

Transformation

Introduction:

Romans 12:2 instructs us not to be conformed to the patterns of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. The Greek word that is here translated as “transformed” is “metamorphos” from which we derive the English word metamorphosis. By allowing God to renew our minds, disciples of Jesus are transformed into his likeness. From the standpoint of character, we can change from being a self absorbed caterpillar to a butterfly whose life revolves around Christ and touches the lives of others with His love. This class will focus on attitudes and actions that will renew our minds and transform our lives.

Scripture Focus: Romans 8, Romans 12:1-2, Colossians 2:8-9

Scripture Memory: Romans 12:1–2

Conformity to the World

The following is a list of some of the attitudes held by the World. The indented bulleted comments are what Christians bring into the Church when they conform to these attitudes. As you read through this list, try not to think of others who think and act like this, but rather examine yourself to see if any apply to you.

- If it feels good, do it. Quality of life means maximizing your enjoyment and avoiding problems. Life isn't worth living if you can't maintain a good quality of life. Positive thinking leads to the realization of your goals; while negativity leads to failure.
 - There are times when I feel a strange compulsion to get more involved, but I'm afraid to really give in totally because God would probably call me to a place I wouldn't like, to do something I won't enjoy, at an income that would bring about my financial and social ruin.
 - Religion is only a part of my life. One or two hours a week are all I can afford for God. Anything more would appear fanatical, and I know fanaticism would not make me happy!
 - I am drawn to the Christian life because of the benefits it provides. If it starts causing self sacrifice, I'll have to rethink this whole thing.
 - If I do God's will, everything will be rosy. Trouble comes to those who are outside His will. Surrounding circumstances are my primary means of determining whether or not I am in His will. If things are going good, then I must be in His will. If I run into problems in my life, then I must be out of His will.
 - I can accomplish anything I set my mind to do. If I believe in myself strongly enough, I can make it happen.
- To the victor go the spoils. Life is a competition that you must win! Don't let anyone get ahead of you. (on the road, in your job, in your neighborhood, in a line at the ticket counter) If you let people consistently get ahead of you, they will look down on you and abuse you. Life is like a poker game; never reveal your hand. We may be driven by selfish ambition, but it's best not to let others see it openly. If you let people see the real you, they will have the advantage over you.
 - A successful church is one that is growing numerically. The bigger the better. If you can't grow bigger than the churches around you, then put them down for their lack of spirituality. That way your church still comes out on top.
 - If you present an interesting program and talk up the benefits of the Christian life, it will attract more people. We can teach them the real truth once we get them inside and fully engaged.
 - I dare not let people see the real me; I'm sure I would not be acceptable. I'll just smile and act like I've got it all together.
- People in our society live on a ladder; people on the higher rungs are more important. We can achieve higher positions either by building ourselves up or tearing those around us down. Where you are on the ladder is determined by the amount of money, power and fame you possess.
 - There is a hierarchy of importance in church. First Pastors, then Elders, then Deacons, next teachers (descending from adult to children's teachers) and finally the members and

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- those who attend regularly. If I am in the hospital a visit from the Pastor is better than one from an Elder or a Deacon and so on down the line.
- The way to compensate for this hierarchy so you don't feel insignificant is to be on the alert for opportunities to criticize the leadership.
 - I enjoy talking what's wrong with our society and the short comings of others. It implies that I don't have those problems and therefore, am a cut above.
 - Maturity is becoming fully self reliant. A declaration of independence is required of real adults. We are at risk if we depend on others. We need to call the shots to guarantee our well being.
 - Heaven helps those who help themselves.
 - I could use some help, but I wouldn't want people to think I can't handle my own problems.
 - I don't agree with the direction Session is taking so I'll withhold my money until they come around to my way of thinking.
 - Life is supposed to be fair. People are supposed to get what they deserve. We are entitled to a full and happy life. If you do good, you should be rewarded. We need to make sure that people who do wrong get punished (unless we're the one who did wrong. We tend to minimize our own mistakes.)
 - I have taught Children's Sunday School for years, and not once has anybody thanked me for it.
 - I should think a good Christian wouldn't have any real problems, but I know better. In fact, the opposite appears to be true. Bad people prosper and good Christians suffer. I wonder why God doesn't take better care of His children?
 - I have a right to be happy, healthy, and prosperous! If anything or anyone threatens my right to these, they had better be prepared for battle. If I don't fight for my rights no one else will.
 - If someone's mistake costs me, they should pay. An innocent bystander shouldn't have to suffer for the wrongs of others.

These attitudes are indicative of those who are conforming to the patterns of this world. In Colossians 2:8, we are told to "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ." NIV

Have you been taken captive?

Conformity to the Kingdom of God

The citizens of the Kingdom, those who follow Jesus by the power of the Spirit, must abandon the patterns of thinking held by the world and begin living according to the principles articulated in Scripture.

- Our life is centered on Christ and not on ourselves. All of our energies are not to be spent on building a life for ourselves that protects us from problems and ensures our well being. That would be trying to save our lives. We are to lose ourselves in Christ. He is our reason for living.

Luke 9:23-24

Then he said to them all, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.

- The hierarchy of our society is reversed in the Kingdom of God. Greatness is given only to those who will not be negatively affected by it. God opposes those who are eager to be exalted, but

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gives grace to those who don't expect it. He exalts those who humbly serve Him by loving others. He lifts up those who declare their dependence on Him. Jesus told us to be childlike (dependent, humble, trusting); not childish (rebellious and self absorbed).

Matthew 18:1-4

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Matt 20:25-28

But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Philippians 2:3-5

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

- In the Kingdom God, people do not get what they deserve. We get much better than we deserve. Knowing this, we no longer need to be concerned about how others treat us; God will be concerned about that. We just need to extend His graciousness to those, who like us, don't deserve it. We no longer live under a "Fairness" doctrine.

Romans 12:14-15

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

Romans 12:19

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God;

Luke 6:27-30

"But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.

Rom 5:8

But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

- If it is going to get done, He will do it through us and through those around us that abide in Him. We are completely dependent on Him to impart His character into our lives. This is what is meant by deny self. We must deny our natural tendency to draw upon our strengths and shrink back due to our weaknesses.

John 15:5

I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

Yet,

Philippians 4:13

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

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Transformation by the renewing of your mind

The metamorphosis occurs as our mind is renewed. It's like Strother Martin said in Cool Hand Luke, "You gotta git your mind right." This takes some commitment on your part. You need to participate fully in the renewal program that is orchestrated by God. One of the ways we can cooperate with the Holy Spirit in renewing our mind is to engage in spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are a means not an end. Spiritual disciplines are not in and off themselves righteousness. When practiced regularly, they can lead to righteousness because they deepen our relationship with Jesus. They are like practicing for the big race. They are the tools that condition us for life in the Kingdom. We need to set our minds on God in order that they might be renewed. The exercises outlined below will help you build a deeper, more personal relationship **with** Jesus so that you may become **like** Him and live **for** Him by loving others.

There are two types of spiritual disciplines. There are disciplines of abstinence and disciplines of engagement. They are like breathing which requires inhaling and exhaling. Generally speaking the abstinence helps us avoid sins of commission. Disciplines of engagement helps us avoid the sins of omission. Abstinence disciplines, in many ways, provide the environment within which to "engage" in Bible Study, Prayer, Worship and other related activities.

Disciplines of Abstinence

- Solitude

It is difficult to change the focus of our attention from the world to God when we are inundated by the demands of the world. So many of us have incredibly busy schedules. People depend on us. We have financial, governmental and social obligations that easily consume all of our time and energy. We also have a host of interests that we want to pursue: hobbies, furthering education, recreation and the list goes on. We still have to find time to sleep and eat. The spiritual discipline of solitude is intentionally letting go of our busy schedules to be alone with God. The amount of contiguous time spent in solitude depends on how long it takes for you to come to the realization that there is only one thing that is essential – being with Jesus. Everything else is secondary.

Our busy schedules are not the only reason why this is a difficult, and therefore, necessary discipline to incorporate in our lives. The first deterrent is that we may be uncomfortable with who we are. When we are surrounded by a whirl wind of activity, it's easy to ignore the aspects of our character that are flawed. In solitude, we come face to face with all of our inconsistencies. We are confronted with who we really are rather than the person we portray in public. The second thing that will discourage us from solitude are the people around us who want and need us to maintain their well being. Every occasion of solitude carries with it some aspect of repudiation toward those who rely upon us. Isn't it interesting that the very things that make us avoid solitude are the conditions that need it most. How can we change if we refuse to deal with the parts of our character that need to change? Further, how will those who rely on us learn to primarily rely upon Christ, if we never give them opportunity to experience their need for relying upon Him?

- Silence

Nothing seems to jar my spirit quite as much as noise. I suppose it's a gift from God that I am a bit hard of hearing. Some people cannot be in a car, working around the house or on the job, eating and even sleeping without some background noise. Silence is a companion discipline to solitude. The two fit together so well, some would say you can't have one without the other. What is the benefit to all the noise? I enjoy contemporary Christian music. My favorite artists are MercyMe, Casting Crowns, Telecast, Michael Card and John Waller. I am drawn to music with a message. I splurged last year on my birthday, I bought an iPod Touch. I particularly like to plug into this music when I spend time in airports. I can enjoy a beautiful message in song while at the same time blocking out the grating noise generated by PA Systems and thousands of other travelers. Perhaps this is the benefit that people get from introducing continual sound into their environment. The risk I run with my iPod is that I may not hear an announcement that I need to hear. This same risk can occur on a much significant scale when we permit our ears to be bombarded with the sounds of this world, we may miss the still small voice of God. We won't hear God when you are dominated by the noise of this world.

Like solitude, silence can be uncomfortable because in the silence we once again come face to face with who we are. We are a culture of doing; silence runs counterculture. Sit in silence for 90

seconds. Did you begin to get uncomfortable, sleepy or perhaps you allowed your imagination to carry you away to a more interesting fantasy. Silence becomes even more difficult to practice when we not only seek to become free of the noise of our world, but also seek to quiet our hearts. I am not referring to the cessation of all thought, just those thoughts that call us to review either our to do lists or our wish lists.

The primary objective of both silence and solitude is to concentrate all of our attention on Jesus. We are to block out everything that may interrupt us in our communion with Him. These disciplines enable us to eventually be able to maintain uninterrupted focus on Jesus in the midst of people and all the noise that accompanies them in our daily lives.

- **Fasting**

We live in hungry times. Ours is a consumer culture, predisposed to quickly fill the cravings of body and mind. The idea of fasting---the voluntary denial of something for a specific time, for a spiritual purpose---sets us immediately on edge. Fasting is an expression of freedom. Freedom from the patterns and habits that mark everyday life, from time to time we can move beyond our appetites into meaningful encounter with God. Fasting is practicing reliance on Jesus rather than ourselves. Fasting is not to be practiced for any other reason. It is not a way to lose a few pounds. It definitely is not a way to more strongly obligate God to do your bidding.

Fasting is typically associated with not eating. The activity called fasting can include taking a break from driving, check email, watching television, engaging in our hobby and the list goes on. Stepping out of our routine allows us an opportunity to arrest control from habitual activities so we can give control to God.

There are no explanations in the Bible for how to conduct a fast. This is because it was such a common practice there was no need to provide instructions. I had to find a book on the subject. I cannot give you the names of the books I used to become acquainted with the techniques of fasting because I have passed them on to others and forgotten the titles. Look for a book that simply guides you in how to conduct a fast and avoid those that focus on all the personal benefits associated with fasting. Remember the objective is to break from conformity to the patterns of this world and to be transformed by the renewing of your mind. If you engage in any spiritual discipline because it will make you enjoy yourself and your life more, then you are still conforming to the thinking of the world.

Disciplines of Engagement

- Bible Study (incl. Memorization & Meditation)

Ps 119:11

I have hidden your word in my heart
that I might not sin against you. NIV

Ps 119:105

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. KJV

Heb 4:12-13

Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. NRSV

This spiritual discipline is required for mind renewal that leads to transformation. It is to like food for our spirit. Without which we will starve our relationship with Christ. We will continue to conform to the patterns of thinking and living of the world. Our minds will not become renewed, so the transformation is superficial at best.

We can engage in the Word of God on several levels. A disciple needs to have a firm grasp of what the Bible says. We acquire this firm grasp by hearing, reading, studying, memorizing and meditating on the Word of God. Each activity is increasingly more effective when coupled with

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the other four. Only hearing the Word is like grasping the Bible between your palm and little finger. It's not a very secure grasp. If we add reading the Bible to hearing it taught, we add the ring finger to strengthen the our grasp. Studying the Bible is when you start to get a much better grasp of God's Word. It's like you've started using your middle finger along with your ring finger and little finger. Memorization and meditation go hand in hand (no pun intended). Adding these interactions with God's Word truly solidifies our grasp of the Heart of God as He has revealed Himself in Scripture. You will discover as you engage in all of these activities centered around the Bible that while your knowledge is growing a much deeper far more satisfying by product of the discipline is that you grow in relationship with Almighty God, Creator of Heaven and Earth. This relationship is what transforms your character into one that more and more resembles Christ's.

There's one more aspect of immersing yourself in the Word of God. Look at John 1:1-3,14:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being...
And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. NRSV

It is within the structure of the written Word that we interact with Jesus the Living Word. The written Word provides the principles of God's will for you. The living Word makes God's will personal for each of us.

- Prayer – Communing with God

Like solitude and silence or memorization and meditation, Bible Study and Prayer need to be done as a set. If we study the Bible without conversing with the Lord, it becomes an intellectual exercise, not a spiritual one. He is the one who illumines our spirit with His explanations and applications. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would teach us all things. If we fail to listen to the Teacher, we are engaged in self study and are limited to the capabilities of our intellect alone. Prayer is conversation with God. It's two way communication. Like any earthly relationship, the depth of our relationship with God requires communication. How long would you remain friends with someone you never talk with? Would your relationship thrive if you did all the talking and most of your conversation was asking your friend to do your bidding? Don't get me wrong, supplication is an important aspect of prayer. It is our declaration of dependence. It just needs to be more than one sided supplication.

Prayer is spending quality time with God. We ask questions, share thoughts, concerns, joys and express our love for Him. He in turn answers the questions, guides us in His plan for us and expresses His love for us. When we fail to trust Him, rebel against His directions or in any way offend Him, we need to ask Him to forgive us and reconcile us to Himself. The conversation continues, and as it does, the relationship flourishes.

When you pray, to Whom are you speaking? When you say **Father in Heaven**, you are acknowledging that you have a unique, eternal relationship with the Sovereign Ruler of Heaven and Earth. You have walked into His Throne Room and spoken to Him as a beloved member of the family. Let your spirit look around. The splendor surrounding Him is more magnificent than anything our eyes have seen or our ears have heard. The heavenly hosts are singing Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD. His Glory radiates from the midst of them all and out shines the brightest light we can imagine. In Him you behold power that knows no bounds. Before Him your unworthiness is keenly felt, and your slightest transgression appears wretched and detestable. Yet, above all the splendor and power, and in spite of your unworthiness and guilt, you are overwhelmed by His outpouring of love for you. You are His child and He is Abba, Father. His love has no strings attached. It is completely undeserved and can never be quenched. He simply and completely loves you for He is the personification of LOVE. The love and acceptance from One so powerful is without equal. You might tremble at the raw POWER, but you are drawn to His pure LOVE for you. You have come home; this is where you belong. In His presence, you find fulfillment for your deepest longings. Now you are ready to pray. Now your focus is upon Him and you can have a meaningful conversation.

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- Worship

John 4:23

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. NRSV

In worship we engage ourselves with, dwell upon and express the greatness, beauty and goodness of God through our thoughts and words. It originates in our spirits which stimulates our emotions and intellect. This is what is meant by worshipping in spirit. God does not want worship that originates from emotion nor intellect. We've all been in services that are designed to tug at your emotions so you'll give more or do more. There are other styles that work to excite us emotionally to make "worship" more to the liking of young people and the more upbeat personalities. Some churches conduct very cerebral services. Everything is designed to make you think and come to the logical conclusion that we are to follow Jesus. Other churches follow a very well thought out liturgy that is filled with ritual and historical significance. None of this matters unless you are communicating your love and adoration to God from the core of your new creation – your spirit. If worship is directed toward God and is a genuine expression of your love for Him, it can occur in any format, any location, among a crowd of people or just between you and God.

The key thing to remember about worship is that God is the only member of the audience. Everyone else is expressing the love for and awe of God.

This by no means is a complete list of the spiritual disciplines, but these will be very effective in bringing about your transformation by the renewal of your mind.