

Imagine a boy, perhaps 10 or 12 years old. It's one of the first beautiful days of spring, warm and sunny. Outside all the kids in the neighborhood are choosing up sides for the first stickball game of the year, but this particular boy is inside. He's sitting at the piano in his living room because his mother said that if she's paying for lessons he's going to practice, and he's certainly going to practice before he goes out and plays with his friends. The boy likes piano, and wants to improve, but today he sits and he stares out the window longingly.

Suddenly beside him sits a man. We'll call him an angel. And the angel says to the boy, "I have something to show you." And suddenly the boy is transported to another time and another place. He finds himself in a great concert hall filled with people. Their attention is focused on a concert pianist who sits center stage, fingers flying across the keys, making music unlike anything that young boy has ever heard. After a moment the angels ask the boy, "So, what do you think?" All the boy can utter is, "Wow." To which the angel replies, "That's you in 15 years. Now get practicing." And suddenly the boy finds himself back in his living room, sitting on the piano bench, with a whole new hunger to practice.

I love that story, and I want to suggest to you that in more ways than you probably realize, it's your story and mine. In fact, today I want two truths to grab hold of your heart and mind in a powerful and compelling way. Here they are.

First, you are not who you think you are. You are so much more. Let me say that again: You are not who you think you are. You are so much more. Second, the pathway to becoming who you truly are is a road called practice. To get at those truths let's read together from Paul's letter to the Colossians, chapter 3, verses 1-14. I'm going to read this passage from The Message [READ].

You are not who you think you are. You are so much more. Think of all the great stories you know in which that theme surfaces. In the movie *The Matrix*, Neo discovers that he's no ordinary citizen. He's "the chosen one" who will set humanity free. In the movie *The Princess Diaries*, Mia discovers that she's no ordinary teenager. She's a princess. And, of course, there's Harry Potter who discovers that he's no ordinary boy. He's a wizard, and a thumpin' good one!

But in today's scripture reading Paul is saying that this is also your story and mine: You are not who you think you are. You are so much more. Paul says that we are living new lives, and not just any life. We're living the life of Christ. Listen again to what Paul says, "Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your real life—even though invisible to spectators—is with Christ in God. He is your life."

Did you catch that? Your real life is the life of Christ! Unbelievable, isn't it? And the reason it's so unbelievable is because we don't always see it or feel it, do we? What we see is our failures and our shortcomings - our grudges, our bad attitudes, our weaknesses. And that shouldn't surprise us, because Paul says our true life is hidden within, invisible to spectators. But that doesn't make it any less true. New

life in Christ is God's gift to us, a gift that we trust by faith, believing what we cannot readily see.

This about it this way. This is a kiwi. It's drab green and sort of fuzzy. If you saw a pile of these on the ground you might think a horse just passed by, if you know what I mean. But what if I told you that this kiwi is more than it appears? What if I told you that inside this odd-looking skin is this beautiful, delicious fruit? If you've eaten a kiwi, you know it's true, even though you can't see it on the outside. Paul is saying that we're like this kiwi. The sweet life of Christ is within us, hidden beneath the surface. God has made it so. That's the first truth: You are not who you think you are. You are so much more.

The question, then, is how does our outer life begin to reflect our inner life? How do we go about becoming on the outside the people that God says we are on the inside? The answer is the second truth: practice. The pathway to becoming who you truly are is a road called practice. Remember the little boy in the story I told a moment ago? How does he become the person he now knows he is? Through practice. Through regular practice that little boy will gradually become who he already is.

And that same principle is true in our faith journey. In order for our outer life to more and more reflect our inner life - the life of Christ - we must practice. That's what Paul means when he talks about daily taking off the old life and putting on the new, as if were a wardrobe change. Each day we are challenged to take off our old life - the bad attitudes and bad behaviors that don't reflect the life of Christ - and practice wearing the attitudes and behaviors that do reflect the life of Christ. Without practice faith too often remains between our ears and doesn't really change us. But when we put our faith into practice, then we are gradually transformed, changed. Our outer life begins to reflect the life of Christ within us.

Practice isn't always fun, nor is it always easy. But it is powerful. When I wanted to become a musician my teacher encouraged me to practice scales. I didn't always like it, but it gradually made me a better musician. When I wanted to become a better golfer my instructor encouraged me to practice hitting golf balls at the driving range. I didn't always like it, but it gradually made me...well, I lost fewer golf balls in the woods. And if we want to become better followers of Jesus, if we want the inner life of Christ to be more clearly reflected in our outer life, it requires practice. It isn't always fun or easy, but it is powerful.

So, let me share with you a practice routine that I find very helpful, one I use regularly. And the acronym to help you remember it is WOOPP. It goes like this:

Wish: At the beginning of the day choose an attitude or behavior that you wish to take off, and the attitude of behavior that you wish to put on. For instance, perhaps you have a problem with your temper. It's gotten you into trouble, it's damaged a few important relationships. It's something you know doesn't reflect the life of

Christ and you want to take it off. And in its place you'd like to put on patience. That's your wish for the day – to take off your temper and put on patience. So, on a piece of paper at the beginning of the day you'd write that down as your wish.

Next is Outcome. Imagine as clearly as you can what it would look like, feel like, sound like for you to take off your temper and put on patience. Let your imagination paint a clear picture. Imagine how you'd interact with your significant other, your children or grandchildren, your co-workers. Don't rush this step. Write down a few key words that describe the picture in your mind.

Next is Obstacle. Change is hard. If it were easy you wouldn't be wrestling with your temper, right? As you think about your wish and your desired outcome, what do you imagine will be the greatest obstacle to your success? For instance, maybe you've got a co-worker who just pushes all your buttons and you know you're going to be in a meeting with that co-worker later that day. Whatever you believe your greatest obstacle will be, write it down.

Next is Plan. What can you do to overcome the obstacle you identified? What one effective action can you take to overcome or get around the obstacle? For instance, perhaps you could decide in advance that when you're in that meeting with that co-worker and you begin to feel your temper rise you could consciously pause and take a few deep breaths, letting your tension and frustration go. Whatever you believe would be the most effective action to overcome your obstacle, write it down.

Finally, Pray. Commit the whole thing into God's hands. Tell God your wish. Honestly share your fears and the obstacle you identified. Ask God to give you strength to enact your plan. Trust that God will walk the journey with you.

That simple process might only take you five minutes, but done consistently God can use it to change you in profound ways.

Let me say it again. You are not who you think you are. You are so much more. Christ is your life. And the pathway to becoming who you truly are is a road called practice. It's how we set our minds on Christ. It's how we take off the old and put on the new. It's how our outer life begins to reflect the life of Christ in you.