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Presentation Transcript
What Is Your Life Theme?
May 7, 2009

Everybody develops a way of being in the world. From the time we're very small we work on this. I've called it a *life theme*. If we know what this theme is, it helps us understand ourselves and understand why we behave the way we behave under given circumstances. If you follow this presentation, you have a really good chance of learning what your life's theme is and then you can understand how you developed it, and also understand how it impacts your everyday life. We're also going to understand the spiritual implications of a life theme. It's going to be kind of like a class that you take.

I know a man, as an example, who was raised by a single mom. He had two siblings. His earliest memory was of falling down and his mother holding him in her lap on the couch and comforting him. His mother never spanked any of her children, but always pointed out the consequences of their behavior to them when they got in trouble, or hurt themselves or whatever. His mother never really restricted him, but she was unerringly interested in what he was doing and where he was, especially when he got to be a teenager. When he was in the third grade he remembers telling his mother that he wanted a bike. And she explained that she wouldn't have any money to buy one until Christmas. But she also explained – since it was February – that he could start a lawn care business of his own and make enough money to buy his own bike if he wanted it sooner than that. So he did that with her encouragement and support. She helped him make up some flyers. He walked around the neighborhood, putting them out. Pretty soon, he had so much business he had to hire his little sister to help him, because besides mowing lawns, he also included pulling weeds. It wasn't long before he was a proud owner of a beautiful new bicycle. He said the realization came to him, at that time when he got his new bike, that the sky was the limit. He could make his life be the way that he wanted it to if he made good choices and worked hard. By the time he was forty-five, he was making a quarter-million dollars a year. So that early lesson that he learned, the confidence that his mother helped him have, the idea that he could work hard and that life would always work out kind of became his theme, didn't it? When I asked him about his earliest memories, that's what he came up with.

Let's look at another example. There was a woman who had a little brother. Her parents always doted on him and ignored her. That's her perception of what was going on. I don't think that they *always* did that, but that's how she felt. She recalled a time when she was

five and he was four – that he wanted to climb up on ladder that was leaning against their house. She told him not to do it, but he did it anyway. He climbed all the way up on the roof. She became so worried that he would fall down and hurt himself that she climbed the ladder to watch over him. While they were both up there, their father came out and caught them. The little boy said that it was his sister's fault, so she got a spanking and he did not. And she said, "It was like that the whole rest of my life growing up, and it's still like that today. My brother thinks that he's God's gift to the world and that I'm worth nothing." So her whole childhood was like that. She was always wrong. He was always right. She talked about another circumstance, where – they were a relatively poor family – she wanted to take dance lessons. Her father complained that it was a waste of time and money, but her mother took a second job so that she could take those classes. All the other little girls in the class came from wealthy families – at least, that's what she thought at five-years-old. She always felt out-of-place and not not-as-good-as. When she got older, even though she earned a master's degree and had a professional career, she still felt completely inadequate in every situation and like she was always getting the short end of things from everybody. She married a man whom she felt didn't really value her and her abilities. No matter what happens to her, she always feels unworthy. That's her life theme. "I am unworthy."

Let's look at another example. There was a boy who grew up in a family of boys. He was the youngest. His father put him to tending sheep with the families flock while his brothers were in the army, which was really an honor for him, because he was the youngest. His father, obviously, had confidence in him. When a lion attacked the flock, he managed to kill it. The same thing happened with a bear later. He gave glory to God for those victories. Later he went to visit his brothers in the army and learned that a giant warrior from the other side had challenged anybody in their army to a one-on-one battle. All the soldiers were too afraid to take up this challenge. So this teen took the challenge, saying that God would deliver Goliath to him, just as He had also delivered the bear and lion. He had confidence in God, just as did his father. He learned that from his dad. And David had that confidence all his life. You read the Psalms. It was always about how God was going to take care of him, protect him, watch over him. That was his life's theme. Because he was like that, God said that he was *after His own heart*.

What's your life theme? How can you find out what it is? Let's do an exercise. I want you to think of a recent event, where you became *very* emotional – really upset, or really happy or really whatever – but whatever a strong, powerful occurrence in your life – the biggest blessing or the worst problem. It has to be a *big* event – really upset or really excited. Do you have something? Well, if you don't, shut off the DVD player until you do. It might take you awhile to think of all this stuff.

Okay. DVD back on, right? So now I want you to think of an image of that event – either the best or the worst part of it. If it's a bad event, the *worst* part of it; if it's a good event, the *best* part. What do you remember that makes it the best or the worst? Got it? You can turn off the DVD player if you want to for this, too.

All right. I want you to think of the thoughts that were going along with that picture. What were you thinking when that was happening? Okay. Got that? What emotions go

with it? Were you really angry? Really afraid? Really sad? Really frustrated? Really happy? Really excited? What was it? Got that? Okay. Where do you feel it in your body? Do you feel it in your head? Is it so good that you smile so much your cheeks hurt? Is it so bad that you just feel a pressure in your chest, or you feel it in your gut, or is it a pressure behind your eyes? What is it? Where do you feel it in your body?

Okay. So we have an event. We have an image of it. We have the thoughts you were thinking about it, the emotions you were feeling and the way it felt in your body. Now I want you to kind of float back in time and remember the earliest time in your life that you felt that way. Just float back. Same emotions. When was the earliest time in your life that you felt like that? Have you got something? You might need to turn off the DVD player again to think about that. Okay, what was the image of that? Were the emotions the same? Can you remember where you felt it in your body? What were you thinking about yourself at that time – like David thought – “I’m worthy enough for God to protect me.” The lady that we mentioned – she was thinking about herself – that she wasn’t worth her parents’ attention. The young guy that mowed lawns was thinking that life is good. (Whole T-shirt company founded on that one, right? *Life is Good*. Right?) So when you had this early event, what were you thinking about yourself?

Okay. What does all this mean then? You’ve got this event detailed. Well, you’ll remember that we just completed a series, called *Understanding Human Behavior*. And in it, we discussed six principles of brain function, didn’t we? One of those is that early memories form the basis for later behavior. The past becomes the present. So the earlier the memory, the more true that’s going to be. The earlier the memory, the more true.

So what does that mean? Well, that means – and this is kind of an aside – our parents have the greatest effect on us of all people, because they have the most early influence on us. If not our parents, then whoever was taking care of us when we were small. This woman who learned that she wasn’t as valuable as her brother.... Do you think that’s really true? Do you think that she *isn’t* as valuable as her brother – that she’s not a worthwhile person? Well, no. All of us know that’s not true at all, don’t we? But because she gained that perception *early* in her life, she’s had to battle it *all* her life. She knows with her mind that that is not true, but she still feels that way when it gets down to crunch time – when she’s put under stress. So her past has become her present. Now if she wants to change that, she can. But she needs to understand what is going on in her own head and she has to start choosing to think differently about herself. And if she *does*, then she’s going to feel and act a lot better. The unhappy memories will always be there, but they won’t be as hurtful as before, because she won’t believe they are true any longer. And she won’t let them sabotage her life anymore.

Everybody has stuff like this in their background. If you don’t get it from parents, you get it at school. It just seems like we always seem to get our share of negative stuff from people. Where did all that get started? The Bible tells us that God and humankind were in relationship in the Garden, but once they disobeyed, then guilt, doubt, lying, blaming, shame – all of that – became a part of their lives. We have very little insight into the family of Adam and Eve, except that we know that one boy killed the other because he felt “less than.” He felt like he was getting the short end of the deal and he became

envious of his brother, even though God explained to him that wasn't true. It really sounds familiar, doesn't it? It is just kind of the way it works.

Now, people who don't believe the Bible think it is natural for us to be this way. I will grant that it is natural to be self-protective – that's always going to be a part of us while we're in the flesh – but when we trace all the negative feelings that we have about ourselves back, we always find an innocent child, who becomes angry, afraid, insecure, guilty, ashamed, etc., because of formative events from childhood.

So what is God going to do about that? Let's turn to Romans 5, and verse 9, and look at God's solution.

Rom. 5:9 – *Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him? For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life?*

So, the first step in God's solution to all of these bad feelings and bad things that we do is *justification*. That's the biblical term for what happens when Jesus Christ sacrifices Himself for us and our sins are no longer held against us. Neither are the sins of our parents held against them. And we have to learn how to let go of that stuff, too.

What is the next thing that happens? Well, in Acts 3:19 – I'm reading this first in the King James – or just in the King James – because I like the word. It says:

Acts 3:19 – *Repent, therefore, and be converted that your sins may be blotted out when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.*

Now, when something is converted, it is changed from one thing to another, isn't it? I think it says in the NIV.... In essence it is talking about changing from one way to another – from one thing to another – and that is a change of our life's theme, where we start thinking differently about ourselves.

The man who believed, if he worked hard enough, everything would turn out good. Well, that's really positive, isn't it? But that's not the same thing as what David thought – who believed that if he *trusted* God, everything would work out good. There's a difference there, isn't there? That's what we're talking about. Once our hearts become converted to God, once we make the decision to trust God, then begins a *process*. You know, we're justified, we learn about that, and we make a decision to surrender our lives to God, and then begins a process called *sanctification*. Let's read about that in Romans 12:1.

Rom. 12:1 – *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, and then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will.* That word there for *transform*, in the Greek, is *metamorfoo* – I'm not good at Greek – it's 3339 in *Strong's*. It means to change into

another form – to transform – to change from one thing into another – like a caterpillar into a butterfly.

Now, when we become converted, we make a *decision* to get in step with that process. And then after that, *God is changing us*. That's what happens. We make the decision to step into that process, and then, it's not that *we* do the changing, it's that *God changes us*.

Titus 3:5. Let's look that.

Titus 3:5 – *Not by the works of His righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, He saves us – by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit – so we're baptized – the washing of regeneration – and then the Holy Spirit is renewed – which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ, our Savior – that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.* The word there – I'm going to try to pronounce this – *paliggenesia* is the Greek word, I believe. It's 3824. And it means *spiritual rebirth* or figuratively – I love this term – a *spiritual renovation* – where we're kind of renovated inside. The word is *regeneration* in the King James – that they use. Let's read it in the NIV. *But when the kindness and love of God, our Savior, appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ, our Savior. So that having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs, having the hope of eternal life.*

So how does that happen? How is it that we are spiritually renovated? How is it that we are regenerated? How does God sanctify people? How does He turn us from what we were into what He is like? How does that happen? If you know, write it down. We're going to test this presentation to see if you are learning anything from it. You might want to turn off the DVD player and write it down. Okay, I'm going to give you some examples of how God does that – how He regenerates people.

There's a young kid out in the wilderness, and he's got a little leather sling and he's got a sword. And he is really feeling pretty small out there at night, looking up at the big sky and feeling responsible for all those sheep, knowing that there are predators about – bears and lions. One night a lion, and a different time, a bear come and, in a few moments of stark terror, David begins to understand what it means that God is a deliverer. That's how he learned that. It wasn't from sitting around thinking, or by God doinking him on the head with a magic wand and suddenly changing him, or by the Holy Spirit just somehow magically making him a converted person. He went through an experience that caused him to be a different person than he was before, even at a very young age. A lot of us walk right by kids in our congregations that have had experiences like that. They may be more converted than we are and we don't even acknowledge it. But those moments, where he grabbed that lion by the beard and slew it, and where he killed the bear, his relationship with God was changed forever from that point on.

Let's think about another example. Remember John? Boanerges – Son of Thunder? He and his brother went to Jesus – or they got their mother and she went to Jesus – because

they wanted to have a higher position in the kingdom. We see that he had a close relationship with Jesus. And we see, in his old age, somehow.... And we see him asking to be...wanting to bring fire down on people because they were slighting Christ. Then we see, at what is called the Last Supper, it says he was reclining on Christ. And then we don't see anything about him until he is in his old age. And we learn there that he had kind of become like Forrest Gump. He tells us in three short books that he now knows what love is. And he didn't before. That seems pretty clear. So, over his lifetime, because of his relationship with Jesus Christ, a transformation took place in this man. He knows that knowing God is the most important thing. Instead of being in control, or going one-up, it's now about the relationship with God and other people – very clearly spelled out in 1 John. Is that not a transformation? It's a miracle! And we know – at least, I believe – that what happened to cause that was his connection to God – to Jesus. Another example. No magic wand. No mystical...just an experience he had. It lasted three-and-a-half years while Christ was alive. Then it took – what? He was probably Christ's age – took another sixty years for it to really come to fruition.

Paul, walking down the Damascus Road. What was he thinking about? He was thinking about killing Christians. So he had a life-changing experience from God, didn't he? Just boom! Like that. All of a sudden the Lord was no longer someone who needed defending. He needed serving. Sudden, miraculous change! And yet...we say it's a miracle, but we can certainly all understand how it happened, can't we? God intervened in his life, caused things to happen to him that changed his attitude. He was transformed by what God did.

And couldn't we just keep going and going? Think about Moses and the burning bush. Think about Job. "Now my eye sees Him." Think about Abraham. How did all those people become what they were? God did things to them that caused them to change. So this transformation that takes place – this sanctification that takes place in us – that God does – we shouldn't mistakenly believe that that's all going to happen because of our efforts. It doesn't. It does *not* come from *our* efforts to be good. It comes from the experiences that God provides for us. And just as our early childhood experiences cause us to develop a life theme that we stick with – sometimes positive, but in most cases, negative – we also, as we are growing up in Jesus Christ – once we make that commitment, or even before that, when He starts working with us as children – He provides formative experiences for *us*. And it is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that makes the experiences *spiritually* meaningful.

If Paul suddenly went blind while on a trip, and that was not being caused by Jesus Christ, it would have only been a stroke. If David were like a lot of kids, killing a lion and bear by himself would have only meant that he was "the man!" See, it is the intervention of the Holy Spirit that makes the difference. If John were not moved by the Spirit, being close to Jesus would have only meant an advantage over other people. But it didn't mean that, did it? It meant something different, because of the intervention of the Holy Spirit. Are you with me? Does that make sense to you? Do you believe that God actually provides experiences that shape and mold you into something else? Well, if you think that it is not happening to you, then you are totally outside of everybody else in the Bible. All of them were affected by Christ directly.

Okay, if you believe that, then we now have a basis in understanding to do some really good work here. God does *not* hit us over the head with a magic wand to change us. It is just that we are designed to be affected by our environment. We develop life themes based on early experience. Hopefully, you were even able to learn about one of your own. And when we discover the theme or themes, then we understand why we think the way we do and act the way we do.

Okay, now when we say that Paul was walking down Damascus Road and he was struck blind, and he suddenly changed from a killer of Christians to a servant of God, what we're talking about is a new life theme for that guy. But it is a spiritual theme. Now stay with me on this. If this comes from God, we could call it a spiritual gift, couldn't we? I mean, that is what that is, isn't it? We learned at the Feast that our gift is more what we're *like* than what we can *do*. And what I'm talking about here is how we get that gifting – how it comes to us. We're talking about what we are *like* in Jesus Christ.

So, how do find your life theme in Jesus Christ? Well, just as we – and I'm going to use a word here – *detected* our life theme from childhood, we can also detect our spiritual life theme from Christ – the spiritual gift He gives us – formative spiritual experiences that come from God. Let's think about it. Think about your life now. When have you recently been moved or excited about some aspect of your spiritual life. What picture of it do you have in your mind? What emotions come up for you? Just turn off the DVD and do the same thing with this that you did with the other. Where do you feel it in your body when you get excited about it? Just hold on to that. Just float back into your past and what previous spiritual experience does that remind you of? And how does that connect with your human life theme?

I think I've told you all what happened to me when I was a little kid. My mother bought this album – they were seventy-eights – that's kind of a clue as to how old I am. Some people may be able to remember back to forty-fives, and certainly most of us can remember albums, but it's really hard for some of us to remember seventy-eights, because they were long gone by the time we came around. Well, we had some seventy-eights. And we had a Philco phonograph that could play them. My mother bought this album of music sung by a lady named Dorothy Minor. On that album was a song called *Old Time Religion*. And that song really kind of captivated me. It kept me – all of my life – going toward the original faith that is in the Bible – not some theological seminary's watered-down version of it, but just what they did there – the old time religion – the original faith. And that kept me out of all the traps that the Church of God people seem to fall into all the time – about these same old heresies that keep rolling around year after year. It gives me a sense of oneness with those people and I think it connects me with the people of God today. I know that I grieve about the confusion and weakness that we have in the church, because every time that something is going good, somebody else comes along with one of these old retread ideas and teaches it to people like it is some kind of new truth. I think that is why I have a desire to lift children out of that weakness, even if parents are stuck in doctrinal error, spiritual tangents and other forms of spiritual paralysis. It seems to me that a lot of folks are uninterested in learning about their gifts, and, if not that, then unwilling to use them. I mean, we have the real deal here! So you see where that comes from for me? It comes from way back when I was five years old.

What not to be excited about? That's what does it for me. But that isn't what does it for other folks. To me, it's not about being in a club or a spa, but it is a treasure to be cared for and guarded – the truth of God.

So what does it for you? Where are you coming from? And how did you get that way? When did you find it? Well, when you find it, you're going to be excited and compelled.

People have asked me, when I talk about this, "What if all my experience with the church is negative?" Well, here's what I have to say about that. God is not discouraged or negative about the church. And if we are, then it is probably because we are allowing our old theme to bleed over into that spiritual experience to contaminate the work of the Holy Spirit. If you've been bitter for twenty-five years because you've been mistreated in the church, then you have missed a good bit of what God wants to do in your life. You can find your way out of that if you want to. You don't have to stay there. You can do the exercises in this presentation. You can go looking for your spiritual gift. You can find it. You can put it to use. You can see that bitterness is a theme that needs to be shed like a dirty shirt and something new put on instead. You can detect the things that God has given you and that will change you. That will change you.

Our gift is all about who we *are* more than it is what we can *do*. We need to find those things. That's really the *key* to spiritual rejuvenation and transformation. We just thought spiritual gifts were a nice little sidelight to Christianity. No, that's right in the middle of it. It's resources given by Jesus Christ to us so that we can be successful in the church. And those resources are a change of perspective – a change in the way we operate. Now sometimes the way we were as children also is a part of that. Human personality becomes a part of it. But we can learn how to find that. We can learn the things that we're excited about. We can start finding a way to express those things. We can start using them. We can go forward instead of backward. We can look to the future instead of the past. We can, as Paul said, "press toward the mark," instead of always complaining about what has happened. We can, as Bobby McFerron sang, "don't worry, be happy," and do that in Jesus Christ with the gift He has given us. We can use our gifts to help other people. We can pick up our own personal, spiritual theme of regeneration, given by Jesus Christ to us, and we can put that on. We can put on the new person – the new us – and we *can go forward*. We can be an asset rather than a liability. We can make contributions instead of withdrawals, because the gift that we have been given is powerful and it's rich.

But, if we're going to do that, we can't just keep doing the same old things. We have to be different. Let's turn to Ephesians 4, and verse 22. I mean, it's right here under our fingers, right?

Eph. 4:22 – *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires – or maybe we could say, themes – to be made new in the attitude of your mind, and to put on the new self created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. I think it has already happened to most of us. We just need to go back and figure out what it is. Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry. And do not*

give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands that he may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as Christ and God has forgiven you.

See, that's where we've come from and that is also where we need to go. God is changing us. He's turning us into the people He wants for His family. And we have a part in that, too. We have some detecting to do. And we have to allow ourselves to be changed and not misunderstand the events that He provides for us.

I think that many of us who have become embittered over our past experience in the church, if we would only look at that experience through the eyes of the Holy Spirit – through the eyes of Jesus Christ – then we would see that that experience actually is where we had to go to get to where we need to be. So, if you've thought about something in a negative way for twenty-five years, it is pretty hard to think about it differently. But we can do that in Jesus Christ. We can detect what He's doing in our lives so that we can respond with spiritual insight, as did David, John and Paul when God worked with them.

What is your old life theme? What is your new life theme in Christ? What are you willing to do with it?