

WELCOME BACK, *Pastor Phil Strong*

Text: Ephesians 2:1-3; 4:17-31

EPHESIANS  
GOD'S IMAGINATION  
FOR YOUR  
TRANSFORMATION



## Growth Questions

*“Will I ever get to the point where I would sincerely desire ‘Brussels sprouts’ over ‘peanut M & M’s’?” “Will I ever reach a point of development where my affections become so transformed that I desire God more than my own independence and where obedience becomes more a demonstration of trust than a strategy for approval?”*

*“Which would you say you feel more: shame or love? Which would you say God feels more toward you: delight or disdain? Who told you that?”*

*“What truth (reality) in your life have you been regularly ignoring in hopes that the tension would simply go away? How do you suppose the numbness in your soul might be preventing you from feeling the ‘good pain’? Might be masking the really ‘damaging pain’?”*

*“What is it that you are holding onto for dear life? If you were to lose one of them, would you be more or less free? Less anxious or more at ease? How might loosening your grip allow it to lose its hold on you?”*

*“What excuses or rationalizations do you find yourself making for such a frenetic and self-destructive pace? If you keep telling yourself you could make some changes if you really wanted to, why don’t you want to?”*

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## Teaching Notes

**Transformation is the process by which God re-directs our hearts (passions) so that they are now pursuing the right things.**

Paradoxically, the same desire that leads us away from God leads us back. It is those innate desires for worth and value and meaning and security and knowing that we belong. It is simply misplaced desire that has been transformed.

**Transformation involves both God’s unprovoked movement toward us to restore us to fully-functional humanity and our willingness to accommodate and cooperate with the life-long process.**

As we peer into the stories offered to us in the Bible, it is apparent that what we are encountering is this perpetual tension between **who we are** and **what we are currently experiencing** in light of **who we were created** to be and the **life for which we were designed**.

Soren Kierkegaard’s prayer: *“And now Lord, with your help, I shall become myself”.*

Paul continuously portrays the *“worthy life”* (4:1), but he knows that most often we settle for *“life as we know it”*, because it’s familiar and, even if not ideal, it looks so much like the real thing.

**In pursuit of that life, I have identified four concepts that I think our theology rarely makes room for:**

**1. Deficiency: that on our own, apart from God, we are incapable of realizing the ‘shalom’ (wholeness) that God anticipates for us.**

“*Apart from me, you can do nothing*” (John 15) means: 1) even the “*whole world*” (Luke 9:25) cannot satisfy an eternal void. Our desires are too big. Our pursuits are too small, 2) at some point--- in order to consider a different way of doing life--- whatever you are trusting for life must fail you [e.g. as long as you are insurable, gainfully employed, the Mariners are winning, trusting God sounds somewhat superstitious.]

**2. Perseverance as an indispensable component of our faith because endurance presupposes adversity and fatigue.**

In the process of becoming who we were created to be, we are continually bumping up against ways of thinking and functioning which oppose our faith in Jesus (trusting his way of life). There is very little about the prevailing-culture which encourages such a life. In the process, we get discouraged. We get tired.

I, personally, wasn’t built for “endurance”. I was built for short bursts of energy. When I was young, my room was littered with Pete Rose paraphernalia, miles of plastic “*Hot Wheels*” track and monuments to my sincere, yet short-lived commitments (e.g. rock collection- back out in the driveway, baseball cards- made their way into my bicycle spokes; and my pop-can collection- came to rest in big-black-garbage-bags in the garage, awaiting the onset of the “recycling movement”).

**3. Grace as the ‘unprovoked’ movement of God toward us.**

God says, “*Come near to me and I will come near to you*” (James 4:8), but if we don’t believe that he loves us without condition, the potential for closeness with him simply “ratchets up” the feelings of guilt as a result of *not measuring up* and we remain at a ‘safe distance’.

**We can always only be accepted for who we are.  
We always only ever risk change  
once we are accepted.**

There’s nothing about our performance-oriented, over-achieving culture that prepares us to hear John say, “*We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love*” (1 John 4).

**Remember:** Our desire to be loved and develop a relationship with our Creator-God is far more central to who we are than our brokenness, but it’s easier to be identified by all that’s wrong with us rather than embracing God’s gracious offer to make us right.

**4. Transformation as the indescribable power of God to radically alter the nature of the human person. It’s the ‘welcome back’ to who you were always meant to be.**

Paul is dealing with a generation of believers who did not grow up in a “*Christian subculture*”, but they had gladly come out from a way of life to which they had been ‘enslaved’ and were learning to trust another Story.

Paul knew that beyond the initial rush of spiritual adrenaline would come the tendencies to revert back to old patterns of thought and behavior (“human depravity”: propensity to find fulfillment apart from God).

He says, emphatically, “... *I tell you this, and insist on it, in the LORD, you must no longer live as the Gentiles live.*”

In this context, “**Gentile**” was not necessarily an ethnic term here (e.g. non-Jew), but a reference used to describe a culture that was being formed and informed independent of God.

“Gentiles” was a generic means of identifying “outsiders” (2:11): excluded from fellowship (didn’t belong), ignorant of the Law (God’s ways and promises; outside of blessing), without God, without hope.

“*But now*”... brought near by the Jesus event (life, death and rez of Jesus). Outsiders becoming insiders. Those at a distance invited in.

Paul describes the culture in which they are living as confused, wandering, closed-minded, shameless and eager to find any means necessary of satisfying themselves according to their own misdirected desires.

“**hard-hearted**”: Every time that we are exposed to truth and refuse to respond, it makes it increasingly more difficult to feel (sense) and actually reduces the likelihood of a favorable response. Our souls develop a ‘callous’ (hardening, v.18). It is a medical term that describes the place on a bone that has been fractured and reset. That place actually becomes harder than the bone itself.

**They are being exhorted to alter the way they live without abandoning the culture in which they are living. They are being asked to live like “free people” in Egypt!**

So, Paul uses a common Greek metaphor of “*putting off*” and “*putting on*” a garment which was used in the mystery religions as a means signifying that the individual had been filled with the divine life and that their restoration had come. Now that you have been given new life in Jesus, those clothes--- that old way of life--- doesn’t suit you!

He says, quite frankly, some things simply cannot be retained because they offer no assistance in realizing the whole-life that God desires for you.

**Transformation is always born of difficult choices because to know God is to know other desires besides God.**

In one sense, in order to really live “*freely*”, Egypt had to remain a place to which they could return. But, in an even more real sense, as long as Egypt remained an option, it would prove impossible for them to experience the blessing to which God was attempting to lead them.

The challenge with transformation is that the things which compete for your affections will not go away simply because you have chosen to live into another story. In fact, they will likely become more pronounced.

You’ll never realize the “full life” that God has made possible in your already “full life”. Our lives go all the way to the “edges”. Sleep comes (if it comes) as a result of sheer exhaustion and the morning light brings the panic which awakens us.

Margins are the empty spaces which result from “repentance”: an intentional effort toward re-thinking and re-aligning our lives around what matters.

**As long as you think there is something else (someone else) more valuable, more satisfying than God, it will always remain an option and you will be unable to pursue the Kingdom with the “all or nothing” commitment that love requires.**

*“If anyone wants to come after me...” (Matthew 16:24)*

It sounds harsh and narrow, but if real life is about us being somehow united with Jesus and that union alone is what can offer us the life that we were designed to live, then such language is an expression of love.

**I would love for us to finally become convinced that the potential for the life that we desire already resides in us through the Holy Spirit; that we need not feel pressured to change in order to secure the love for which our hearts are longing, but that such love would secure us enough to risk transformation.**