



Not How I Am

By Katherine Rowland



Knowing who you are now is important. Knowing what you may become can change your life.



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We humans by nature are a curious, analytical, and introspective lot. I know few people who are not interested in why they do the things they do

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We observe within ourselves that sometimes we react in ways that don't make a lot of sense to us or to others, and we wonder why. We read about what we do, we take personality tests, we seek to understand ourselves. Often we meet with some measure of success. We can trace back our current behavior to certain situations from our childhood. Or we can see that a particular relationship difficulty may be due to a difference in temperament or personality.

The tempting thing is to leave our research at that point and say "Oh, so this is why I'm the way I am." So often we're satisfied with simply finding the "why," instead of asking the next question. The next

question, especially for a



Christian, ought to be, "What should I be like?" It is so very easy, though, to let ourselves instead feel justified by whatever circumstances have shaped us, especially when it comes to habits that irritate other people. "That's just how I am," we want to argue.

Obviously, we cannot live long in this world without being shaped by the people

and circumstances near us. And God certainly accepts us from any quarter, from any background, and with whatever quirks and behaviors we've picked up. But He does not intend us to stay there. His acceptance is not a mere formality; a matter of changing our name and then continuing on. He accepts us from where we are with every intention of taking us where He wants us to go. Our part of this journey is accepting that destination and also accepting the fact that we will have to prepare ourselves to reach that destination.

As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17-19, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." If we've become new, we cannot cling to "this is how I was" or even "this is how I am." Paul continues, "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation." When

two people are reconciled, it usually means that one or both must change in order for the relationship to continue. Our acceptance of God's invitation to reconcile means that we have taken a hard look at ourselves and realized that we are not great, not mighty, not clean; it implies a knowledge that we have fallen so far that we could never get back by ourselves. And in His mercy, God recognizes the contrite heart and allows us to begin that journey back. Our conversion is not just about us and God, but also about us and other people. In 2 Corinthians 5:15, Paul comments that He died for all. In 1 John 4:20, we read, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" We love God by loving our brother. We love our brother by trying not to offend. In Romans 14:15, Paul writes, "Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died." Although he is talking about food in this instance, we can also extend that to other things that offend our brethren.

Do we want to risk destroying someone for whom Christ died because of our past personal grievances and circumstances?

Not at all! Romans 12:1-2 makes it clear that we are not to remain as we are: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

We ought to recognize where we came from and how that shaped who we are: that's part of being human. But we also ought to recognize that we, as Christians, are not to stop with asking, "Why am I this way?" Instead, must go on to ask the next question, "What am I supposed to be like?"

For more helpful reading request our free booklets *Making Life Work and What Is Your Destiny?*,

You Can Have Anything You Want

By Judith Anne Nelson

In today's world we're taught that if we want it, we can get it. But do we need it or should we have it? And what does God have to say about it?



I was craving something while I was out and about one day. In my head I was asking, “How can I get something sweet?” A convenience store came to mind. As I walked into the store, a calm, firm voice (also in my head) said, “You can have anything you want.” I took this as permission to indulge myself and chose an ice-cream sandwich. To be “good” I got a bottle of water instead of a sweetened drink. Later in the afternoon I had a cupcake and coffee at church. By early evening, on the drive home, I noticed that my fingers were puffy and stiff and my gas pedal foot was

cramping. When I woke up the next morning I understood. God’s Spirit was telling me that I could choose any *outcome*.

Previously, I prayed for the outcome of improved health. I’ve been making poor choices in a number of areas related to health for some time. My attention has been brought to alternatives to those behaviors, BUT my addictive relationship with sugar and other unhealthy choices has been stronger than my desire to change and receive the better result.

On the one hand, I had been asking for health and on the other hand I had been doing the things that lead to disease. James 4:3 says “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume [it] upon your lusts” (KJV throughout). My action was motivated by lust. My desire for a healthy body was relegated to an afterthought (water instead of a sweetened drink). When James says “you ask amiss” it means “badly.”

When you ask badly, you are asking for a bad outcome. Other meanings of the word “amiss” indicate some of those outcomes; diseased, evil, grievously, miserably, sick, and sore.

What the Spirit also pointed out to me the next morning was the inconsistency of my desires. James 4:8 says, “...purify your hearts, ye double minded.” The source from which we make choices determines what we will choose. If we are asking for and choosing fulfillment of our lusts, the result will be disease, evil, grief, misery, and soreness.

I know I’m not alone in this situation. There are a number of people in the church who are not in the best overall condition. Just like the general population, many of us are indulging ourselves and ignoring the inevitable consequences. Sometimes at church the subject of unhealthy foods comes up. On a number of occasions, I’ve noticed a pattern of thought that is

very consistent. Someone mentions that a particular item is not really good for someone else and then that person laughs and says, “I’m not afraid to die a little sooner.”

Realistically, dying sooner is not the choice. What we’re actually choosing is a life of physical and mental suffering. Food choices, along with getting enough sleep and exercise, determine your quality of life. Ask yourself about the results you’re looking for. Do I want to feel confused,

tired, and depressed? Do I want aches and pains? Do I want to be burdened with expensive medications with their negative side-effects for possibly years into the future? Or would I rather be clear-headed, energetic and positive, and have money for healthy, productive choices?

Most important, our health choices can determine how we can be used by God. If I’m unhappy and unable to do certain things, how does that glorify our Father in heaven? When I ask for

healing, but I choose illness, how do I expect God to answer?

Throughout the Bible, God is saying you can have anything you want. But most important of all, He is saying to you to “...choose life...” Deuteronomy 30:19 KJV.

For more helpful reading be sure to request our free booklets *Making Life Work and Why Does God Allow Suffering?*

Anger Explosion

By Robert Berendt

If you notice a pattern of anger in your life, you have the opportunity to learn how to control it.



I recently read some very interesting material in a book entitled “Emotional Intelligence” by Daniel Goleman. He addresses a subject that touches us all. We read about things like

road rage, and if we’re honest with ourselves, we probably must admit we’ve had moments when our anger grew hotter than we would like. We have probably said things when angry that we regretted and later apologized for

Self-control is possible

People appreciate a person whose self-control enables him to calmly withstand the ups and downs of life

rather than a person who is a slave to excess emotions and passions. Goleman quotes a scholar named DeBois who translates the Greek word “sophrosyne” as “care and intelligence in conducting one’s life; a tempered balance and wisdom.” Goleman goes on to say, “The goal is balance, not emotional suppression – every feeling has its value and significance. A life without passion would be a dull wasteland of neutrali-

ty, cut off and isolated from the richness of life itself.”

We are often surprised by the emotions that assail us. Our mind seems to have a “mind of its own” sometimes. It is in the conscious control of this “other mind” that we can have an impact. It is OK to be angry – it is not OK to kill because of that anger. This “other mind” of ours is able to downplay and almost erase the overreaction we have made. We “forget” the outpouring of curses from our mouths and excuse them by feeling justified at being angry. We hide behind the justification rather than admit that we are wrong in our reactions.

Another way our “other mind” tricks us is by supplying us with an ever-growing set of “good reasons” for our anger. The longer we ruminate about what has made us angry, the more fuel we add to the fire. “Brooding fuels anger’s flow,” says Goleman.

The effects of anger can be devastating

The Bible has much to say about the control of anger and the avoidance of extreme emotions. A fool’s

anger results in shame, embarrassment, strife, contention, self-destruction, cruelty, downfall of empires and so on (Proverbs 29:8, 9, 22; Hosea 7:16). We are told to avoid such people (Proverbs 22:24). This is good advice – for our own safety.

One who refuses to control his or her emotions and anger usually leads a very lonely life. What it takes is will power, along with a great deal of prayer, meditation and bible study. Sometimes it may even require fasting. Just as we may have learned to let loose our anger, we can also learn to contain and properly control it. If we do not learn the lessons of self-control, we will be the losers.

Explosions of anger can hurt other people. A father or mother who is prone to losing their temper may eventually resort to violence towards children. There may be a genuine problem that needs attention and a solution, but uncontrolled anger does more damage than good. Children are also hurt by the bad example, and families suffer.

Paul wrote, “Be angry, and do not sin (Ephesians

4:26).” Anger in itself can be an healthy emotion if used in a Godly fashion. God has given us emotions to make our lives better, but He also expects us to control those emotions and develop character by doing so. One of the ways we can control our emotions is by learning to use our *minds* to make decisions. We *choose* how to react to the trials and troubles of life. Excess emotion cuts into the reasoning and thinking process and interferes with the interactions we have with others.

Strategies to gain control

One key to self-control is to take control quickly. Escalating provocations can result in an outburst that may be controlled by taking a timeout, counting to ten, going for a walk, or “sleeping on it.” Often after a frustrating day in a hurried world, we just need peace and quiet at home. Be sure to make time for that when necessary. Identifying problems and having a problem-solving mindset will also help.

We often hear people say, “I just can’t help myself” when they have exploded in anger or allowed some other emotion to become excessive. Those words are

excuses not to change. I once told an abusive husband that if his wife were a 300-pound gorilla who pounded him every time he yelled at her, he would learn to quit yelling after the first pounding!

The results of outbursts of anger are often not clear to us until it is too late. Once the anger comes out, the damage has already been done. I have spoken to people who have lost their mates, friends or jobs due to a lack of self-control. They have been willing to do almost anything to get back that which was lost – except really and truly change. Yet, all of us can change and, as a matter of fact, as life goes on we do change. Change is in our power; it takes character and honesty - the honesty to face up to a personal

fault and to seek God's help in correcting that fault. Anger management classes can also help. They are conducted with the understanding that we can control that rage.

I have found that the more we excuse our behaviors, the less likely we are to take the needed action to correct them. Habits are formed. We might even think of them as “addictions”, often because our mind accepts an addiction better than the concept of habit when we are trying to excuse a behavior. Saying we have an addiction is tantamount to saying, “I cannot help it.” Habits can be broken, but it does take hard work, diligent effort, self-discipline, humility and honesty. Those are the very qualities we love in people, what we respect,

and deep within ourselves, how we would like to be.

Facing our anger, admitting its power, thinking about ways to stop it, praying for God to help and seeing ourselves as people in control of anger and other emotions is the image we need to develop in our minds to replace the weak image of a person who is helpless. You are not helpless. God must be a part of the transformation, then you can control your anger – just do it!

To learn more about controlling your emotions through a relationship with the Creator of those emotions, request a copy of our free booklet *“Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion.”*

GOOD SEED

By Samuel R. Urbina

GOOD SEED PRODUCES GOOD FRUIT – GOOD FRUIT PRODUCES GOOD SEED



I held it expectantly, full of hope for its inherent integrity. I savored the mouth-watering moment as I approached with open mouth anticipation, my swollen

cheeks spilling a rush of saliva. I bit slowly at first

and, feeling no resistance, pushed into the tender flesh of the peach that burst forth in succulent sweetness, spraying my mouth in sublime joy!

I reached with my hand to dam the dribbling juices,

not willing to lose even a rivulet or drop of such a wonderful piece of fruit. It

didn't last long, as I devoured it down to its kernel, sucking and nibbling

on the pith that struggled to hang onto the pit.

I wonder if you're like me. I think a great piece of fruit deserves to have its pit laid in the place of honor on the kitchen counter, believing it will be available for planting to produce a little plant that will one day become a wonderful tree providing excellent peaches. It usually remains there, dormant and forgotten over the weeks, until it is thrown away in the garbage can of lost hopes. Or, it makes its way to the desk drawer where important stuff lays unattended, and promising things simply fade away into obscurity—kind of like good intentions.

However, we pay no mind to the disappointing fruit we eat, simply tossing the pit. Perhaps the peach was too green, too bland or just too mushy with hardly any juice. We wish we hadn't taken the time to bite into it. Then we wonder if the others we bought that day will be as bad.

Do you think God loves a good peach? Would He set aside a good seed pit to plant and make more good peaches? What if we were like little peach plants growing up from such a seed? Are all peaches alike? We already know by experience that they are not. Can God change a sorry producing peach plant to a good one? Scripture says that He can. "...with God, nothing will be impossible" (Luke 1:37).

In Luke 8:11, we read, "The seed is the word of God." God in His mercy and love has implanted this word in us, but if the seed lands on bad soil it will not grow. In other words, if we don't accept what God gives us, we cannot thrive. In James 1:21 it says, it is the seed which is able to save our lives. In James 1:18, it says, "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures."

Can our Christian path therefore be compared to the life of a peach? Let's see. God plants good seed pits in pots of potentially rich soil. We are His soil, watered with living waters. All that is in the pot becomes as one: The soil (we are clay selected by the grace of God), the seed

(the word of God), and the living waters (God's Spirit).

We, as the soil, have our part to contribute as fertile ground. As Luke 8:15 says, if we receive the word with a noble and good heart, and keep it within us, we will (with perseverance) bear fruit. This is a process, and the process takes patience and endurance.

When planted, the lower surface of the seed eventually extends little roots like arms to receive the moisture and nutrients. The top surface of the kernel germinates with a clasp of little leaves clawing gently, but persistently, through the soil. As the tiny sprout springs forth, God and His Son nurture it tenderly, nourishing it in the warm light of love. This is our beginning.

The large pots are then moved away from protected areas, and the growing saplings are exposed to the elements. In their pots, they stand on solid ground, their scrawny branches and twigs covered in leaves. At times, tiny blossoms begin to show, with promise of good fruit to come.

Finally, the saplings are transferred into the earthly soil, where the roots begin

to expand with the experience of life. The farm of their beginning is the church. The orchard they are planted in is their congregation. The saplings grow into trees, some already more mature than others. Now, the blossoms have the potential to turn into fruit.

The following description, although about apples, is also a good description of how peach blossoms turn into fruit. It is from www.tooter4kids.com. "In spring, apple trees are covered in apple blossoms. In order for the blossoms to become apples, they must be cross-pollinated. This means that the pollen from one flower must travel to another before fertilization can occur. The creatures responsible for this important task are bees. When bees travel from blossom to blossom they collect pollen. Pollen is made by the stamens of the blossom. The bee drops pollen from the stamens of one blossom onto the pistils of another blossom. It is at this point that fertilization occurs. After fertilization, ovules within the ovary can become apple seeds.

"[As the] seeds begin to develop, the petals from the blossoms fall off. Next, the ovary starts growing. The ovary is surrounded by

a thin protective layer. This layer eventually becomes the core line - or apple core. The outer layer surrounding the ovary becomes the exocarp, or the eating part of the apple. The calyx, stamens, and pistils become the dry, hairy part at the bottom of the apple."

Here is the beauty in this maturing process. We are trees growing in our congregational orchards with the blossoms of promise on our mantles. We are in need of cross-pollination to bear fruit. The Holy Spirit moves about us like a bee, touching the very hearts of our being. It is the interaction we share in love and service in Jesus that will help the blossoms bear spiritual fruit.

This is a wonderful thing! Our former selves were nothing more than dormant dirt. All manner of things could grow wild out of us, but mostly weeds. God took our dirt and prepared it to receive the implanted word. The seed of the implanted word germinated into a plant that has become a tree. Our trees have grown and are becoming fruit bearers. This is spiritual fruit you are now bearing!

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Romans 6:21 helps make it clearer: "What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death." This is the fruit we were bearing in our fleshly former lives. We read in Romans 7:5, "For when we were in the flesh, the passions of sins

which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.” How do you think that fruit tasted?

“But now,” (Romans 7:6), “we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.” The point of this process is revealed in verse four, “...that we should bear fruit to God.”

Romans 6:22 says, “But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.” Brethren, we aren’t just slaves to God – we are privileged spiritual fruit bearers! We have the potential of producing good tasting fruit at that!

Here is a list of forces that affect the quality of the fruit. Sometimes we are the culprits.

Too green–picked too soon–our fruit is immature, never ripens. Good intentions are not followed by good works.

Packaging–produced to fit the mold–we keep being drawn to worldly ways and compromise the constancy and quality of our fruit.

Appearance–pleasing to the eyes, but is it worthy? Is it sincere? Is it merely an imitation of genuine Christian fruit?

Genetically modified–we have God’s spirit, His DNA, yet someone is there to try to change it. We may, in our nature, try to make God into our own image. Also, Satan wants us to be like him.

We neglect our own care–we tumble down onto the rows of life, and get bruised in our fall, soiling ourselves.

Firm on the outside–but weak and mushy on the inside. We seem good but our integrity and faith are weak.

Result: Garbage-prone seeds–we need work. We need to return to our Christian roots. We need to let Jesus intervene in our life–to renew and establish us as bearers of fruit unto God.

What can we do to produce good fruit?

Honor God with our fruit–do all things as if unto God.

Preserve your integrity–remember who we are and who we represent–God, Jesus, and the Kingdom of God.

Hold your firmness of faith–the elements will test our faith and endurance–remain true to our calling.

Be a pillar tree–let our light so shine that others may see our good works and glorify God.

Be fragrant and pleasing–our labors of love and sharing are a pleasing aroma to God.

Be savory and sweet–God loves a good peach. We strive earnestly to produce our best as an offering to Him.

Result: Place-of-honor seeds–we have been diligent in our Christian growth. Our Christianity is being brought to fruition.

Remember, God’s fruit is always genuine. His fruit-bearing servants have been:

Planted in faith–God has confidence in His plan of salvation for us. When He began to work in us, He fully intended to complete the growth process. See Philippians 1:6, 10 & 11. We are God’s labor of love.

Nourished by living waters–Christ loves His Church, His Bride, and He has provided the living waters to make her fruitful.

See Song of Solomon 4:12-15. We are the trees in the garden.

Nurtured to yield fruits of the spirit–see Galatians 5:22-23. God’s fruit bears the sweetness of these ingredients. They are infused into us by His Spirit.

Result: We are God's fruit!
We are the branches of the tree of Jesus, of God's family, producing fruit unto God.

It says in Psalm 1:3, we will be like trees planted by the river's sides. We have been tended diligent-

ly and lovingly from our very beginning as tiny plants, being protected from the elements, trained to stand firm, and pruned to perfection. To what end? Turn to Isaiah 61:3. It is "...that they"—meaning we, through all the adversity and challenge to grow to

the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ—"might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He might be glorified." Finally, in verses 9-11, we can know just how special the seeds of our fruit will have been to God!

