

# Perception

## *Fundamentally Different*

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

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Every so often in life, you and I are given the opportunity to start over. Whether it's a new job, you might have a move to a new city, maybe it's a new year, just the changing over of the calendar on January 1st. You and I are given the opportunity to start over. If you're a golfer, there's always a new nine holes to start. Maybe you transferred to a new school. Maybe it's simply a graduation from a school and starting the next stage of your life.

When I graduated from high school and went off to college, I took this opportunity to change and to start over. As many of you already know my story, I went into junior high and high school as this shy, awkward kid who had zero confidence. I let my mother dress me and do my hair. I didn't really care. And so this is what my middle school picture looked like. And I was the stereotypical nerd, you know scrawny, glasses, socially awkward, maybe a little book smart.

And add to the fact that when I went to high school, I was a Christian, the first few years of high school weren't easy. It didn't matter what I did to try to lose that stereotype. I would always be viewed as the nerd by my classmates. And so as I was graduating high school and I was preparing to head off to college, I made the decision that this was my chance to change everybody's perspective of me. And so I changed my hairstyle, I bought some stylish clothes, and I continued to work out and exercise so that I wouldn't be scrawny anymore.

As a part of this change, I also decided I needed a new name, much to my mom's chagrin. There was just something about introducing myself as Joel that never went well. People always heard Joe and not the L. And so then I had to say, "No, it's not Joe. It's Joel," which is never fun to say. It always sounded weird and just added to the perception. Then there was the problem of trying to pronounce it the first time so that they would hear it, and I would say, "No, Joel." And they would say, "Joel?"

No, not Joel." So I remember sitting around a campfire with my friends after graduating high school and brainstorming ideas of new names. One of my friends knew that my middle name was Ronald, cue the Ronald McDonald jokes, of course. And they suggested, "Why don't you go by J.R. for Joel Ronald?" And no one had to know what that stood for. Just introduce yourself as J.R., and so that was perfect. So I went into my freshman year with new hair, new clothes, a new image, and I introduced myself as JR.

As crazy as it sounds, with a new name, I felt like a different person. If you look closely in the picture, you can see I even put on a fake earring for my freshman year picture. It all worked. It really did. Even though I was the same person on the inside, I was still that same nerdy kid. People's perception of me changed because of what they saw on the outside. Now, if you have noticed, I've mostly reverted back to that nerd of my freshman year of high school.

I've now had the same hairstyle for a little over 25 years. I'm back to wearing jeans and khakis and t-shirts and polos. And yes, mom, I am back to Joel. That's my name. Which still does drive me crazy when I go to the restaurants and they want to ask like, "Who is this order for?" And I have to say Joel, and I don't know what it is about this generation, but they can't spell it right. They spell it J-O-L-E if they actually get the L.

Sometimes they put Joe, and sometimes I'll try to say Joel, and they say, "Joel," and I say, "No, Joel." So I'm still considering going back to JR, but just for that purpose, all right? Today, we're going to continue in our series that we've been calling perspective. And we will see that God actually gave many people in Scripture different names and also gave them the chance to start over. They were given a new beginning because that's the God that we serve.

He gives us a chance to have a new beginning. And again, He even gave some of them new names. But even if they weren't given a new name, their perception of the world and their perspective of the world would change forever. And so should ours. So let me pray and then we'll jump into the Scriptures. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for today. Thank you for the opportunity to gather together and thank you that you love us enough, that you give every one of us this chance to start over, to have a new beginning, to be radically transformed from the inside out when we proclaim you as Lord.

And so my heart is that you would speak to us today and you would draw us closer to you. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. When you surrender your life to Jesus, Scripture says that you and I receive a new identity. How we view ourselves and even how others view us begins to change. I've noticed that it's not something that we necessarily demand or even something that we ask for, but it's something that naturally happens.

When we allow God to take control of our lives, our identity begins to be found in Him instead of in ourselves. Scripture says we are a new creation. And so we naturally gain a new identity. And this change in Scripture was so obvious that many times God would give people new names. If you think about Scripture, you have Abram who went to Abraham. You have Sarai who went to Sarah. You have Jacob, who would then be known as Israel.

You have in the New Testament Simon, who would now be called Peter the Rock, and you had Saul who changed to Paul. Their identities changed. These men were no longer viewed because of their career or their status or their achievements or even these relationships. These women were now viewed and had a new identity because of who God is. And our identities change as well. We still have adjectives that others will use to define us, but at the top of our list is a new adjective.

Once we confess Christ, it is number one and it can never be replaced. John 1:12 says, "Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God." That is our new title. We will forever now be known as Child of God. And nothing is more important than that. No other adjective or title that we will ever carry in our lives can replace the fact that we are a child of God.

We are a child of the king. Everything else takes second place or even further down. You no longer are going to be defined by your political party, by father or mother, being called a son or a daughter, a husband, a wife, a brother, a sister, a friend. No longer should you and I first and foremost be defined by our occupation, whether you're a pastor, a doctor, a teacher, a coach, a farmer.

No longer should you and I be defined by our net worth or if you're an athlete or you're an actor or you're a musician. And as someone who is now what I would call middle-aged, I have grown to love the fact that my new identity in Christ will never change or fade because every other title eventually will fade. You will lose your athletic ability, and it's hard to take. Your net worth can change overnight. Your friends will change.

You will change jobs or eventually retire. And everyone you love and everyone who loves you will eventually pass away because we don't stay here forever. Not only does our identity change, but Scripture also says our purpose for living changes as well. When you and I surrender to Jesus and we proclaim Him as Lord of our lives, our purpose for living I've seen it happen both ways either gradually changes over time or it flips in a moment.

It is amazing to watch somebody's transformation take place when they confess Christ for the first time and maybe they're walking down life on a certain road and then they have this encounter with Christ and it's just this radical transformation. But even for that person, there is this gradual shift towards being a part of God's kingdom

and their purpose and perspective changing because those who follow Jesus now live for His glory and His kingdom. Followers of Jesus truly have a different purpose for life.

Scripture says that we are now called to seek first His kingdom. Matthew 6:33 says, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Of course, we still have jobs. We still have friends. We still have fun and enjoy life. We still go through the same life that everybody else does, but our top priority has changed. We now are seeking His kingdom and His righteousness.

Life becomes less about what I want to do and more about what God wants me to do. That's a big change. Because before Christ, we often live for success. We live for comfort. We live for possessions or personal happiness. But once we come to know Jesus, our lives become about His glory and His kingdom. Please don't hear me saying this means we always get it right.

We don't always get it right, but our purpose for life truly has changed. Another part of this transformation is once we have experienced Christ, we have a desire to share Him with those that we love and care about, including our neighbors and our friends and others. We desire to make disciples and to love well. Matthew chapter 28 verses 19 through 20. This was a command that we are given from Jesus.

He said, "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always to the very end of the age." The life of a follower of Jesus is meant to be fundamentally different from anybody else's because of who they belong to and what shapes their priorities, what shapes their values, and what shapes their purpose.

Our purpose changes because what matters to us most changes. Followers of Jesus also receive a transformed heart. When we confess Jesus as our personal Savior, when we hand over control of our lives to Him, Scripture says that we receive the Holy Spirit. When you give your life to Jesus, you're basically saying, "God, I allow you to pour your Spirit into me." And when we receive the Spirit, Scripture says that we receive the fruits of the Spirit.

We begin to change from the inside out. And the fruits of the Spirit, according to Galatians, are love and joy and peace and patience and kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. And Paul says, "Against such things, there is no law." Now, of course, those of us that have walked this road, even though we recognize these fruits are given to us through the Spirit, these fruits do need to be planted, and they need to be watered. And if they are, they will grow in us.

They begin to overtake our natural human responses. Things like wanting retaliation, bitterness, pride, hate, and selfishness. Those things begin to fade, and they begin to be replaced by these fruits of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

And some people will say, "But Pastor, is there ever a day on this side of eternity that those old responses that I used to have will completely disappear?" And the only answer I can say is, "I'm not sure, but it hasn't happened yet for me." We still fight that, don't we? We still fight that old way of life where there is that bitterness and that pride and that hate and that selfish desire. We still fight that, but our lives do gradually begin to become more defined by love and by compassion and by mercy and by grace.

And it stays true. It's just a truth of life that what you water and what you tend is what will grow. If you continue to water and tend bitterness and selfishness, that's going to grow. But if you will invest in love and joy and peace and patience, that will grow in your life. And as the Holy Spirit works in our lives, we will begin to show fruit that mirror and reflect who Jesus was.

Galatians 2:20, Paul says it this way, "I have been crucified with Christ." He actually viewed himself as being crucified with Christ. Therefore, he said, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body. I

live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." You see, as Christians, we also have a different source of hope. When the world around us seems to be falling apart, we stand on the hope of Jesus.

He becomes our firm foundation in the storms of life. He is the rock upon which we stand. Paul says to the Philippians in chapter 3:20, "But our citizenship is in heaven, and so we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ." We know this is not all there is, and so our hope doesn't rest on the things of this world. If the stock market crashes, we still have our hope.

If war breaks out, we still have our hope. If a relationship is torn apart, we still have our hope. If we lose our job, we still have our hope. If we get sick, we still have our hope because our hope does not rest on health or on money or relationships or success. Our hope is anchored to something that is unshakable. Our hope is in the eternal life and the promises that God has given to us. Believers have this firm foundation that will not crack.

It won't crumble when the weights of this world are piled on. And as I was working through this, of course, I was reminded of the lyrics to the song that say, "My hope is found in nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness." I know I have said it before, but don't put your hope in another person. Don't put your hope in an organization. Don't put your hope in a political party. Don't put your hope in a bank account.

It is only a matter of time before these things will let you down. I've even taken it a step further, and I have told you over and over again, "Don't put your hope in me as a pastor. Don't put your hope even in this church because it's only a matter of time before we will fail you. I have no intentions of doing so, but I also know I'm human. Don't put your hope in me. My goal is that you would put your hope in Jesus Christ because He will not fail you." So it doesn't matter what else happens.

He can be the firm foundation. And finally, for today, the call to follow Jesus is also a call to self-denial. The world says to follow your heart. The world says, "Do what makes you happy." Every commercial you watch is all about you. How do you fulfill your desires? How do you fulfill your longings? How do you get what you want out of life?

But Jesus says in Luke 9:23, "Whoever actually wants to be my disciple, whoever wants to follow me must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." Following Jesus means surrendering your will. It means surrendering your desires and your control. Following Jesus means trusting God and His will even when it hurts or costs us something. And this is impossible for the world to understand.

They cannot comprehend why we would ever deny our desires for the desires of somebody else. It is foreign to them. And so if you live in this way of self-denial, learning to control your desires, your wants, and you truly begin to focus on others, you will stand out. You will stand out at your school, whether you want to or not. You will stand out at your job. You'll stand out in your neighborhood.

And if you are part of a family that does not know God, you will stand out in your family and you will be different. And the world doesn't like different. Sometimes, by your very presence, you will make those around you feel judged or uncomfortable. And so therefore, as a point of caution, make sure that your life is defined by grace and love and mercy because that's what God has called us to do.

When we are different, the world doesn't like it. I don't have time to fully address it now, but I do want to address a little bit of what just happened this last week. As I know, social media has blown up, and I don't have any idea what the future means, but I'm talking about the death of Charlie Kirk. Many of you have watched his videos, and of course, I don't know him personally. But here's what I do know. The world doesn't like different. So here was a man that was speaking truth, and I don't know everything that he said.

You know I've watched some videos. I would say I probably believe with the majority of what he said. I've definitely read some things and tried to find out who this man was and what his life was like. And it seemed like definitely he was a follower of Jesus, and that was the most important thing in his life. And because he stood on

truth, somebody decided the only way they could silence him was by taking his life. We live in a world where evil exists. And as people talk about this, I just want to throw in my two cents and you can take it for what it's worth.

Just as I say, don't put your hope in these things. Can I tell you that as this continues to unfold in our world, this is not the first or the last time something like this is going to happen? Can I just tell you that as I look at Scripture, the problem is not a political party, the problem is not an individual, the problem is not guns, the problem is not knives or other things that are used for violence. The problem is a condition of the heart. It is a heart issue.

Until God transforms the heart, you and I need to understand that every single one of us, it is possible for us to commit every evil you could ever think of. It is only by the power of the Spirit that you and I can be transformed. And so if somebody has not been transformed by that spirit, evil exists in their heart. It's the world in which we live. And until the heart is changed, you can't fix the problem.

And God knows that, which is why He desperately wants our hearts. He desperately wants us. So remember who the real enemy is. You and I are truly called to be transformed. We're called to be different. And maybe you're here today and you just feel like something's missing. You've been coming to church for a while now. You enjoy the music. You put up with me.

You've met some great people, but you look at others and you feel like you know there's something that they have that I don't. They have a hope in a world that seems hopeless. They seem to live a selfless life. They live for a different person other than themselves. Maybe today is the day that your transformation begins because Scripture is very clear that in order to have our heart changed, Scripture says that if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord, and you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved, which means you will be changed.

That is how our heart is transformed. We come before a holy God. And when we come before that holy God, we finally see ourselves in the mirror for the first time, and we recognize, "Wow, I'm a mess. I'm a mess, and only God can fix it." And so you submit yourself to His authority. You ask for forgiveness for your sins. You come before Him confessing your faults and your need for a Savior. And you come to that point where you say, "You know what? I know I'm just going to mess it up again.

So I'm going to give you control of my life." And so you give over control to the one who knows best. You ask Him to transform your heart and your mind. You ask Him to fill that void that exists in you because God has intentionally created you with a void that only He can fill because He knows that when He fills that void, it's best for us to do that. Ask Him to fill that void.

Ask Him to take you on this amazing journey, and then all I can tell you is hold on for the ride because it's going to be a ride. There's going to be ups and downs. There's going to be twists and turns. But there is one promise that we can stand upon that He will never leave us nor forsake us. He promises that He will be with us the whole way. Your life will be different, but it will be good. And so I pray that you will take that journey with me.

As always, the altar is open. There will be people here that would love to pray with you. If you want to do your business with God, again, if someone comes to the altar, let them do their business with God unless they ask you. If they want prayer, hopefully, they will come to the outside. But I just encourage you to do your business with God. Submit to Him. Give Him control. Go on the journey. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we do come before You. We thank You for Your grace and for Your mercy.

Thank You that You provided for us in the person of Jesus Christ what we could never provide for ourselves. We could never be good enough. We can't go to church enough. We can't give enough. We can't pray enough. But Father, you have made this amazing plan of salvation by making it a gift that if we simply would receive your grace and your forgiveness, if we would receive you into our hearts and into our lives, that we would be radically transformed.

And so, Father, if there are individuals here today or people that are watching online or even listening on the radio, driving down the road, I pray that your spirit would be poured on them in such a heavy way, but they could not help but fall before you and proclaim you as Lord. Would you make yourself real? Thank you for your grace. Thank you for your forgiveness. Thank you for your love. It's in Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.