

Turkey
2-9-08
Spiritual Growth Session #1
Tragedy and Levels and Purpose
2008

ROGER

1. I have something in my hand. Do you believe me? Now I am going to test your faith.
2. Repeat #1: No one has ever seen before. Do you believe me?
3. repeat #s 1 and 2. When I open my hand, you and I will be the first people ever to see it. Do you believe me?
4. Repeat #s 1, 2 and 3. After you and I have seen it, no one will never see again. Do you believe me?
5. Open hand, show peanut and eat it.

► SLIDE #: Peanut

What if you thought God lied to you? Would you still believe Him?
Seemed to abandoned you in seemingly impossible situation—Would you still believe Him?

Feeding of 5000: “I am the Bread of Life.” That night goes across to other side of lake.

Next morning: “Where is Breakfast?” Follow Him to other side of lake.

Jesus preaches the hardest sermon He ever preached: “Except you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no part in me.”

People began to leave until only the twelve were left.

► SLIDE #: John 6:66-68: From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

JULIE

► SLIDE #: Jessie

Our first-born child died in our arms. Jessie was lying on the little pillow that was her bed for the last eight months. My wife, Julie, and I watched each breath grow fainter. Around dinner time, Julie said, “Roger, she’s gone.” Putting my cheek down to her little nostrils I longed to feel her breath on my cheek—but, there was none. Somewhat in unison Julie and I said together, “Hi, Jessie. We’re your Mommy and Daddy. We love you with all of our hearts.” She was more alive now than ever before. For the first time in her short life she knew who we were.

Every parent has the fear that their baby will be one of the ones to die young. Six months into a normal pregnancy, our obstetrician said, “Your baby hasn’t grown in the last four weeks. But, don’t be alarmed, I probably mismeasured on your last visit.” But, he was wrong. Three months later, Julie gave birth to the cutest-little-full-term-baby girl. Tragically, she only weighed less than four pounds. Her genetic encoding was skewed with three chromosomes instead of the customary two in the eighteenth pair: trisomy eighteen. Trisomy twenty-one produces Down’s syndrome. Trisomy eighteen produces an adorable outside; but generates a mishmash of confused genetic instructions that jumbled her insides. One of the complications of Trisomy eighteen is a poorly formed heart not strong enough to support her tiny body. She was going to die.

SLIDE: Jessie was so weak that she could not suck from a bottle. We learned how to slide a small-plastic tube quickly past her gag reflex and into her stomach. Before pouring in the formula, we learned to first pull back on the attached syringe. If formula filled the syringe, we knew that the feeding tube was safely in her stomach. If all we got back was air, we knew that the tube had gone into a lung. So, we repeated the process.

SLIDE: Occasionally, I have heard people say, "Oh, isn't that a cute little baby? Wouldn't it be nice if it could always stay that size?" No. No. It is not nice. It is not a good thing. I had a little baby that couldn't grow up; it was awful.

Christmas stocking

ROGER:

Julie and I talked over the options. Knowing the long-term prognosis, we concurred with the physicians that when her heart failed, no heroic efforts. I said to the doctors, "If she stops breathing, please, just let her die." The most difficult prayer we ever prayed was on a Sunday evening eight months later. Totally exhausted from full-time pastoring and twenty-four-hour childcare while watching her slowly wither away, Julie and I prayed for Jessie to go ahead and die. Six days later she was in Heaven.

After the initial shock wore off and some of the intense grief and sorrow subsided, I began to realize that I was intensely angry at God: "Is this the way you treat your children? Julie and I have dedicated our lives to You! We've poured our lives into Your service. We dedicated our family to you. Is this the way you treat us? Is this the thanks we get? "

We were in the hospital for forty days. We saw some women give birth and frankly, they did not know who the daddy was. I remember complaining to God, "How come that woman gets a healthy baby? She gets to take hers home. This is not fair! Why do we get the one that is going to die?"

So, early one morning I asked: "Father, what is the purpose and meaning of our journey with Jessie."

In James 1:5, God invites us to ask for His insight when we lack wisdom in understanding a trial.

► **SLIDE #:** Three point check list:

1. Is this sickness unto death? (time for dad to die)
2. Is this sickness the result of sin?
3. Is this sickness for God's glory?

As the months dragged by, quietly, deep down in my innermost spirit I heard God speak: "Roger, do you know how much it hurts to have a little baby who cannot grow up physically?"

"Oh, yes. Yes, God, it really hurts."

He replied, "Roger, I gave you this child so that you might have a tiny-little taste of how I feel when one of my new-born-again children refuses to grow up."

► **SLIDE #:** The Greatest Tragedy In The Christian Church Is The Believer Who Refuses To Grow Up.

JULIE:

▶ **SLIDE #:** CHRISTIANS ARE NOT ALL ON THE SAME SPIRITUAL LEVEL.

▶ **SLIDE #:** John 21:15-17: When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you even like me a lot?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I like you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep.

Jesus recognized that He had some lambs. He also had some mature sheep.

▶ **SLIDE #:** Romans 14:1; 15:1: Accept him whose faith is **weak**, without passing judgment on disputable matters.... We who are **strong** ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

SLIDE#: Hebrews 5:11-14: We have much to say about this (the priesthood of Melchizedek being like the priesthood of Jesus), but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

SLIDE#: Hebrews 6:1-3: Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, 2 instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 And God permitting, we will do so.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could have learned more about Melchizedek?

ROGER

▶ **SLIDE #:** 1 John 2:12-14: I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

OVERHEAD: THE SPIRITUAL GROWTH GRAPH

NOTES for graph

Broad way

Narrow door of salvation

Chasm and cross

Line drawing from lost to infants, to children, to young men and women to mothers and fathers
Further mountain peaks

Corresponds to Romans 1-12

Many face chasm and return to the door in fright. Dangerous to remain by the door.

Story: Bronwyn Chasm-Avalanche story:

Death must always precede a resurrection

Philippians 3:10-11: I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

The cross is the tool that God uses to accomplish both our salvation and our resurrection life.

1. The cross provides our salvation from the death-curse of sin: “Jesus Christ died on the cross for me.”

Galatians 3:13: Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."

2. The cross frees us from bondage to a sin-filled life. God uses the cross to develop our God dependence while crucifying our self-reliance, self-centeredness and self-condemnation. “I died on the cross with Jesus Christ.”

Galatians 2:20: I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 6:14: May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

In other words, our sins are dealt with by the blood; we ourselves are dealt with by the cross.

SLIDE#: EXERCISE: How far along are you in your personal journey to maturity? Where are you on the spiritual growth line? Are you pleased with your progress?

JULIE:

IN ADDITION TO A PROGRESSION IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH FROM CHILDREN TO MOTHERS AND FATHERS, WE SEE HERE A DEEPENING IN OUR LOVE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

There are different levels of spiritual maturity. There are different levels of intimacy.

SLIDE#: 1 John 2:12-14:

Spiritual children: Know their sins are forgiven and who their father is.

Spiritual mothers and fathers “know Him who is from the beginning”...:know Him who is from the beginning...”

Brie raises hands in crib: “Mama.” She knew who Julie is—but hardly anything about her. She just knew that I was the one who fed her and changed her when she needed it.

Spiritual children call God, “Dada,” but really know nothing about Him.

But spiritual mothers and fathers know the depths of a relationship with God (“Him who is from the beginning”—twice!

What does it do to your heart to know that God wants a relationship with you? He wants to be intimate with you.

SLIDE#:

Our daughter Brianna almost died this fall. Brie is 27, and she is a writer for a well-known pastor in the U.S. She spends all her days writing Bible studies. Her husband is a wonderful minister as well. A year ago, the doctor gave Brie a blood pressure drug that destroyed a third of her lungs. She became a severe asthmatic. Last August, Brianna contracted pneumonia which lasted for five months. Before I came to take care of her, she was driving and had a breathing attack. She pulled off the road and had to call on her cell phone an ambulance to come get her. That’s when I decided to come and take care of her. I spend most of the next five months 1,000 miles from home in her house. Brie was on a breathing machine and was so weak she couldn’t even get off the couch. I would rush her to the hospital. One visit to the hospital, she contracted a deathly bacteria that doesn’t even grow in humans. It took the doctor two months just to find out what it was. Neck Tumor. When she couldn’t breathe, they would have to give her more and more medicine, but the medicine would make her heart beat so fast, it could make her heart burst if she had too much. As I lay in the bed next to her two months ago after a very scary hospital run, she said, “Mommy, I think I am going to die.” We both started crying and I remember saying to God “God please let it be me. Please let me suffer so that she doesn’t have to.” “Please let it be me.” Then God gave me a picture of Him crying great tears of anguish. He reminded me that He watched his son suffocate on the cross and He had to just stand there and watch. His son’s heart burst when the spear went into His side. That was His little boy, and He knew exactly how I felt. In that moment, I finally understood the depths of the suffering of my Heavenly Father. We know God best when we know Him in His pain.

Miraculous recovery

ROGER:

► SLIDE #: THE FATHER’S PURPOSE IS TO MATURE HIS CHILDREN TO LOOK LIKE JESUS.

► SLIDE #: Romans 8:28-29: And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son....

Aunt Susie is struggling with cancer. A misunderstanding spiritual child might misuse the passage by saying, "Don't worry, Aunt Susie, God promised that all things work together for good to those who love God and we both know that you love God. Therefore, be at peace, you are going to be all right!" Two weeks later, Aunt Susie is dead. All things did not work out so “good.”

Teenager story with Ken and George: “All be all right.”
He misinterpreted the verse!

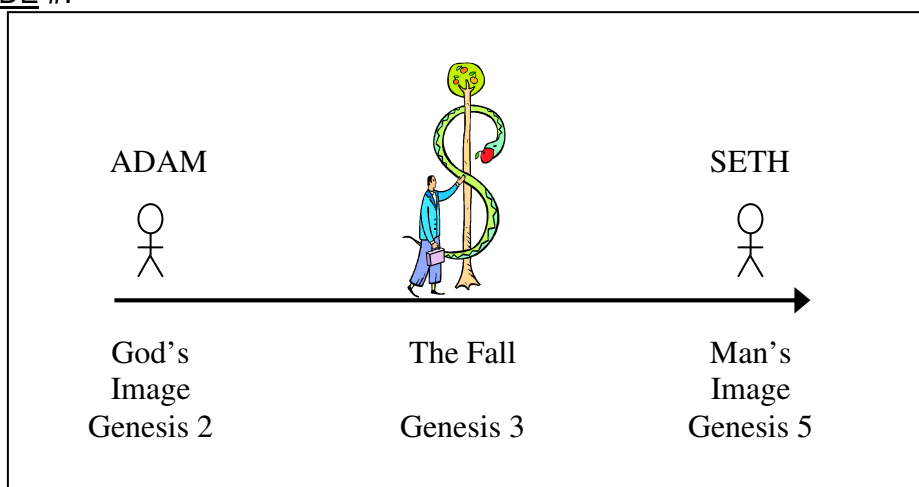
The “good” of Romans 8:28 is indelibly linked to verse 29: "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his son..."

God is not promising that George always gets well. God is not promising that Aunt Susie is always going to recover from cancer.

► SLIDE #: What He does promise is that every single experience we have is designed and allowed by the Father for the good purpose of maturing us to look like Jesus.

God's Purpose Is To Conform Us To The Image Of Christ. His Intention Is That The Image Of God Be Visible On Earth Through The Lives Of The Followers Of Christ.

► SLIDE #:

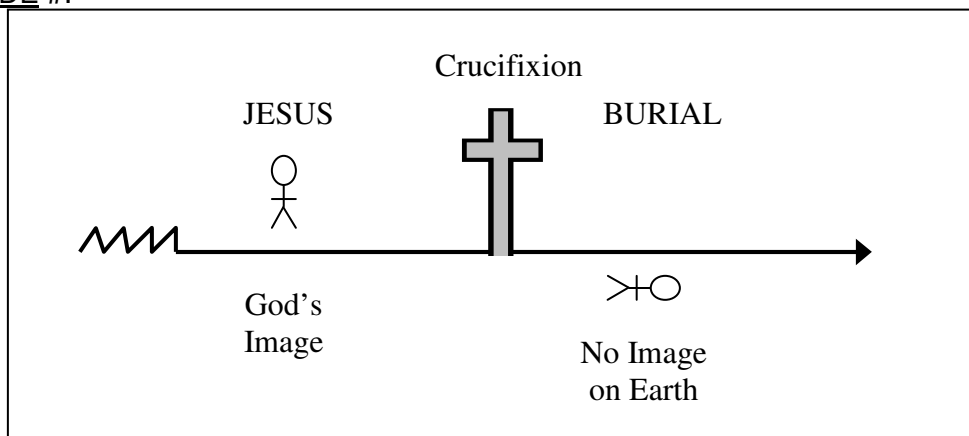


God's original intention was that mankind be a reflection of Himself on earth. Genesis 1:26: Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness,

The image of God was no longer visible on earth the moment the Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit.

Men and women would now be born in a marred caricature of God's image—Seth's—mans' image.

► SLIDE #:



It was not until the coming of Christ that once again the image of God was visible back on earth.

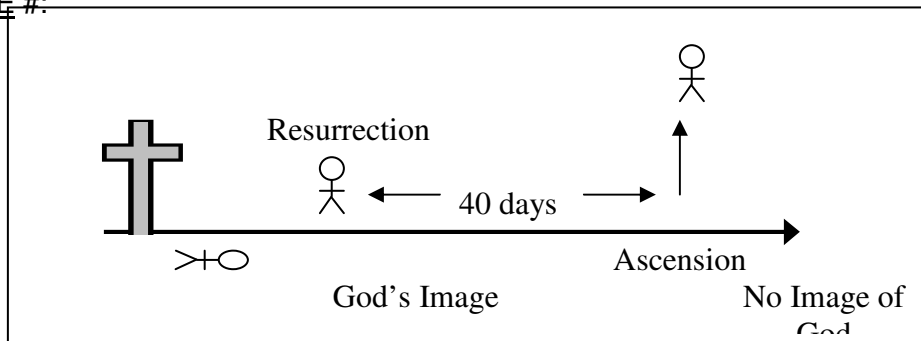
JOHN 1:14: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth"

At a historical moment in time, the "unrevealed wisdom of God," Jesus Christ, put on a body and became a man. In Jesus we see the picture of the real God in a package we can visualize.

Not only does Jesus look like God, He is God! Anyone who wanted to know what God was like needed only to gaze upon the person of Christ. He was the "spitting image" of the Father.

Then wicked men arranged for the crucifixion of Christ. During the three days He was inside the tomb the image of God was removed from sight.

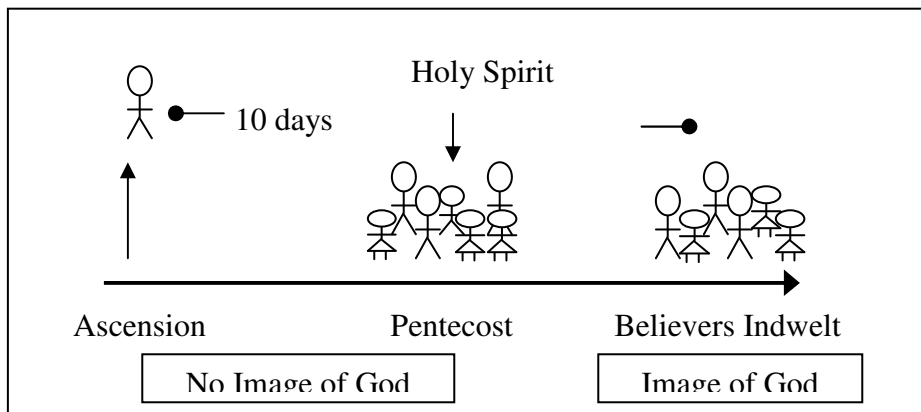
► SLIDE #:



Three days later he came back to life, and for forty days the image of God was manifested in His resurrected body upon the earth.

When He then ascended into the heavens the image of God was again no longer on earth.

► SLIDE #:



On Pentecost, ten days after the ascension, the Holy Spirit, Who is revealed in Scripture as the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9; 1 Peter 1:11) indwelt, one hundred and twenty Believers on the outside porch of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem.

Once again the image of God was back on earth—multiplied.

Jesus shared that His going away was best for everyone (John 14:16-18)! When He was in His earthly body He was limited to one place at one time. When He was in the boat calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee, He could not be talking with Nicodemus in Jerusalem, or discussing living water with the woman at the well in Samaria. His leaving would enable Him to send the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, Who could be with all of the disciples all the time. He told them to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of Jesus was no longer limited by His earthly body. The Image proliferated through the lives of indwelt believers. The image of God is now visible, not just in one locale, but in hundreds and thousands of places throughout the world—in the hearts and lives of Christ followers.

JULIE:

Let's illustrate a woman through whom the Holy Spirit put Jesus on display.

● SLIDE #: Many Americans were moved by the Vietnam-era Pulitzer Prize-winning photo of 9-year-old Phan Thi Kim Phuc (pronounced fuke), naked and horribly burned, running from a napalm attack.

But for John Plummer, pastor of Bethany Methodist church in Purcellville, Virginia, that picture had special significance.

In 1972 he was responsible for setting up the air strike on the village of Trang Bang. He was twice assured there were no civilians in the area.

● SLIDE #: In June of 1996 he saw a network news story about Kim Phuc and learned she was not only alive but living in Toronto. Plummer found out she was speaking at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.

As Kim addressed the crowd, she said that if she ever met the pilot of the plane she would tell him she forgives him and that they cannot change the past but she hoped they could work together in the future.

Plummer was able to get word to Kim that the man she wanted to meet was there. "She saw my grief, my pain, my sorrow," Plummer wrote in an article in the Virginia Advocate. "She held out her arms to me and embraced me.

All I could say was, 'I'm sorry; I'm so sorry,' over and over again. At the same time she was saying, 'It's all right; it's all right; I forgive; I forgive.'"

Plummer learned that Kim Phuc became a Christian in 1982.

Romans 8:28-29 is one of the best-loved, most-reassuring and all-time favorite promises from God. It is also one of the most misunderstood passages in the Bible.

► SLIDE #: Unfortunately, many Christians don't look much like Jesus—especially in the early stages of their spiritual journeys.

ROGER:

When I say "Wright Brothers," what is the first thing you think of?

When I say "Mahatma Ghandi," what country do you think of?

When I say "Attaturk" what do you think of? Father of modern-day Turkey.

When I say, "Vladimir Putin", what do you think of? President of Russia.

Wouldn't it be nice, when your name comes up in conversation, if their first thought was, "She reminds me a lot of Jesus," or "He's a spiritual man," or "She's a Godly woman."

► SLIDE #: Do you remind people of Jesus? Do people think of Jesus when they think of you? Do they think mother, teacher, businessman? Missionary? Christian worker? Do they think of your race or country?

The Shunamite woman was standing with her husband when the Old Testament prophet Elisha walked into town. She hadn't met him yet. But, there was something about his demeanor, the way he ministered and talked, that prompted her to say to her husband, "I perceive, that there is a man of God."

Charles Spurgeon pastored in London during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Eighteen thousand copies of his sermons were printed and distributed world-wide each week. He was one of the greatest preachers this world has ever known. His love for Jesus was transcendent. Joseph Parker also preached powerfully in London during the same time period. His sermons were collected in a series of books called, *The People's Bible*. It extends over five feet of shelf space in my library. Spurgeon's sermons, by the way, cover over twenty feet of space. When people departed after hearing Parker preach the most frequently heard comment was, "Joseph Parker is a wonderful preacher." On the other hand, it is said that the most frequently heard comment outside the walls of the Metropolitan Tabernacle after Spurgeon preached was, "Jesus Christ is a wonderful Savior."

Do you see the difference? God is really not interested in putting us on display. He's very interested that Jesus Christ is on display. As our intimacy with Him flourishes, our interests align with His.

EXERCISE: Do people think of Jesus when they think of you? Who do you know that looks the most like Jesus?

Let's pause for a moment of reflection as we conclude this session.

Consider what might be going on in the heart of God if Jesus were consistently on display in your life? Wouldn't He be pleased? Wouldn't you?

Chasm: "I am not certain I want to make the sacrifice to grow up spiritually."

TOMMY AND GARY ILLUSTRATION

Now, take time to pray to be like Christ and to know the very heart of God. Amen.
Father, Please grow me to be a spiritual mother or father at any price. The world is filled with spiritual children who need care and guidance. As you mature me to be more like Christ, place into my care those new-born children who need mentoring and nurturing care
Amen.