

**Friday, September 18, 2020**

**SERIES: GROWING AND GOING**

**SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD**

**TITLE: An Interview with Michael Frisina: “Christian Metamorphosis” Pt. 1**

**Now, let’s join Pastor Nat with special guest, author Michael Frisina:**

NC: Michael, thank you for coming on the show today.

MF: Sure Nat. Thank you. It's a real pleasure. God bless you. So great to see you looking so well.

NC: I appreciate it - you too. Well, Michael, you and I have known each other for some time. I've worked with you. I've seen you speak, but our listeners may not know who you are, or much about you. So if you don't mind, take just a couple minutes and share a little bit about yourself, and how you went from being in the Army to a pastor, a leadership expert, and an author.

MF: Sure. And, thank you everyone. So, you know, I became a believer between the summer of my junior and senior year of college. And Jeremiah 29:11 talks about the Lord has a plan for your life, and it's a wonderful plan. And I've often used the metaphor of a bicycle built for two, where Jesus is in the front seat, and we're in the second seat. And the only thing you really need to do in the second seat of a tandem bicycle is pedal. Or you can just sit back, and relax, and enjoy the ride, with the person in the front seat steering and pedaling. And occasionally, we'll want to crawl over the top of the shoulders of the person in front, and take the controls ourselves, if you will. And so, because of that, and because of the timing of my conversion to Christ, it started the summer before my senior year of college. So the plans that I had through college up to that point, which included like going to medical school, which included perhaps even going to seminary. I was raised Roman Catholic - Italian and Irish - and my conversion was a dramatic change, culturally for our family. And I was in a Catholic seminary university at the time, and going back for my senior year, and having to take theology and philosophy courses. And now talking as a converted evangelical Christian about the Bible - you can imagine the expectation of my previous professors and what had happened to my life.

And so that led us into the military, which wasn't a place I'd ever thought I would go, or had any anticipation of going. But the Lord opened the door for that to happen, against my own desires. I was confused about how I ended up there, and you know, I was ready to go off to medical school. And next thing I know, I'm in a combat Army division of the Hundred and First Airborne Division in 1977. That one assignment actually turned that into a career for 22 years.

Now we ended up coming to South Carolina in our last career [move], and because I was in the Army medical department, I actually ended up teaching at the Uniformed Service University, the

medical school in Bethesda, as one of my Army tours. And we were in South Carolina, and the Lord opened the door for me to move in as an executive director of an open heart and vascular surgical hospital here, in transition medically.

But along the way, we've always conducted Bible studies and started Bible studies. We always started a marriage ministry group that we're part of, called Life Partners, in a way of connecting with believers. And we also had the opportunity to be in a number of different churches and different types of congregations, as the Lord would lead us - and in some cases, ended up in churches we never thought we would be a part of that fellowship.

And then culminating with all of that, the Lord opened the door for me to take leadership principles that I had been teaching and learning - I was very blessed to have had a teaching assignment in the Military Academy at West Point in Leadership and Ethics and Philosophy. And so you can imagine how I was able to integrate Biblical theology, Biblical ethics, and Biblical leadership, even in the classroom at West Point. And then, how the Lord transferred that into working with healthcare leaders around the country, with an organization called the American College of Healthcare Executives - where I get to lead and teach a host of leadership development and teaching clusters. But fundamentally, what I'm teaching are Biblical concepts of leadership, Biblical concepts of integrity, Biblical concepts of how to care for people. And so that's a quick synopsis of where we started, and where we are now today.

NC: Well, you've got a remarkable story, and I've been blessed to hear it several times, and I've been able to see you interweave these Biblical principles into these secular venues. And it's amazing to watch people just eat it up, and they really appreciate it. And when applied, it changes themselves, and it changes their organizations. So you've obviously written some books. You've written a book called *Influential Leadership*. You've written a book called, *Are You Ready to Change?* But the book I want to talk about today is *Metamorphosis*. And I love the subtitle, *Why Christians Don't Change*. And you and I have both been pastors. And one of the things I think we both struggled with at times, is going, "Okay, I'm giving them the Word of God. They're supposedly reading it, but they're not changing. What is going on?" So I'm just curious, why write this book, and what is it about?

MF: Well, it's a classic metaphor: obviously the cover, as you have there, shows a butterfly. Well, a butterfly doesn't have its own initial developmental stage, you know, as other animals and the like, and birds, and all that God created, and how they came together. You know, the interesting thing about the butterfly is, it starts as a caterpillar, and the caterpillar weaves the cocoon - it goes into the cocoon - and there is a biological and physiological transformation inside the cocoon. And the cocoon itself becomes a hardened chrysalis. And at some point, that chrysalis starts to crack, and we start to see the emergence of this butterfly. And the question is, you know, well, what happened to the caterpillar? Well, the caterpillar gets consumed - actually starts eating off of itself inside the cocoon, and in the chrysalis. But there is a moment in time of specific transformation, where that biological life inside the chrysalis isn't a caterpillar anymore. And it isn't a butterfly yet. It's its own life entity, with a transformation of DNA that then takes on that growth development process of turning into the butterfly. If you watch a butterfly exiting its chrysalis, you want to leave it alone. You have an urge of wanting to help it escape, and crack out of the shell of this chrysalis. But the unique dynamic in God's design of this transformation process, to keep the wings from drying out as the butterfly is developing inside the chrysalis -

now there's an oil that is created to keep the wings pliable and soft. The problem is, without that oil coming off the wings, the butterfly can't fly. So part of the struggle to exit the chrysalis – and there's another metaphor, you know - not just the transformational component - but when a trial comes into your life as a believer - you know, God can keep us *from* trials; He can keep us *through* trials. You know, the idea of a rock can be a stumbling stone; it can also be a stepping stone.

And so believers, with Christian resiliency, you know, we have to go through this same trial and crisis of transformation, and exit so that we become who God intends us to be. The wonderful passages of Scripture, where, in Ephesians [2:10], Paul talked about believers being God's *poiema* in Chapter two and we're His workmanship - that word in the Greek, you know, His workmanship. And then the verse, you know, that *He who has begun a good work in you will be faithful to complete that work.* [Phil.1:6] We are God's Creation. We are God's work in progress. And so there should be something fundamentally different about how you thought, how you emoted - your emotions and your behavior.

-----

In positive psychology, interestingly enough, they've discovered a Biblical truth. They call it a cognitive triangle. Well, it's a Biblical principle - in Romans 12 - of the renewing of your mind. And so we ought to be going not just through a physical transformation, but we need to be going through a mental transformation, where we become a completely different entity, exiting the crucible of transformation. Our justification - theological term - our salvation, you know, from who I was before Christ entered my life - and I became filled with Christ and the Holy Spirit - and who I am now - as Paul would exhort the Ephesian believers to *walk worthy of Christ within them.*

And the key here for me, was I was being witnessed to, as a Roman Catholic. Most of my teenage years - I was a teenager in the late sixties and early seventies - the Jesus movement was exploding all over the country, particularly in California. And so, even in high school where I was in Pennsylvania, yeah, I would have this group of Jesus freaks come up to me, and want to tell me, "You need to accept Jesus". And I said, "I already have. I'm Roman Catholic." And they said, "No, you need to know Jesus". And I said, "No, I do". And they'd say, "No, you know about Him, but you don't know Him". And ironically, in my own personal conversion experience - much like Paul had on the Damascus road -the point of my conversion - and the breaking point, the yielding point, of my will to surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ - came about by answering a question that the Lord presented to me: "Do you know Me?" And I started to tell Him everything I knew about Him from Roman Catholicism, and doctrine, and catechism. But He gently interrupted me in this mental conversation. He's "I didn't ask if you knew about Me; I asked if you knew Me." And when I said no to that question, and I said, "No, I don't know you". And He said, "Would you like to?" And I said, "Yes" - that was the moment of my transformation. That was the moment in time, where I went from being who I was prior to salvation in Christ, and now started the processes of who I was going to become later.

So what happens is, I go to these folks, who've been witnessing to me through college years. And I started going to evangelical Bible studies and started studying the Word of God. And I was conflicted with what I was seeing people teach, and the inability of them to live it out in their lives. And I'm not talking about perfection, and people trying to be perfect. And I'm not a legalist

by any stretch of the imagination. I'm just talking about fundamental things, like gossiping, and how people were treating each other with gentle love and kindness and forbearance.

You know, it's an interesting thing about the letter to the Ephesians - Paul wrote to a group of believers there - saints as he called them. And when he said, *walk worthy of your calling* [Eph. 4:1], we could talk about, what is our calling? Well, our calling is who we become in Christ. Our calling is to become a saint, to become sanctified, to become holy. It's the process of living in righteous living, holy living - to be living and walking in the sense of our sanctification, in the redemption that we see. *By grace have we been saved; through faith, not of ourselves, lest anyone should boast - not of works, but God's gracious gift.* [Eph. 2:8-9]. And so, I'm in these Bible studies, and some of these people are in the Bible studies - are acting more worldly than people I knew who weren't saved. And so now the question is, what hasn't happened here?

You know, if you watched a chrysalis start to crack, with the anticipation that a butterfly was going to come out, and a caterpillar came out instead, you'd have to ask yourself, what happened? You know, I know biological processes - I know what this process requires. I know that I'm supposed to see a butterfly. Why did the caterpillar come out? What didn't take; what didn't change? So by application of this metaphor to the life of a professing believer, we can legitimately ask the question - based on fruit, the absence of fruit, or the quality of fruit being produced in this sanctified life - what didn't happen? What didn't take? What part of this transformational process of metamorphosis, are you individually as a professing believer, missing out on?

And so that led me to ask the fundamental question - why don't people who profess to be Christians change? Why isn't there this dramatic transformation that Paul writes about in Ephesians, when he tells them, you know, not to meander in the course of the world, like you used to walk? You know, there was this clear sense that Paul talks to believers about who they were before their transformation experience, and who they're supposed to be now. And here's the interesting thing - writing to the Ephesian believers - there are 46 traits - transformations - Paul writes about, between Chapter one, verse one in Ephesians and Chapter four, verse one. And I have a study where I walk people through every one of these traits, asking them, you know, "Have you accepted the fact that you are now adopted? Have you accepted your redemption? Have you accepted that you're a joint heir into the Kingdom of God?" and walk them through each one of those. And so by the time we get to Chapter four, Paul's ready to start to talk about an application. And the first thing he says is, *walk worthy*, and he tells them how they should stop behaving, and what they should be doing instead.

But here's the irony. The Ephesian believers were probably the most tutored, the most educated in Christian doctrine, of any group of people Paul ever spent time with. He met them on his first missionary journey. He spent three years with them on his second missionary journey. Imagine having Paul with you for three years - but he's still writing to this group of believers in the Ephesians letter, admonishing them and encouraging them, *walk worthy of your calling as a saint*. And what does that mean? And then he has to tell them, stop lying to one another. Really? He has to tell the Ephesian believers to stop lying to one another, and to be kind to one another, and forbear with one another?

And so that became the emphasis. I wanted to write something that could get in the hands of Christians, that could confront them with a fundamental question: Have you really changed? Has

your thinking changed? Have your desires changed? Has your behavior changed? Have you gone through this transformation that Paul talked about in Romans 12? Has your mind been renewed? Are you taking every thought captive, from Second Corinthians? And so the book was a journey of exploration and explanation. And then an interesting thing happened - people started emailing me, and getting in contact with me, and saying they felt convicted, and they were to a point of wanting to get real about this transformation process. And so that led me to write the second book. *Are You Ready to Change?* Because they would say, "Okay, you got me; I'm ready to do it, but you didn't tell me what I needed to do". And so that led to, *Are You Ready to Change?* - to give this process and complete the question from, *Why Don't Christians Change?* "Okay, now I'm ready. How do I do it?"

NC: Well, let, let me just interrupt you there, because I think you've identified something that is a reality. Right now, I'm working through the book of Galatians for our Back to the Bible radio show. And it dawned on me, there's a difference between being free, right - kind of a theme of Galatians, being free - but then there's a disconnect sometimes with *living* as free, right? We can be free, but not live that way. And I think that's ultimately what you're talking about: Being saved - not reflecting that in our behavior. So I'm just curious from your perspective, and what you found by writing this book, why should Christians change, and what prevents them from doing so?

MF: The fundamental obligation for why a Christian should change, is missing out on the blessings of what God wants to give. God created us for His good pleasure. God wants to bless us. God has a greater desire to bless you as a believer, than your desire to be blessed.

NC: Ah, Wow.

MF: And if we could understand, and we could put things in a right perspective - you know, people pray, "Lord, I need a job" or "Lord, I need good health" or "Lord, I need this". "Lord, I need to heal this relationship." And they pray in a form of desperation, as if somehow, if they just had the secret sauce of prayer, then they could get God's ear, and then God would answer the prayer, and bless them. What they need to understand is God has a greater desire to bless them, than their desire to be blessed.

But there's a requirement on our part. You know, if you go to Second Peter, and look in Second Peter, he tells the believers there - he said, "I know you're saved" - he had no doubt about the sense of justification, or theological terms, right: being saved - and he said, "but you've got to add to your faith, these things. In other words, there's work that we're required to do - not to be saved - but work that is evidence of the growth of our salvation, into our sanctification/holiness process." And fundamentally, I think there's been just so much bad teaching through the last 30 years or so, where people who have large exposure with large ministries have been teaching Biblical fallacy - that somehow God is a super-sanctified Santa Claus, that's obligated to make sure that you're healthy, that you're wealthy, that you never struggle, that you know. And it's a heresy of Biblical doctrine.

And being in the military, and having other opportunities, I've traveled the world. You know, there is a false Gospel in the United States, that only applies to the United States, and can't apply to Christians any place else in the world, because of the material wealth of our country. And that Gospel sells in America, because of the material wealth that already exists, the access to medical

care that already exists. But you go to other parts of the world and you see real poverty among dedicated, really transformed, holy believers - It goes to the Parable of the Sower of the seed, where there's four soils. And it's the third soil that we get the answer to this question - the tares right? The false wheat grows up with the legitimate wheat. And it looks just like the legitimate wheat, except there's no fruit. And then there's a reason why there's no fruit. The *tare* is still concerned - in this metaphor, right - a believer - who's made a profession of faith, but hasn't made this metamorphosis transformation into holiness - is struggling with one of three things or a combination of all three: the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire of other things. There hasn't been teaching that salvation comes with a cost. And that cost is the forsaking of the things of the world - to connect to, and to strive to receive the blessings of the Kingdom of Heaven.

I use a metaphor - if you could commit murder, and were convicted of murder, and you were on death row. And I was the governor, and I commuted your sentence, and I gave you a full pardon, and just expunged this crime, so that if you went out on the internet, and looked you up on the internet, and did a criminal background search, you wouldn't even find that catalogued somewhere on the internet. It would be completely expunged. Okay, so the guards come down - the Green Mile, this is called - they open up your cell and they tell you you're free to go. And somehow, over the amount of time that you've spent in that solitary loneliness, the bondage of that prison cell, you've become accustomed to the comfort of that cell. So with the door wide open to freedom, you choose to stay on death row. And the guard finally says, "Well, okay, look, you're free to go. And I've got other work to do. Anytime you want to leave, just come out and you can go". And Paul talks about the idea again, of the liberty of a believer having been saved. It's not the freedom *to* sin. It's the freedom *from* sin.

Again, there are just foundational, fundamental principles, spiritual growth, and development, that many, many, many pastors and churches have just neglected to teach. And so, we have people who "I love Jesus. I want to serve Jesus. I want the blessings of it". And they don't understand that they're either keeping themselves in a self-contained prison cell of bondage, or they have yet to give up the participation of desires of the things of this world, deceitfulness of riches, caring for other things.

And so they haven't gone through this mental transformation that Paul talks about in Romans 12: The power of the Holy Spirit to renew our mind, to change our thinking, to change our emotions, to change our habits, to change our behavior, and that's a progress in which we have to participate.

We have to do the work in those areas, as Peter exhorts believers to do in Second Peter: "To your faith add virtue, moral excellence". [2Pet. 1:5] My goodness, how lazy it is to just dabble with sin and allow a sexual sin or a pride sin, or a gossip sin, or a glutton sin to come back in your life, and say, "Well, God understands. And so I'll just ask for forgiveness again." Yes, He'll forgive you. But my goodness, what a lower level of spiritual growth and development that is, to just live off the crumbs of the table, when the Lord has prepared a banquet feast for you, if you are willing to come in.

That's the book. That's the premise - that's the main core of this element of ministry.