

SPIRITUAL

Growth



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LESSON 4

personal
spiritual growth

BIBLE STUDY

**Desire the sincere milk of the word
That you may grow thereby (1 Pet. 2:2)**

Christ Baptist Church

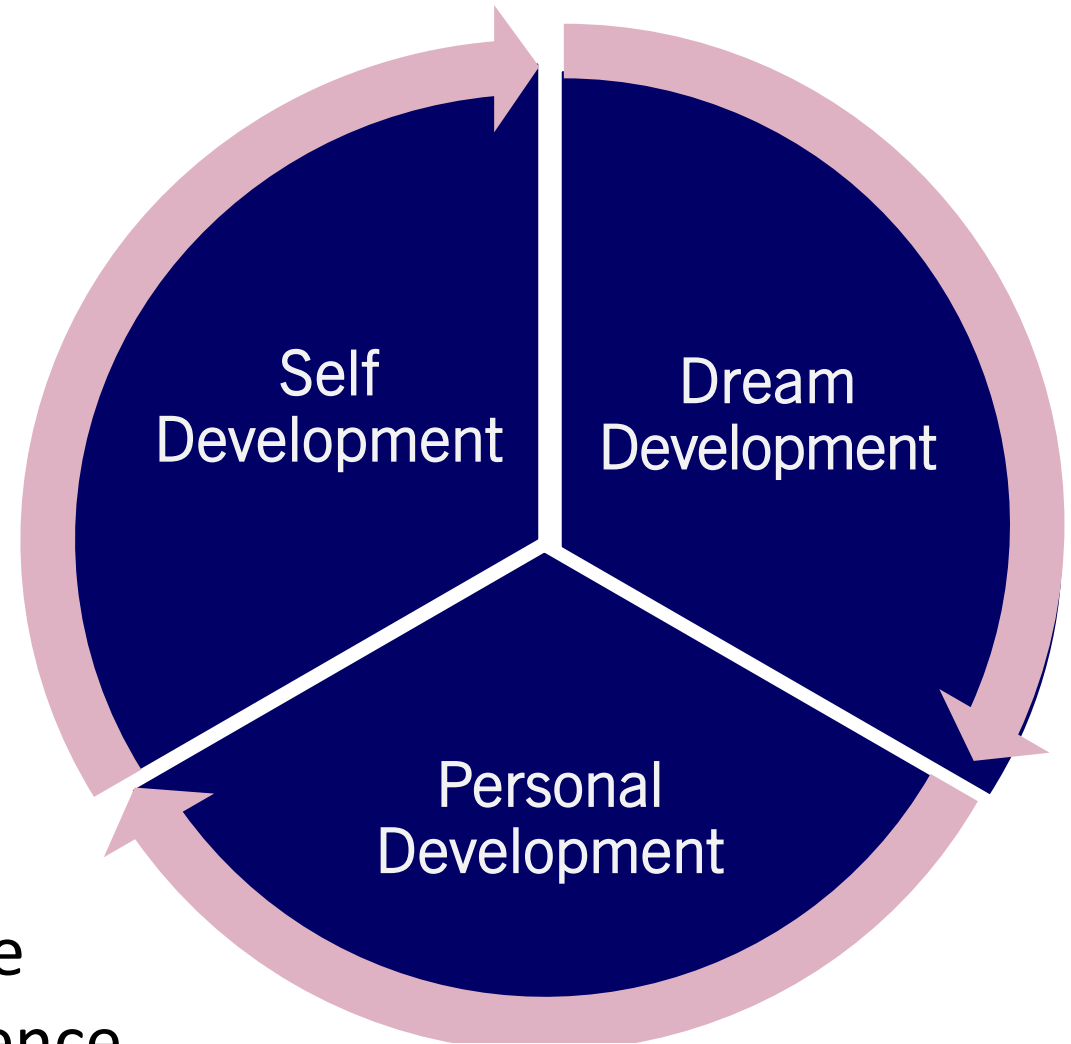
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Last week we introduced a review of three age old queries:
“Who am I ?” “Why am I here?”
“Where am I going?”

These three questions open
“**Lines of Development**” which
are represented pictorially as:

- a) **Self- development** – Where we uncover our full potential
- b) **Dream- development** – Where we learn to live life fully
- c) **Personal- development** – Where we realize our purpose to make a difference



Developing Ourselves: Who are we really?

Ever since we were young, we were told to excel in academics, focus on getting good grades and study hard for a positive outcome on our exams.

In almost all of our academic pursuits, the learning has always been more directed towards academic courses with little attention to spiritual advancement

- In fact, the importance of spiritual self-improvement often goes unnoticed.
- We either conveniently brush our shortcomings under the carpet, or are just happy being ignorant.

Truth is – we cannot run away from ourselves; and in attempting to do so, the farther we run, the deeper the grave we dig because there will come a time when all those unresolved emotions will surface, leaving us overwhelmed.

Self-improvement is not a change that occurs overnight, but one that can take months, even years to come to full maturation.

- Since it is not a haphazard venture, we must prioritize our lives for self-improvement

Self-improvement helps enhance strengths, improve mental health, and even enhances and heal relationships.

Some ways of self-improvement include simple exercises as **deliberate observation** of associative environs, **reading** , and **mediating (Psl. 1:1-2)**:

- **Psalm 1:1-2** Blessed *is* the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; ² But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.

□ This Psalm consists of two parts:

- ❖ **Part 1 – V 1-3** where David sets out to summarize the felicity (happiness) and blessedness of a godly person from God
- ❖ Here the gracious man is described both negatively ([v 1](#)) and positively ([v 2](#)).
- ❖ He is a man *who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly; but* takes wiser counsel, and walks in the commandments of the Lord his God.
- ❖ He walks in Jehovah's counsel because His footsteps are ordered by the Word of God, and not by the cunning and wicked devices of carnal men.

- ❖ Next notice, *he standeth not in the way of sinners*. His company is more choicer, for he is now quickened by the Holy Spirit, and renewed in heart.
- ❖ Further it is said, "*nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful*." He finds no rest in the atheistic scoffings of judgmental men.
- ❖ Spurgeon says "The seat of the scorner may be very lofty, but it is very near to the gate of hell; let us flee from it, for it shall soon be empty..."
- ❖ **Part 2 – V 4 -6** Where he contrasts the state and character of the ungodly, revealing their future, and in telling language, their ultimate doom.
- ❖ Whatever good thing is said of the righteous is not true in the case of the ungodly

- ❖ Interestingly in the in the opening of the Psalm, the ungodly are the beginners in evil, and are the least offensive of sinners
- ❖ The first sentence is a **negative description** of the ungodly [*they are like chaff*], and [*the wind drive them away*].
- ❖ The second is the **positive picture** [*They shall stand to be judged, along with the sinners, but they will not be acquitted*]
- ❖ "The Lord is constantly looking (*ever knowing*) on the way of the righteous, and though it may be often in mist and darkness, yet the Lord knows it.

The keys for recognizing our true-identity in self-development can be found in opening to the connectedness that resides in a heart relationship with God.

Energetically, the heart and soul connection with Divine empowerment, provides higher guidance and wisdom.

- And out of this association, self-development is the growth element.
 - We all possess the potential for the emergence of Divine usefulness
- And as we overcome obstacles that keep us stuck, our hearts open, revealing more of the truth of who we are, and accessing universal wisdom. This wisdom transforms lives as we:
- 1. Explore our spiritual core by** simply asking ourselves questions about the person you are and the things you value the most
 - These questions will lead us down a road where we will think more in-depth about ourselves and allow us to notice things that will help you achieve fulfillment.
 - 2. Look for deeper meanings.** This requires analyzing patterns which reoccur in our lives and expose areas that have the potential to alter our destiny.
 - Awareness in this area can help us achieve a happy and spiritually healthy life

3. Renew and expunge the mind. Expressing what is on our mind will help us to maintain a focused mind.

○By writing down our thoughts, we may be able to think clearer and move forward.

4. Think positively. Once we start viewing things in your life in a positive manner, we will find yourself thinking differently and refocusing your mind to a healthy place.

○By avoiding the “**negativity trap**,” we are able to re-frame our thoughts, and thereby we will notice ourselves being more relaxed.

❖**Prov. 23:6-7** Do not eat the bread of a miser, Nor desire his delicacies; For as he thinks in his heart, so *is* he. "Eat and drink!" he says to you, But his heart is not with you.

- ❖ This proverb warns against eating with a stingy person, who may appear hospitable and generous on the outside but is resentful and calculating inside
- ❖ The term “evil eye” in V 6 (KJV –miser/ NKJV) means ill-natured, grudging, and ungenerous
- ❖ *“For as He thinks in his heart”* is understood ‘For in himself he is like a wicked man.’

[His speech is not a true representation of what is really in his heart]

- 5. Switch our personal growth mindset from “Find what is wrong and fix it” to “Grow the goodness.”**
- Instead of looking strictly for what is wrong so you can improve it, see what happens when you look for what you like, love, admire and appreciate about yourself

- The goal here is to cause our relationships, or our lives to focus on betterment
- The more loving, caring, accepting, appreciative and understanding you are, the more likely that others will respond in kind.
- Align your words, thoughts and actions with what you want, instead of what you don't want.

Developing Dreams and Goals: Why are we here?

The key to understanding “why” is [creative imagination](#), enlisting the creative power of our heart's desires.

As we engage this creative power and true potential, we discover our reason for being alive, our “why.”

- **Acts 2:17** *'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams.*

- ❖ This Scripture is a transliteration of Joel 2:28 and is referring to the speaking in tongues in Acts 2:6 & 12, which Peter says fulfills Joel's message about the Spirit of prophecy
- ❖ Perhaps Peter is asserting the Jewish *qal va-homer* ("lesser to greater") argument: If the Spirit can inspire them to speak languages they do not know, how much more could he inspire them to prophesy the word of the Lord in their own language?
- ❖ Visions and dreams were especially prophetic activity, and Peter underlines this point by adding "and they will prophesy" at the end of [Acts 2:18](#) (which is not in Joel).
- ❖ The "dreams" are attributed to the "old men," as more in accordance with their years; "visions" to the "young men," as adapted to their lively minds.

❖ The three modes whereby God revealed His will under the OT (Nu 12:6), “prophecy, dreams, and visions,” are here made the symbol of the full manifestation of Himself to all His people

Developing Life Purpose: Where are we going?

Here, we might also ask “What difference do I want to make?” The big picture comes into focus as we engage our innate desire for greater life – for doing something meaningful.

• **Psl. 37:23-24** The steps of a *good* man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way. ²⁴ Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the LORD upholds *him with* His hand.

❖ Summarily the Psalmist declares that the lives of those who trust God is not a matter of reckless fate, nor fickle chance; every step is the subject of divine decree.

❖ Spurgeon says: “When this Pilot undertakes to steer their course, their vessel shall never split upon the rock, run upon the sands, or spring a leak, so as to sink in the seas.

❖ He goes on to quote an unknown author "If a man will choose God for his Friend, he shall travel securely through a wilderness that hath many beasts of prey in it; he shall pass safely through this world; for he only is safe that hath God for his guide." (Ar. Epist. 27)

❖ Please notice that in Psl. 37:4 we are bidden to delight in the Lord, and here in 37:23 God delights in us, and as here our way is his delight, so in verse thirty-four we are to "keep *his way*." CHS

Now surely, this smacks of a strong tie to the complex issue of fate/destiny—where “fate” is usually thought of as a predetermined course of events beyond human control and “destiny” is the hidden power believed to control what will happen in the future.

The typical response to a belief in fate is resignation—if we can't change destiny, then why even try? [que sera sera]. This is called “fatalism,” and it is not biblical.

Fatalism is a major premise of Islam, which demands total submission to the sovereignty of Allah. It is widely held in Hinduism, too; in fact, it is a fatalistic view of life that helps keep India's caste system in place.

Greek mythology told of the Moirai, or the Fates, three goddesses pictured as weavers of men's lives. Their decisions could not be canceled or annulled, even by other gods. Again, fatalism is not a biblical concept.

The Bible teaches that Man was created with the ability to make moral choices and that he is responsible for those choices.

The Fall of Man was not a predetermined event in which Adam and Eve were hapless victims of a Puppet-Master God.

On the contrary, Adam and his wife had the ability to choose obedience (with its attendant blessing) or disobedience (with its consequent curse).

- They knew what the result of their decision would be, and they were held accountable ([Gen. 3](#)).

We sin because we choose to, therefore we can't blame "fate," kismet, predestination, or God. [James 1:13-14](#) says, "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed."

And yet, man's free will does not negate the sovereignty of God. I.e., lest we get the wrong idea, we are not the sovereign masters of our fate.

- Only God is sovereign and His control is individually called "providence."
- He has chosen to give us a free will, and He has created a moral universe in which the law of cause-and-effect is a reality.
- But God is God alone, and there are no "accidents" in the universe as He orders the pathways that a righteous man will choose to walk in.

Fighting against the plan of God is pointless. "There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan / that can succeed against the LORD" (Prov. 21:30).

This is why the Tower of Babel was never completed (Gen. 11:1-9), why Daniel's detractors were thrown to the lions (Dan. 6:24), why Jonah spent time inside a fish (Jonah 1:17), and why we get in trouble when we sin.

To be sure, God does not take a “hands-off” approach to running the world. Even what we would normally call “chance” or “fate” is under God’s control. “The lot is cast into the lap, / but its every decision is from the LORD” (Prov. 16:33).

Even when Man’s intent is purely evil, God can still bring about His will, as in the case of those who crucified Jesus (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28).

- Prov. 21:1 “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD; / he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases”
- God worked in the hearts of the Egyptians (Exd. 12:36) and King Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:27) to bring about His purpose.

God’s plan includes a reward for those who trust in Him, and promises to glorify His children.

- **I Cor. 2:7-9** “We speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. . . . As it is written: ‘No eye has seen, / no ear has heard, / no mind has conceived / what God has **prepared [hetoimazō—made ready in advance]** for those who love him”
- Note the use of the word **destined [ordained – proorizō]** in this passage—and that it’s a destiny based on our love for the Lord.

God’s sovereignty reaches even to a plan for our individual lives as is illustrated in God’s calling of Jeremiah—before the prophet was even born.

- **Jer. 1:4-5** “The word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, / before you were born I set you apart; / I appointed you as a prophet to the nations”

- David also recognized that the Lord had a plan for him. “Your eyes saw my unformed body. / All the days ordained for me / were written in your book / before one of them came to be” (Psalm 139:16).
- Because of this knowledge, David sought the Lord’s specific guidance in many situations, such as in I Samuel 23:9-12.

In Acts 9, Jesus appears to Saul of Tarsus with an interesting statement: “It is hard for you to kick against the goads” (V 5).

Jesus obviously had a plan for Saul, and Saul had been (painfully) resisting it. Exercising our freedom against God’s plan can be painful.

Later, Jesus tells Saul that a man named Ananias would come to visit —and then Jesus tells Ananias (V 11-12)!

- Obviously, Jesus had a pre-arranged plan for Ananias as well.
- Now, Ananias didn't want to visit Saul (verse 13-14).
- He could have been like Jonah and run the other way.
- If that had been his choice, God would have had a "fish" prepared to bring him back.

• Fortunately, Ananias obeyed (V 17), helping us to understand that exercising our freedom to follow God's plan brings a blessing

In summary, the Bible teaches that God is in charge; and at the same time, He has given us the freedom to obey or disobey Him, and there are some things that God does only in answer to prayer (James 4:2).

God blesses the obedient, and He is patient with those who disobey, even to the point of seeming laxity.

He does indeed have a plan for our lives, which includes **our joy** and **His glory** both in this world and in the world to come.

- Those who accept Christ as Savior have accepted God's plan (John 14:6).

From then on, it's a step-by-step following of God's best for us, praying for His will to be done (Matt. 6:10), and avoiding the sidetrack of sin (Psl. 32:1-11; 119:59; Heb. 12:1-2).

As we open to our true potential and activate God's creative power, our dreams and inner wisdom connect us with a His higher purpose, and that is the difference we want to make.

Purpose Development brings everything together at a higher level and produces a positive impact on the world.

BIBLE ESSENTIALS

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