Do genuinely born again Christians cheat on their taxes?
Do genuinely born again Christians lie and cheat?
Are there genuinely born again Christians who hate minorities?
Are there genuinely born again Christians who indulge in pornography?
Are there genuinely born again Christians who are alcoholics and drug addicts?
Is it possible for a genuinely born again Christian man to verbally and physically abuse his wife and children?
Is it possible for a genuinely born again Christian woman to be so full of bitterness and anger that she is making herself physically ill?

From time to time something like this will surface in the church family and invariably I will hear someone say, “If they say they’re a Christian, how could they do that?” But if you doubt that born again Christians can do these things and much more, read with me James 4:1-4.

James 4:1-4

James was writing to born again Christians, messianic Jews to be exact, scattered throughout the Roman empire because of persecution.

READ JAMES 4:1-4

Some of us may shake our heads and wonder how this can be? But most all of us know genuinely born again Christians can act very badly and hold very bad attitudes because we know ourselves. Dr. Larry Crabb, a Christian counselor admits:

Well, when you talk about being honest, to begin with, it’s frightening to be honest about where I am. Just speaking about me personally, I’ve been saved now for about 50 years. I got saved when I was eight years old. I had a counselor tell a bunch of boys, eight-year-old kids, “Now look in this campfire. Ten-foot blazes.” He said, “Guys, you’ve got a choice to make. Trust in Jesus or burn forever.” That was a no-brainer to me.

It’s been 50 years since that happened. And when I get really honest about where I am, there are times I wonder if I have really changed in 50 years. Why can I still feel resentment? Why do I still treat my wife in ways I’m ashamed of?

Why is this?

Because the Christian life is, by definition, a process of re-forming our inner selves to become like Jesus. Many Christians do not understand this or do not believe it is possible to become like Jesus and do not participate in the practices that produce lasting spiritual transformation.
From birth, our character, our inner self, our soul is being formed. Even though we may not be aware of it, all of our life experiences and choices are forming who we are on the inside and how we act on the outside.

Crumbs and Bubbles

Author Gary Moon writes:

We are formed (changed, influenced, affected) by the commercials we watch on television, our work environments, conversation, and the songs we listen to on the radio. A nursing child is being formed. A teenager listening to MTV or participating in a youth group is being formed. Whether we are reading Tom Clancy or C. S. Lewis, paying income taxes, or building a Habitat for Humanity home, the raw clay of our souls is being transformed into what it will be forever.

William Barton, writing under the pen name of "Safed the Sage", gives us a great illustration of both the subtlety and power of formation. His parable goes like this:

Safed was spending time with his beloved granddaughter when the little girl had noticed that it had begun to snow.

"Grandpa, can we go outside and play in the snow?" she asked.

He could not tell her no, so the two went outside. It was not long before Safed became amazed by the words the little girl used to describe the falling snow.

"Look how it falls down in crumbs and bubbles!" she exclaimed.

"What do you mean 'crumbs' and 'bubbles'?"

"See Grandpa, it falls on your face in little bubbles and on your overcoat in crumbs."

And she was right. The snow falling on Safed's face melted quickly, resembling a bubble. The snow that found its way to his overcoat did not melt and looked like small crumbs of bread.

He marveled at the little girl's creative use of language.

They played in the crumbs and bubbles until they became tired, and they went inside to get warm by a fire. It was close to evening. After an early supper, they both went to sleep for the night.

The next morning Safed awakened to a world that was strangely silent. During the night the snow had piled up in great drifts that closed the roads and sidewalks. The whole world was still and quiet.

Then he remembered the words of his little granddaughter and how she had described the crumbs and bubbles of snow, such small and powerless things. But now these crumbs and bubbles had piled up in such great drifts that they were able to stop trucks from driving down the street.

And so it is with the crumbs and bubbles that form our lives. Taken one by one, these activities and events seem inconsequential, but over the course of a lifetime...
they pile up in drifts that form the landscape of our characters, whether we’re becoming Mother Teresa or Adolph Hitler.

So, take a moment to consider the "crumbs and bubbles" of a typical day in your life. How much time is being given to activities that help your spirit and character be formed in a positive way?

My point in sharing this story is to raise our awareness of the impact of these “crumbs and bubbles” that are shaping our lives. We are not victims of this process, in fact, we have much more control over the things that shape our lives than we realize.

When we are born again through faith in Christ we still possess the character that was formed away from God and shaped around our self-centered desires. As we said, Christians some times say of each other, “How could they do such a thing if they’re a Christian?” Well, now we know; they (we) were simply living out their character as it has been formed by their self-centeredness and by the world away from God.

When we trust in Christ are we, in that moment, completely re-formed in the likeness of Jesus?

Being born again is not being spiritually transformed; it is the absolutely necessary starting point. Being born again connects us to God and His resources for spiritual transformation. Just as every parent is excited to see their baby grow so God’s desire is for each of us to grow into Christlikeness after our spiritual birth.

This truth needs to permeate our thinking:

**God’s goal for me is to become like Jesus**

What does it mean to become like Jesus? It means that we are changed such that we think the way Jesus thinks; we feel the way Jesus feels; we choose the things Jesus chooses; we use our bodies to serve God just as Jesus did. Socially, to become like Jesus is to treat people in the same manner Jesus treated various kinds of people. To become like Jesus is to center our lives on Him and find life in Him.

Turn with me to Galatians 4:8-20.

**Galatians 4:8-20**

Jewish teachers were troubling the predominantly Gentile churches of ancient Galatia (modern day Turkey). They taught that in order to be reconciled to God, Gentiles needed not only to believe in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus but also were required to keep the Law of Moses. In this letter, Paul forcefully argues that salvation is by faith alone in the finished work of Christ and not by the keeping of the Law (Gal. 2:15-16).

READ GALATIANS 4:8-20

In this passage, Paul expresses both his consternation and concern. Paul writes the Galatians that he is in anguish on their behalf…

...until Christ is formed in you!
Spiritual transformation into Christlikeness proceeds by faith just as salvation comes by faith. Paul was in anguish that the legalism they were being taught would stymie their spiritual transformation into Christlikeness. Becoming like Jesus does not come about through legalism or through our will power alone.

Attempting to live the Christian life by our will power alone has lead some of us to believe that we really cannot become like Jesus.

For instance, we read about love in 1 Corinthians 13 and feel convicted. So we decide we need to be more loving… which lasts right up to the point where the guy in the car next to us cuts us off! We try again and again with the same results. We conclude it doesn’t work; we can’t become like Jesus in this life. We remain nothing more than a sinner saved by grace.

This is because we don’t under the process of becoming like Jesus. Spiritual transformation comes about by faith, by grace, by truth, by God’s power and by our involvement.

There is an orderly process to becoming like Jesus. There are specific actions we take that will bring about change. But no one can force us to do the things that will change us to become like Jesus.

One thing is certain, spiritual transformation happens from the inside out. We will discover that the secret of becoming like Jesus is to realize that if you change the inside, the outside will follow.

The secret of becoming like Jesus is to realize that if I change the inside, the outside will follow.

This process of becoming like Jesus is what we will be thinking about for the next several weeks. Becoming like Jesus and making disciples is one and the same thing. We’re really thinking about the third goal of our mission statement to:

Love God, Love Others, Make Disciples

Our key passage will be Colossians 3:1-17.

Colossians 3:1-17

READ COLOSSIANS 3:1-17

I encourage you to read this over several times this coming week. I will be memorizing this passage and would love it if you joined me.

The key thoughts I hope you will come away with from this study are these:

- Crumbs and Bubbles
- God’s goal for me is to become like Jesus
- The secret of becoming like Jesus is to realize that if I change the inside, the outside will follow.