

LOOK FOR THE PATTERNS | New Hope Sermon 10 28 20



Keith, his caregivers and I have been putting together a jigsaw puzzle this week. The picture is one of my favorites: The cat looks at himself in a mirror and sees a tiger and that's his self-portrait! This is a very biblical concept so I want to use this image and analogy of the jig saw puzzle as the basis for our meditation today.

THE SELF-CONCEPT

First, it's an amazing truth that the Holy Spirit comes to live inside each person who believes in Jesus Christ as Savior. Then, the Spirit begins the process of conforming each one to the image of Jesus Christ. It's part of the extraordinary uniqueness of Christianity that we become the ones in whom God takes up residence. God in us. Amazing. And over time as we walk with the Lord, the image of Christ is being slowly reproduced in us. As Paul told the Corinthians:

Now, the "Lord" I'm referring to is the Holy Spirit,^[a] and wherever he is Lord, there is freedom.¹⁸ We can all draw close to him with the veil removed from our faces. And with no veil we all become like mirrors who brightly reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus.^[b] We are being transfigured^[c] into his very image as we move from one brighter level of glory to another.^[d] And this glorious transfiguration comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.^[e] (Passion)

It's a messy process, like a jig saw puzzle with myriad of little pieces that don't initially fit together well. But God is incredibly gracious and merciful and He will keep at it, showing us how certain pieces fit together and empowering us to maintain on focus on His ultimate goal for us. To be like Him.

THE FRAME

Second, the frame. Jigsaw lovers know the importance of starting a new puzzle by connecting each outside piece that makes the frame. With the frame in place, then the pieces can be connected from the outside to the inside.

The frame symbolizes the outer parts of our life that are unique to each of us - our heritage, our personality, our body, our gifts, natural and spiritual, all the basic components of us God works with. Sometimes, we rail at God for these things: the dysfunction of our family system, a weak body with various susceptibilities, sometimes our gender or even our race. But all these things situate us in a certain time and place in history. They are the boundary lines – the frame – God has given us.



In Psalm 16 David says to God, "The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places. My heritage is beautiful to me." Later, after he was anointed king while Saul was still the King of Israel, Saul became insanely jealous of David and repeatedly sought to kill him. David had times of desperation and grief and inner turmoil. But he was who God created him to be and came to peace with all that each time he turned his focus back to God's love and sovereignty and goodness:

I will praise the Lord, who counsels, me even at night my heart instruct me.

I have set the Lord always before me, because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure.

The boundary lives are a profound lesson we need to accept even as we seek to bring justice out of injustice, racial reconciliation out of prejudice and violence, peace out of chaos, value out of devaluation. God gives us our heritage and it is the frame in which He is building us into His image.

THE PATTERNS

Third, in putting together a jigsaw puzzle, it is the patterns that give us clues about the whole picture. In our simple puzzle there are colors that match, that clearly go together and literal lines that we can connect. There are images, like the cat and the tiger, that are recognizable enough to be fitted together. Each coordinating section gives coherence to one part of the puzzle and then another.

I believe there are patterns we need to discern in our own lives – a time when a loving community was around us, a time when God's call was clear, words of hope and direction from others, openings where we thought the pathway was blocked. We need to search in our minds for those connection points, those patterns – then we can begin to make sense of the whole. The Spirit can help us find those patterns if we ask. God can give discernment or revelation or even faith to see and welcome His footprints on the sand of our lives;

And that's a clue, we look back and remember when the Lord carried us, when God brought forgiveness, when God used a gift He had given us to help others, when He answered our prayers so many times. This is actually the value of keeping a journal, beloved. I'm still trying to get this habit consistently in my life. I have tended to just journal when life has been particularly hard. Then I pour out my complaint to the Lord and make careful notes of the ways He intervenes and reveals Himself in that hard situation. Gordon MacDonald, one of my writer-mentors writes of all the journals he has kept over the decades, all color-coded and neatly arranged in his bookcases. Unfortunately for me and my kids who have to work through all my materials after I die, those sporadic journals are not systematically organized and filed. (A nightmare for my very efficient gifted administrator son.) Still, the journals have served a purpose. Writing things down helps anchor those thoughts in my mind. So it is still possible to recall God's work in the past – both in the good times and in the hard times. But, beloved, learn from my inconsistency and start keeping regular journals now. That way you WILL be able to remember accurately the patterns of God's work in your life in the past. Finding the patterns of God's leading and God's interventions keep us focused on God's presence and agenda. They help us track with the Lord in understanding His big picture from His perspective.

THE PRAISE

Finally, in a jigsaw puzzle, each time a section is completed or a missing piece gets put into place, it gives a sense of praise and gratitude. I just got the tiger together in the puzzle I am finishing and I am grateful. On a more substantial note, when we can see the puzzle pieces of our lives coming together and the patterns of the design in place, it increases our joy and confidence in the Lord. Back to Psalm 16. David ends this psalm with praise: You have made known to me the path of life; in thy presence is fullness of joy. In Thy right hand there are pleasures forever."(NASB) Notice the preposition "In" in this translation. That tells us that the pleasures are in God's right hand and He extends His hand to us to receive the pleasures. Just as Ps 104:28 says, "God opens His hand and satisfies the desires of every living thing."

We will finish the jigsaw puzzle tomorrow and have a sense of delight in its completion – but also in the picture that the puzzle portrays. We are like the cat who looks at his image in the mirror and sees the

tiger. And this is how “God sees us – complete in Jesus Christ, dressed in Christ’s righteousness and conformed to His image. It is [art of the wonder of our salvation. That’s our future, beloved. So take heart. What God has begun in you, He will complete. (Phil. 2:6). He is working day by day for you to will and do His good pleasure – and to realize that pleasure as you gladly follow Him. Keep agreeing with the Spirit as God is arranging the puzzle pieces of your life. There is the Lion of Judah, Christ Himself, emerging. Celebrate that in faith. Amen.

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New Hope Global Fellowship 10/28/20

Here is the puzzle completed. It is a joy to see and brings a smile on our faces as we look at it.

