

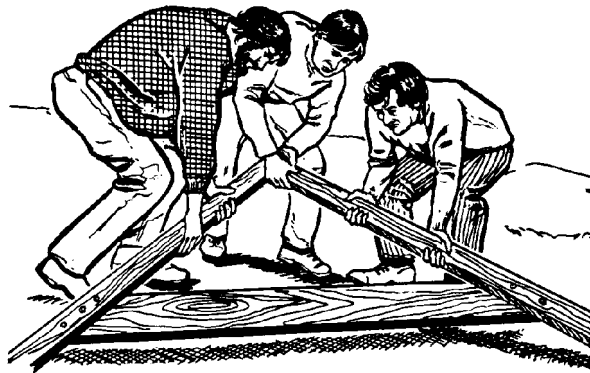
Lesson
3

Does God Expect Too Much?

. . . His plan is so big!

Sam was seventeen years old and away from home for the first time. He had finished several years of school in his small hometown. Now he had come to the university in the capital of his country. His first day in class was almost frightening; there were as many students in one class as had been in his whole school back home. Besides this, the professor began to list what she expected the students to do during the coming year—the reading assignments, the written work, the tests, the oral reports, the projects. It looked impossible! Sam became very discouraged.

What Sam did not realize was this: not everything was due that day; in addition, the professor would help. That was what she was there for—to help Sam reach those learning goals. Sam would make gradual progress. Each new lesson would be built on the knowledge gained in the former lesson. Eventually the goals would be reached.



Sometimes when we begin to view the great plan of God, we may feel like Sam did. It looks *too* big; it even looks impossible. It *is* impossible to do in our natural strength. But with God all things are possible. In this lesson we will study what God expects of us, but we will also see what He will do for us and through us as we seek to reach the goals He has set for our lives.

In this lesson you will study . . .

God Expects Great Things
God Gives Powerful Help
God Doesn't Stop When We Fail

This lesson will help you . . .

- Describe what God expects of us.
- Explain how we can fulfill God's expectations.
- Explain why our failures do not destroy God's design for us.

GOD EXPECTS GREAT THINGS

Objective 1. *Recognize reasons why we need God's help to reach the goals He has set for us.*

You have an exciting future as you cooperate with God in His plan. His design for you is good, and it is eternal. Let us think together of some of the goals God has set for us that are part of His design. We will look especially at those goals that God wants all of us to reach. As God helps us to be successful in reaching these, He is able to accomplish His plan for our individual lives also.

Transformation

Romans 12:2 tells us that we are to be completely transformed. I think most people desire to be transformed. But instead they may change something only on the outside as they try to copy or imitate other people or some ideal. Is this all God plans for us? Does He want us to be just outward copies of someone else who may be good? It would not only be difficult to do this but maybe even impossible. And besides, what value would it have if we were to succeed? You have been thinking about how big God's plan is; are we to be mere *copies*? The idea doesn't seem to fit.

Transformation is more than imitation or copying. Transformation is a key to the rest of God's plan. Without it, too much of what God plans for us is just out of reach.

The Pharisees only copied religious behavior; they had never been transformed. Notice how Jesus speaks about them in Matthew 15:7-8. It is no wonder that they could not love their enemies. We do not naturally love our enemies either, nor do we bless those who curse us. Looking at the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), we see so many commands of Christ that are absolutely impossible . . . *unless* we are transformed.

Maybe you have already confronted some of the "impossibilities" that God seems to expect of you.



For You To Do

1 Certain behaviors are described in the Scripture verses referred to below (left). Read each verse. Then match it to the kind of person described (right).

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| a Matthew 5:40 | 1) A person who tries to copy |
| b Matthew 5:44 | 2) A person who is transformed |
| c Matthew 6:2 | |
| d Matthew 6:5 | |
| e Luke 6:36 | |

Obedience

In the last lesson we thought about the fact that God expects obedience. When we desire to be obedient, and *He* desires us to be obedient, what could ever stop us? In fact, many things do.

Some commands in Scripture are active; that is, they command us to *do something*. Others are passive; that is, they command us to *allow something to be done to us* or to experience something. We can see that it is impossible for us to obey the passive commands by ourselves. But the active commands are impossible to obey as well, for they ask us to do what goes against our natural desires.

Even after we have been transformed we still find that it is not always easy to do what is right. At the same time that we are making the effort to do right, to match the standard set by Jesus Christ, we also experience all sorts of other powers. These seem to lead us into wrong action or attitudes.



For You To Do

- 2 Read Romans 7:21-23 and write an answer to the following questions in your notebook.
- a What was the conflict the apostle Paul was experiencing?
 - b What explanation did he give for this situation?

Paul did not create this law; he observed it working in himself. Simple obedience to what he knew was right and desired to do was frustrated by this “law.”

Growth

Besides transformation and obedience, it is clear that God also expects growth. He does not want us to remain spiritual “babes” but to grow into “childhood” and finally to become “adults.” As we grow, we begin to decide what is most important so we can make the right choices. This gives us stability. As we grow, we not only learn more, but we also go from receiving to giving. We go from always learning to taking responsibility to teach. Yet now we are talking about taking the first steps in discovering God’s plan; teaching others may look like one of those unreachable goals!



For You To Do

- 3 Read in Ephesians the verses referred to below. Circle the letter in front of each reference to a Scripture passage that describes the process of spiritual growth.
- a) 2:4-5
 - b) 4:13-15
 - c) 5:1-2
- 4 One of the following statements is the best explanation of why we need God’s help to do what He expects of us. Circle the letter in front of it.
- a) New believers cannot expect God to tell them what to do.
 - b) We live in a world in which most people are opposed to doing God’s will.
 - c) Our natural desires do not lead us toward what God wants us to do.
 - d) It is hard for us to really understand what God expects of us.

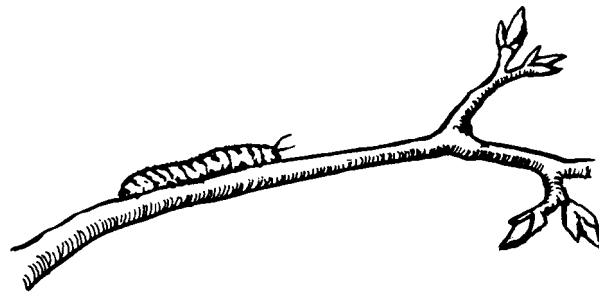
GOD GIVES POWERFUL HELP

Objective 2. *Recognize a description of God’s part and our part in our spiritual development.*

Does God expect too much? Will it be possible to satisfy Him? Will He help?

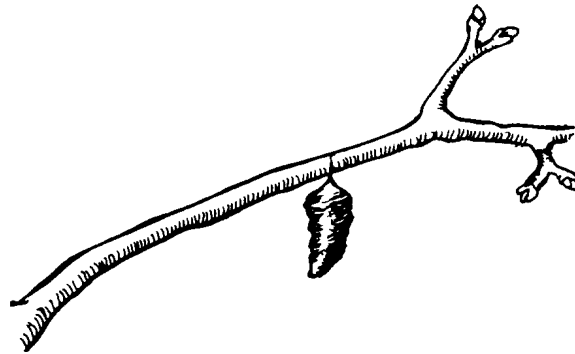
We have just mentioned some of the goals God has set for us. They are not really as different from each other as they appear to be. They show us the kind of work God wants to do in us from various points of view.

We have emphasized that in the design and plan of God, these goals are fundamental and expected of all. What does God do to help us reach them? Let us take some that we have studied and see what God does to help us follow His plan.

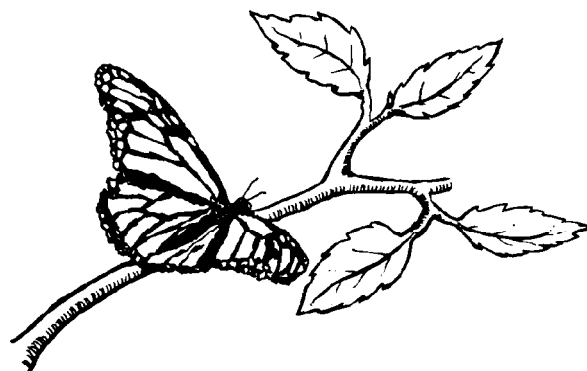


God Changes Us

One of the great mysteries of nature is how a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. A caterpillar appears to be related more to a worm than to anything else. It crawls and could not fly if it wanted to. How could it ever be thought of as beautiful? Yet in the structure of its life, God has designed change. For while it starts out crawling, God's intention is for it to fly. How does this change happen?



It “dies” as a caterpillar when it goes into its cocoon so that it will come out as a butterfly. *It doesn't learn to fly.* The caterpillar crawled by nature; the butterfly flies by nature. This transformation, called *metamorphosis*, is not the result of the caterpillar's effort to copy the butterfly. It is the result of inner change.





For You To Do

- 5 Read in your Bible the Scripture passages referred to below. Which one is the best description of the metamorphosis that a Christian experiences?
- a) Galatians 2:19-20
 - b) Ephesians 1:9-10
 - c) 2 Peter 1:10

The metamorphosis of the caterpillar could really illustrate all that God is doing in us. Metamorphosis is the idea given in Romans 12:1-2 concerning the change that God expects. And notice—it can take place only when a new life principle is in us. As we have said, the caterpillar does not make an effort to change itself. The life God has put into it is what changes it into a butterfly. In a similar way we are changed as we yield to the Spirit whom God has placed in us.



For You To Do

- 6 Read Romans 12:1-2 and write an answer to the following questions in your notebook.
- a) What two things are we asked to do?
 - b) What are we to allow God to do?

God's Power Works in Us

It is easy to see God's part in the passive commands when our task is that of cooperation. But what of those things that God tells *us* to do? Do we depend on our strength to accomplish them? In Ephesians 4:17–6:20, for example, we are told of many practical ways of expressing our Christianity, our “Christlikeness.” It would seem that these things at least are left for us to do. But even that would be expecting too much on our own strength.

In Ephesians 2:10 we read that God has made us and that we have been created in Jesus Christ to do good deeds. These good deeds are the things named in Ephesians 4:17–6:20. Then in Ephesians 3:20, we are told that God “by means of his power working in us is able to do so much more than we can ever ask for, or even think of.”

Think about that. Our asking comes nowhere near the limit of His power and ability, and that power works *within us*.

We mentioned the “law” that worked in Paul (and has worked in each one of us). It prevented his perfect obedience. If this “law” is that strong, could it limit God's plan for us? Paul, at least at one point in his life, felt that this “law” effectively kept him from doing what he knew he should do. But the answer to this dilemma is given in Romans 8:14. The effect of the “law” that causes disobedience is canceled; there is “no condemnation” (Romans 8:1). Instead, the power of God works in us.

God *did* help by sending His Son; He *does* help by the power of the Holy Spirit. God's plan for you is not something He wants just you to do. Actually, it is what He wants to do *with* you and *through* you.

The Bible gives us a key idea to help us understand the balance between our effort to work out God's design in our lives and the help we can rely on God to give. This idea is stated in Philippians 2:12-13:

Keep on working with fear and trembling to complete your salvation, because God is always at work in you to make you willing and able to obey his own purpose.



For You To Do

7 Below are three statements about how we can reach the goals God has set for us. Circle the letter in front of the one that is the best description.

- a) We decide to turn away from following the world. As we do this, we transform our minds so we can obey God. By trying hard, we have success in reaching the goals.
- b) We offer ourselves to God and seek to obey Him. At the same time, God's power works in us to transform us. Together we move toward the goals He has set.
- c) God takes control of our minds and makes us willing to do what is right. Because the goals He has set are difficult, He does all the work in helping us to reach them.

GOD DOESN'T STOP WHEN WE FAIL

Objective 3. *Choose reasons why we can be confident that our failures will not destroy God's design for us.*

In understanding God's plan and following His direction, there is one aspect that we do not like to face: sometimes we fail. Perhaps this happens because of ignorance or weakness. Sometimes even our motives are mixed. In spite of the "power that worketh in us" (Ephesians 3:20, KJV), in spite of the fact that "God is always at work" in us (Philippians 2:13), we *still* fail.

Failure. God has an answer for sin—forgiveness, new birth. But if we fail after the new birth, then what? Does our failure change God's plan? Do we then settle for "second best"? Does God have several designs for our lives in case we ruin one? Does our failure take Him by surprise? Does He then leave us to work out our own problems?

Let us look at some facts that will help us understand failure—why we fail and how God responds to it. This will help us find answers to these questions.

Our Past Failures Affect Us

Much of our feeling and emotion is shaped by our own history. For example, if a special holiday is celebrated in a happy way year after year, we will begin to feel a certain way as that day approaches. Some holidays are days of feasting. Families and friends exchange gifts. Houses are decorated. There is joy and singing. As these holidays approach, all the memories of former celebrations come back. People begin to have a certain feeling. And that feeling starts to affect how they think.

Sometimes failure shapes our feelings in a similar way. We have a history of sin before Christ comes into our lives. When circumstances arise that are like those in which we have failed before, the memory of those failures comes back. Our feelings then make us think a certain way. Satan may use these memories and feelings to tempt us, and we may behave as we did before.



For You To Do

8 Which of the following incidents is an example of how a person's history of failure can affect how he or she feels?

- a) Before Teresa became a believer, she had friends who did not live right. In order to keep their friendship, Teresa did the things they did. Now that she is a believer, she no longer does those things. Her new friends encourage her to live right.
- b) Before Jesse became a believer, he often became angry with people who had ideas that were different from his own. Recently he has met a Christian brother who has disagreed with him. Jesse finds that he is beginning to have feelings of anger toward this brother.

So though we do not, in fact, *have* to sin after we are saved, at times we *do*. Our habits are not always right; certainly our environment is under the curse. We fail because we are still human, still tempted, still living in a fallen world, still growing, still being changed.



God Knows About Our Failures

God knows all of our failures. It is important to realize that we never take Him by surprise. No circumstance in our life does; nothing that touches us does. If our sin doesn't surprise God, if He knows even our failure before we experience it, then we can be sure He has taken it all into account.



For You To Do

9 At the end of Lesson 1, you were asked to meditate on Psalm 139. This psalm reassures us that God does know all about us. Read verses 2-4 and 11-16 again. Circle the letter of each TRUE statement.

- a God's knowledge of us begins at our birth.
- b Some of our thoughts are not known to God.
- c All of our actions are known to God.

God's Grace Overcomes Our Failures

We have said that God knows about our failures. As we look at the fact of failure, what provisions do we have to give us confidence that God's grace will continue to work in our lives?

First, forgiveness is available; this is God's way of separating us from our sin. In 1 John 1:9 we read that God has promised to forgive us when we confess our sins to Him. God's plan for our lives is never based on our ability to be perfect but on *His* knowledge and ability.

Second, God's power is available. All the power God used to bring you into salvation continues to be available after your salvation. God did not wait until after you were saved to determine what would be His plan for your life. Your experience of salvation marked the day of your choice, not His. As His child, you can be sure that His power is available to you now.

This power of God is effective. In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 the apostle Paul described an experience he had. He “failed” to receive the deliverance he prayed for. But through this experience Paul learned a lesson that shows us how effective God’s power is.



For You To Do

10 Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 and answer in your notebook the following questions.

- a** What did Paul learn about God’s power through the experience he described?
- b** As a result of what he learned, what was Paul able to do?

Furthermore, God’s power works beyond our failures. The real issue we often face when we confront failure is this: *Does failure mean I can have only God’s “second best”? Have I ruined His perfect plan for me?*

God taught the prophet Jeremiah a lesson that helps us deal with this issue. After seeing the failure of the nation of Israel, Jeremiah was sent to a potter’s house (Jeremiah 18:1-10). He watched the potter take the clay and shape it. But in the middle of shaping, a “failure” was found in the clay. Instead of throwing the clay away or making a flawed vessel, the potter reshaped the clay into a vessel that was perfect.

Jeremiah began to understand how God regarded the failure of Israel. God did not want to reject them but to reshape them.

In God’s knowledge your imperfections are known as well as your strong points. God will *still* make you into the vessel that pleases Him. The ingredient He looks for in the clay of your life is that “Christ is in you” (Colossians 1:27). Failure, even sin, does not change the fact that Christ lives in you.

Chapter 11 of Hebrews lists the names of many people who are regarded as heroes of the faith, worthy of fame. Their lives certainly cannot be described as following God’s “second best” design for them. But look at the list. If you were to read the stories of the people who are named, you would realize this: these people knew what failure was. They were “failures”—but heroes.



For You To Do

11 We have said we can be confident that our failures and weaknesses will not destroy God’s design for us. Circle the letter in front of each statement that *gives a reason* why this is so.

- a) Everyone has times of failure.
- b) God’s design is based on our ability to follow it completely after we have accepted Christ.
- c) God made His design for us, knowing about our failures ahead of time.
- d) Our failures and sins do not keep God’s power from working in us.
- e) People often fail because they have a history of failure.
- f) God has a “second best” plan for those who fail.

Like the people listed in Hebrews 11, you too can experience God's perfect will for you though you may have times of failure. Jesus says to you as He said to the apostle Paul, "My power is strongest when you are weak" (2 Corinthians 12:9). His power can overcome your failures and make it possible for you to fulfill His design for you.



Check Your Answers

- 6 a** We are to (1) offer ourselves as living sacrifices and (2) not allow ourselves to be conformed to this world.
b We are to allow God to transform us inwardly by changing our mind.
(Your answers should be similar.)
- 1 a** 2) A person who is transformed
b 2) A person who is transformed
c 1) A person who tries to copy
d 1) A person who tries to copy
e 2) A person who is transformed
- 7 b)** We offer ourselves to God and seek to obey Him. At the same time, God's power works in us to transform us. Together we move toward the goals He has set.
- 2 a** He wanted to do what was good, but he actually did what was wrong.
b He said there was a law at work in his body. It made him a prisoner to sin.
- 8 b)** Before Jesse became a believer, he often became angry with people who had ideas that were different from his own. Recently he has met a Christian brother who has disagreed with him. Jesse finds that he is beginning to have feelings of anger toward this brother.
- 3 b)** 4:13-15
- 9** Statement **c** is true.
- 4 c)** Our natural desires do not lead us toward what God wants us to do.
- 10 a** Paul learned that God's power was strongest when he was weak.
b Paul was able to rejoice in his weaknesses because it was then he experienced God's power the most.
(Your answers should be similar.)
- 5 a)** Galatians 2:19-20
- 11 c)** God made His design for us, knowing about our failures ahead of time.
d) Our failures and sins do not keep God's power from working in us.