

It's a Beautiful Life: Living In, Living Out "Transformed"

10-30-15

Text: Galatians 4:19



Reflection questions... [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis for your reflections]

"Which would you say best characterizes your present pursuit of transformation? Is it an anxious attempt to compensate for what you are lacking, or the courage which is fostered by a 'call'?"

"Have such practices in your life ever become ritualistic and rote? How might you be better able to re-enter and respond to these practices in ways which seem more life-giving and less uniform? How might God breathe new life on such practices so that they might better serve as a 'catalyst' to a re-ordered heart instead of the objective?"

"In the process of transformation, do you ever feel like you are on a 'need-to-know' basis with God? Have you ever felt that the initiation of the process was divinely inspired and not the product of your own self-determination?"

"What would you say is the relationship between transformation and mystery? Do you think we are really in charge of our own transformation? Why can't we be? How has making space for God in the 'ordinariness' of your day seemed to provide the context for God to show up in extra-ordinary ways?"

"How would you respond to this quote by Richard Foster?"

"We are doing what we can do with our bodies, our minds, our hearts. God then takes this simple offering of ourselves and does with it what we cannot do, producing within us deeply ingrained habits of love and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (*Renovare Perspective*, April 1999)

"What are some of the spiritual practices in which you are currently participating that you find to me exceptionally meaningful? With which do you seem to be struggling? When is the last time that you 'tried something new', in terms of your faith development?" (e.g. extended solitude, finding God's presence in the beauty of his creation, etc.)

Teaching Notes...

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.

Transformation: the “welcome back” to who you were always meant to be. We have addressed it previously as the process by which God re-directs our hearts (passions) so that they are now pursuing the right things.

Transformation is the process by which collaborative friends of Jesus receive his life, share his vision, adopt his practices, take on his character, and reflect his love for the good of the world.

It portrays a deep, inward conversion by which we are being “authenticated” (made genuine, true). This process is in response to “*the mercies of God*” (“*because of all that he’s done for you*”, NLT). Romans 12:1

The Christian understanding of transformation is unique because it begins and ends with Jesus. He is both the object of our desire and, through his lingering presence, becomes the very source of the transformation of our affections.

“Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.” Philippians 2:12-13

God creates certain desires within us, affirms them within us as right (Holy Spirit), and then invites us to validate them as they are worked out in our lives.

We all set out on this “journey” because of either “**discontent**” or “**discovery**”.

Discontent always reveals the superficiality of our heart-attachments and their inability to address the dissatisfaction

Discovery is always associated with the “*more than*”. It is the God-initiated restlessness which can only be satisfied by obedience. Jesus’ appeals to “*leave all and follow*” could never be accommodated by those who were simply disgruntled or bored with their present circumstances. It could not sustain them.

With our new-found freedom in Jesus comes the potential for loving something other than ourselves. For being called into a life which requires our participation, but cannot be the product of our own machinations and maneuvering. It must be “Christ forming himself in us”.

I have noticed some consistent themes throughout the Story relating to “transformation”:

~ **Life is always “more than”. We were created for so much more.**

“... I pray that your eyes may be focused and clear... so that you may grasp the immensity of his glorious way of life he has for us...” Ephesians 1:18 (MSG)

~ **The presentation of the “more than” life either results in compelling inspiration or debilitating frustration.**

~ **Grace as both “passive” and “participatory”.**

The power to realize transformation is both something that God accomplishes for us, despite our best efforts, and something that God can only accomplish alongside of our best efforts.

When we understand spiritual growth to be simply about mental assent to a list of God-propositions, it not only becomes deceptive, but life-threatening.

If you know that 1 Chronicles comes before 2 Chronicles and that “Rick” was not one of the original (12), that information might prove helpful in a rousing match of “Bible Trivia”, but unless it is actually transforming the way that you understand and respond to God, yourself and others, it is lifeless formalism.

I have, in my life, encountered countless people who have completed a menu of course options, adopted rigid disciplines, and who subscribe to a litany of podcasts by the latest spiritual guru, but who have yet to experience transformation.

Know that every time that we encounter mystery (what’s most real about God and us), what we believe to be true of God, the world, ourselves... is threatened and we are called upon to respond with the “strength that you have”(Judges 6:14)

Paul alludes to the paradox of the natural and the supernatural in the text. Even though human beings have their part to play in conceiving and giving birth to children, and although we are able to describe the process in anatomical terms, there is something that remains a mystery. It is something we do. It is something God does every single time.

We display some predictable responses. We minimize the encounter; dismiss it as the psychological by-product of our circumstance. Like Abraham, we “*laugh it off*” (Genesis 17) because what God is speaking over us and into us challenges our present paradigm, keeps us fixated on the limitations of our present resources, and necessitates our willingness to hold this revelation for ourselves.

Instead of waiting on the **epiphany** (divine disclosure) we present to God our own resolutions and then invite his endorsement (Ishmael). It’s more manageable. It’s less risky than faith.

“In the midst of our frustrations over our failure to realize the life that we desire, how can we move forward without abandoning the search... without losing heart?”

Keep bringing who you are to God, not who you would like to be. We call it humility.

Determine to keep the vision of the “good” before you and to do so with such regularity and passion that it begins to alter your identity and your heart-pursuits.

Choose to respond out of your renewed identity and re-oriented heart, even if at first it feels awkward.

Don’t wait until your motives are pure to begin to practice the goodness of the Kingdom. Because of our heart-attachments, our motivations are rarely “pure”. When your urges and desires align with God, it simply requires your response. Our capacity for morbid-introspection when it comes to our motivations often paralyzes us and prevents us from responding.

Sometimes we are required to “behave” our way into a new way of “believing”.

Keep implementing definitive practices which help to loosen your grip on all that you hold onto ‘for dear life’, but which are obstructing your progress.

Know that when you neglect discipline, you forfeit the ability to live freely. If you are not interested in transformation, the requirements are simple: just keep doing what you’re already doing.

It's made explicit in statements like, "***This is just who I am.***" When you proceed in life from that posture, you forfeit the ability to ever become something other than you already are.

It's good to have friends who can "wound" you... but not friends who derive some twisted pleasure from doing so.

"Wounds from a friend can be trusted..." Proverbs 27:6

Living alone is easier, but it's not healthier. Isolation creates an environment in which we are rarely faced with the truth about ourselves.

We realize, in the process, that we don't have the "band-width" to go it alone. We have "blind spots" and "bald spots". It's good to take-a-peek at the back of your head, every now and again!

To the measure that...

...we see ourselves **delighting** in the word of God (will/desires of God as revealed to us)...

... we are decidedly **adopting** God's vision of life as the paradigm for our own...

... we find ourselves **adapting** our activities/agenda in order to actually practice the ways of

Jesus,

... is the extent to which our lives are being "**transformed**".