus on how far we've come and not on how far we have to go. It's encouraging to see the progress. We all need to focus on how far we've come on the journey and not on how far we have to go. We need to celebrate the progress along the way and allow the progress we've made to encourage us. I was talking to retired pastor at my Rotary meeting the other day. He asked me how things were going at my church and I mentioned that I was preparing for our Annual Congregational Meeting. He then went on to tell me how much he hated congregational meetings. He said he just hated congregational meetings because it gave all the nitpickers a chance to publicly criticize and nitpick. He repeated how much he hated congregational meetings and he just shook his head. I could tell he was reliving some bad experiences in his head. The man next to me joined in the conversation. He said, "I used to be one of those." We looked at him and he continued. He said, "I used to be one of those nitpickers. I was always criticizing and finding fault." I was really curious at that point and so I asked, "So how did you get out of that?" He replied, "The Lord." Then he shared about how the Lord brought him through being so critical. I've known him for four years and he's never been nitpicky or critical. It was so encouraging to hear his testimony. God is at work in our lives. Celebrate that good work. Let other people know how God has helped you to do – what roadblocks he has helped you to overcome.

These are the ways we cooperate with God on the road to change. We realize that the Christian life is a journey and that our final destination is to become like Christ. We ask God to help us with the road blocks along the way. We take time to refuel and we celebrate the progress along.

PRAYER

Holy God, we give you praise and thanks for loving us just the way we are and for loving us enough to not leaving us just the way we are. You change our hearts enabling us to acknowledge our sin and recognize our need for a Savior. You enable us to call out to you for forgiveness. You send your Holy Spirit into our hearts to partner with us on the road to change, helping us to be people who are more and more like Christ as we journey through life. We pray that you would continue to work your perfect nature into us. May our progress be evident to all and something we can truly celebrate and be encouraged by. Help us develop moral excellence, godliness, patient endurance and a genuine love for others.

Lord, if there is anyone here today who does not know you as their Lord and Savior, I pray that in the quietness of this place, you would speak to them and that they would hear your voice calling them, that you would draw them into a relationship with you, embarking them on the road to change—real and genuine change. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen