

Who Will You Be?

Blake Stanley

Who are you now compared to who you were 10 years ago? You are different. Sure, there are a lot of similarities but you have changed. You have experienced events that have changed you. You have made decisions that have made you a different person. Speaking for myself, 10 years ago, I had no kids. Today, I have four. Along the way I have buried several family members and experienced the sudden and unexpected loss of a dear friend. In no way are my experiences unique. You too have experienced joy and pain. We cannot have those experiences without change.

In what ways have we changed? Have we grown in our faith or have we regressed? The answer is the result of decisions we made along the way. It is true, events do shape us, but ultimately how they shape us is up to us. The same event can shake our faith or make it stronger. It can break us down or build us up. It can cause bitterness or it can expand our capacity of finding joy in all of life's trials. The difference is in our response.

There is some value in looking back at life this way. Self-reflection can be revealing. Think of Solomon in Ecclesiastes, David after Nathan exposed his sin, Saul on the Damascus road. We see these moments of reflection in their lives. Solomon writing the book of Ecclesiastes. David writing Psalm 51. Saul presumably reflecting on what he had done and what he would do as he sat blind, not drinking or eating for three days (see Acts 9:9). Like these men, by reflecting in this way, we can see the opportunities we missed, the things we need to improve upon, the time well spent or ill spent, the mistakes made and lessons learned. The value of reflection is realized when we allow it to change how we act going forward. We are who we are today. We cannot change the choices of the past that brought us to the present. What we can do is work to mold who we will be in the future.

Regardless of where we find ourselves today, we continually have the responsibility to change. In Ephesians 4, as Paul outlines the work of the church, he says the church works together, "till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (verse 13). God expects us to change. He has given us the unattainable aim of reaching the measure of Christ. To work with each other and His Spirit to create a metamorphosis of our habits, our actions, our thoughts and even our character. To be more like Christ. That is our aim from the moment we commit to Christ to the moment we go to meet him.

Our work towards this goal does not only impact ourselves. Our growth is not meant for ourselves. We are to grow so that we are better equipped to equip others for the work of the church, which is to equip the saints. God provided a cycle of growth within the church. When I was a youth in Christ, there were those who I leaned on. They worked to ground me in the faith. They helped to provide what was needed for me to mature, grow, remain faithful, and they were there to help me when I strayed and failed. I would expect all of us had those people in our lives, and God expects us all to grow, so we can fill that role for another person. Each stage of life offers us opportunities to help build up those around us.

Growth for this work does not happen without active work on our part. We have to want to change. We have to look at the challenges life brings us as opportunities to grow. Not just the tragic events in our life. Those have a way of sharpening our senses, focusing our attention and drawing us closer to the Lord. What about the other times when things are going well? How do we take advantage of the relatively calm times to grow?

The Psalmist of Psalm 1 paints the picture of a man who delights in and meditates upon the law of Lord as a tree planted by the waters, continually drawing on the strength the word provides. Paul instructed Timothy to "give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (1 Timothy 4:13). Making time for those moments when we can open up the word and pray to the Lord is so critical. With each moment of attention, we are further building on our faith. Over the course of years, the continual attention to and drawing on the word add up to large amounts of time in study and prayer. It will transform us closer to Christ and make a difference in our ability to work in the Lord's body.

If the Lord continues to bless you with life, who will you be ten years from now? It is an impossible question to answer, but what we do know is that ten years from now we will be the product of our experiences and - more so - of the decisions we made along the way. We should keep that in mind as we make decisions and face the trials of this life.