

Transforming More than Meets the Eye
Proverbs 3:1-6

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Good morning!

I hope your holidays had some restful times, and some busy times with friends and family, and lots of time to reflect on the great gift of grace in Jesus.

For Christmas I bought a couple of people devotionals. Each page has a date, a bible verse, and a short reflection. But the problem with devotionals that have dates is that if you miss a day, or ten, then you are faced with the question of just doing the devotions in the book order and ignore the dates, or do you just skip the dates you missed and do the current date. Or perhaps you cram them all into one day trying to catch up. The trouble is that we put these expectations on ourselves to do certain things and accomplish certain goals that God himself doesn't expect of us. So once we can keep a proper perspective and expectations, there is a great benefit to a devotional, as a tool to help us meditate regularly on God's word. God created us to be creatures of habit. When we do certain things regularly, it becomes easier for us. Like traveling a path that gets easier to travel over time, we can develop good spiritual habits.

But how much of our spiritual growth and sanctification depends on our efforts to develop good habits? How much does it depend on me doing my daily devotions or reading my Bible every day or to serving the poor? I don't know about you but I want to be more like Jesus. I want to be transformed. And if you want to be transformed how do we do it? The passage that Pastor Tom has been using as a theme for his sermons has been 2nd Corinthians 3 and it says there in verse 18 [And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord,^{\[a\]} are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.^{\[b\]} For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.](#)

So if transformation comes from the spirit, if it comes from God, then why do we do all of this other stuff, is there anything that we can do if we feel far from God or we want to be transform faster or we want to be closer with the Lord? Are there things that we can do or does it wholly depend on the Lord and his work in our hearts? If we want heart transformation are we passive agents that we just have to wait for Jesus to change us slowly over time, or are we active agents in our transformation where we can actively do things that will help facilitate transformation in our hearts?

I would submit to you that if you want to be transformed to be more like Jesus then we must put our full faith and full trust in God and in his ways. Now I know that sounds like a very Christiany pastory kind of thing to say, but let's dive into what it actually looks like.

So in preparing for today I've been doing a lot of thinking about our hearts and actions, and what this relationship is between our heart and what we do. Does God transform our heart and that shapes our actions to be more like Jesus? Or as we follow God's ways with our actions, does God then use those actions to keep transforming our hearts to be more and more like Christ?

At the beginning I ran into a lot of trouble balancing these two things largely because my semantics were wrong, the way I was understanding the words was not full and complete. I found a whole bunch of passages like the one we just read that talks about how God transforms our heart, and that He alone is responsible for our heart transformation. Ephesians 2:8-9 says that **"we know we are saved by grace through faith, not by works, so that no one may boast"**. In Romans and Psalms it reminds us that no one is righteous no one even seeks after God on their own. In Genesis chapter 8 verse 21 God says that even from youth there is corruption in our hearts. In Ezekiel God says he will replace our heart of stone with a new heart. And at the same time, all throughout scripture are scattered tons of examples of God telling his people to do certain things, especially loving others and loving him. A lot of these things, are things that we wouldn't necessarily be inclined to do on our own. Like Loving our enemies, or praying for those who persecute us, loving our husbands and wives when it's hard, praying regularly, giving away our money, reading our Bibles regularly, are all things that we are told to do, but aren't supposed to wait until our heart and our feelings catch up. We don't wait until we feel like forgiving someone, we do it regardless of how our heart feels about it. Then God uses those acts of obedience to teach us and transform us and align our hearts to match up with his will.

The big problem that I realized in my thinking, was that I was conflating a few different areas and comparing verses that were talking about salvation with our expression of faith. Now let me be 100% perfectly clear. I am in no way talking about how Works affect our salvation. Our salvation depends entirely on the grace of God through faith and faith alone. Our good works play Zero roll in getting us anywhere close to Salvation at all. Ephesians 2:8-9 says for **"we know we are saved by grace through faith, not by works, so that no one may boast"**. So I am not talking about how works play into salvation, but rather, how do works affect our sanctification -our growing to be more and more Christ-like.

There's a passage that many of you are likely familiar with because it's a good one to memorize it's in Proverbs chapter 3 verses 1 through 6 I feel that In this passage there is so much to draw

from and so much for us to learn from but I think specifically we can answer our original questions about what we can do when it comes to our own sanctification and how we can draw near to the Lord. Let's read it together:

My son, do not forget my teaching,

but let your heart keep my commandments,

² for length of days and years of life

and peace they will add to you.

³ Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you;

bind them around your neck;

write them on the tablet of your heart.

⁴ So you will find favor and good success^[a]

in the sight of God and man.

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart,

and do not lean on your own understanding.

⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him,

and he will make straight your paths.

Now, implicit in this passage in verse 5 it says trust in the Lord with all your heart. The first thing that we can do if we want to be closer with the Lord and we want to experience more of and experience his life-giving transformation, then we must first put our trust in the Lord and in the gospel. When we put our trust and our faith into the Gospel of Jesus Christ this is what brings us salvation; this is what brings us back into relationship with God. Many of you have already put your trust into the gospel. The gospel is the simple reality that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. I'm going to break that down because it's so important and foundational, so please allow me to run on a couple of tangents.

We are sinful. That is one of the most aggravating truths about the gospel to someone who isn't a Christ follower. People will work out all kinds of ways to deny their own sinfulness. They will say truth is relative, what is true for you may not be true for me. So they may try to justify their greed or adultery or whatever by saying that for them in their situation it's not a bad thing. Or something that I have been hearing a lot more of lately is the pragmatic view of Truth and morality where something is good or bad or true or false, based on how it benefits the society at Large. Which is a terrible way to define truth. Because of our pride, which is a sin, nobody wants to feel wrong, bad, stupid, and ugly. But for us to understand Christianity truly we have to understand our own sinfulness. If someone you are talking to does not believe in a sinful nature of humanity, challenge

them to be perfect. Because if it is just our choice, if it is just up to us, why can't I just choose to not be bad? Why can't I just choose to love my wife and kids perfectly? No, the reality is that there is something bigger than us and our willpower at work. The sinful nature continues to draw us back, because the Bible says that we are slaves to sin and unable to escape its grasp. So we have to first acknowledge our sinfulness. Pastor and author Timothy Keller said about the gospel, that *"the gospel so assures us of God's love that we are finally capable of admitting the worst things about ourselves. In his love, based on Christ's work, not ours, it is finally safe to do so."* The first step in the gospel is acknowledging that we are sinful and that we break God's laws and rejected him over and over. We have broken the laws of a Beyond Cosmic being. As Beyond Cosmic lawbreakers, there is a price to pay, and it is bigger than we can pay on our own.

A huge criticism against Christianity is the reality of hell. People outside of Christianity hate the idea of this Justice and Punishment. People say How could a loving God send somebody to hell for just not following him or believing something different? Isn't that overreacting? This is so important and I want to take another little tangent to address these really good questions. First let's fully grasp exactly what the problem with sin is. God does not send anyone to hell simply because they don't believe in him. It is our sin that keeps us out of relationship with the Lord. When we sin, we are disrespecting and breaking the laws that our creator has put down for us, and we are hurting his creation.

Imagine this if I went up to a frog and I disrespect that frog, maybe I call him slimy, bumpy, and ugly. If I disrespect that frog, does it matter? Perhaps there are some who would advocate for the feelings of that frog but for the most part, no it would not matter. What if I went up to a child and said the same thing: you are slimy, bumpy, and ugly! Suddenly it matters more! And my disrespect carries with it more consequences. If I say the same thing to my wife, suddenly I'm going to have even more consequence coming to the point where I start to experience some of those consequences, like sleeping on the couch. Now what if I disrespect a police officer or the mayor of a city? How about the leader of a country? Here in Canada and even in the US we have freedom of speech and we can say things rather flippantly, but in some countries and through all different times, doing something like that could land you in prison or even being killed. If I went up to the queen and said are bumpy and slimy and ugly, suddenly that same comment I once made to a frog carries with it a larger grievance scale. So as we go out from a frog to a child to an adult to a person of authority to a world leader the consequences intensify, and where is God on that scale? He is infinitely beyond! So when we disrespect and disobey God, the consequences are infinitely

worse than relationships here on Earth. And we're not just talking about a few mocking words, we are talking about the rejection of our creator and hurting the things that he loves most his creation and other people. **Mothers and fathers**, what would you do if someone broke into your house and tried to hurt your baby or your child? **Our sin** of not loving God and not loving others *does* upset God, and I think that's fair. Not only is it fair, but with that, comes Justice. In our culture where we live in North America, we might wonder why would God punish us for doing bad things, and wonder why God doesn't just offering Grace and forgiveness to everyone regardless of how they behave or what they believe. But in other cultures, if you were born somewhere else in the world, you might feel the exact opposite. There are other cultures in the world where the idea of Grace and forgiveness is appalling because they feel that there is a lack of Justice, so they might look at Christianity not seeing the whole picture and say well look at God, he's not bringing Justice, he's bringing Grace and forgiveness. How horrible is that that people are not paying for their own crimes? So what someone here might see as offensive about hell, other culture and viewpoints might view that as fair and Just and right. But Christianity is not the product of one culture over another, it's a trans-culture truth. So this God of Love is all for justice. He wants us to understand that our sinfulness is a big deal to him.

So we are sinners, and the reality of that position as Sinners is that we will spend eternity in a place that was prepared for those who are against God. But there is good news! Paul says that in Romans while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. He paid the price and gave his life in our place so that we might enjoy eternity in relationship with our creator. This is glorious. And to bring us full circle, this gift of Jesus dying in our place for our sins is that free gift from God that none of us can earn. This gift of Salvation from our own sin and from the wrath of God, is given to us by God for anyone who will accept it, and God transforms our heart and transforms our heart of stone into one of flesh. Once God gives us a new heart we are also given responsibility. We are not passive in our faith, but rather God has called us to be active agents for Him. Not so that we can earn our salvation, we've already got salvation as true followers of Christ. Rather it is an expression of our faith in Christ. It's our heart aligning with God's heart so that we desire the same things that God desires. We can only do these good things in a way that pleases him by his power and with faith.

Hebrews quote says that without faith it is impossible to please God. I know people would say but Justin can't non-Christians do good works too? Yes. Of course people who aren't Christians can do things in a loving or generous or thoughtful manner, they can have compassion and be

incredible people. I know Christians who are incredible people and I know non-Christians who are also incredible people. However, anyone, Christian or not Christian, can do acts that outwardly conform to God's will- but don't have faith. It's not that God dislikes someone trying to do good who doesn't have faith, but God doesn't care about conforming or outward compliance. As a parent I think about raising my kids and I want them to obey and be good people, not because they're trying to conform or to comply to my demands as a parent, but because they really understand, they really get it and they really believe that the things that I say are good for them. I don't want it to be empty. For God, he wants us to do good out of a place of faith not just for the sake of doing good. God is pleased by our faith more than any specific action or sacrifice we make.

Part of my initial misunderstanding was that I missed the fact that even though we have to do things that we aren't going to enjoy, and our feelings and hearts haven't caught up yet, but we have to do them anyway; the reality is our hearts have already being transformed. When we do things that we don't feel like, we want to do them anyway because of our faith. We have faith that God knows what he's doing. We have faith that when we love our enemy God's word can pierce their heart. When we turn the other cheek, we have faith we will reflect God's great love for them. When we forgive those who hurt us and seek forgiveness, we replicate the great forgiveness that God has first shown us. When we give generously, we show God that we trust in his provision for us. Our actions motivated by faith please God. I was confusing heart and the meaning of the word to mean feelings in one place, and are deciding to do things in another.

A really cool thing that I learned, is that in ancient Hebrew, they didn't have a concept of what our brain did or does and they attributed a bunch of different things to the heart rather than to the brain. So they understood that the heart was a physical thing in your body that kept you alive but they also attributed intellectual understanding to the heart. So when we gain wisdom or store up knowledge, those things are attributed to the heart. They also attributed emotions to the heart so when we feel happy or sad or fearful or distressed or joyful, that all happens from the heart. Similar to how we might refer to it today. They also felt that the choices we make, or our desires, or the things we long for, also come from the heart. It's even a bit more complicated, because there are other words that are used and translated into English. But what this means for us today, is we have to be careful that because we have so many words to describe what gets translated into heart or Spirit or mind. So when the writers of the Bible sat down to write, that's the frame of understanding that they wrote with. So when it says that God transforms our heart, it's not simply

talking about our feelings, or our Salvation in a general sense, but more so our whole being our intellect our physical body our emotions and our desires, and God transforms all of us that we would Point towards the Lord and acknowledge Him. This is the transformation that I long for.

So that brings us back to the original question that I raised. I want to be transformed to be more and more like Jesus, because I know that I'm not all there yet. So if you also want to be transformed to be more like Jesus then what must we do what can we do? Let's look again at Proverbs chapter 3. So that was a large tangent about trusting in the Lord. If we want to be closer with the Lord we have to be in right relationship with him by trusting in the gospel. Another thing that it says is "My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments". This is very similar to what Jesus said at the Great Commission in Matthew 28 when he said 'go and teach all that I have commanded'. this is important if we want to know the Lord and be closer with him and be more like him, this idea of us being filled with his teaching to know his teaching to understand his ways, is so important. If we want to get to know God the only place that we can truly learn more is from the Bible. As Christians we believe the Bible is the inspired word of the Living God. That we can talk and speculate all we want on some possible theories about what God is like and we might listen to some philosophers or pastors or anyone who has an idea about who God is, But ultimately the only things that we know are actually true about God are the things that we can read about in Scripture. So we have to be in the Bible regularly learning and writing God's word on the tablets of our heart, so that our whole being, our understanding and wisdom and intelligence and our desires can lineup with God's. And then in verse 5 and 6 it's so beautiful. It says

Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.

⁶In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.

So we trust, we learn his Commandments and his ways, and then we forsake our own understanding, just like a child who doesn't understand why their parent is telling them to not run across the street, but instead of leaning on their own understanding, they trust the wisdom and commands of their parents. Or here's another one for you parents, it's like when you tell your teenager to clean the house and they don't understand why, instead of leaning on their own understanding, they trust in the wisdom and commands of their parents, not fully knowing that their parents are preparing them to be adults could one day care for their own home and family. God's wisdom is so far beyond ours. When we start to lean on our own understanding instead of

on the Lord's, that's when real big problems start to come in. People feel that they can be sexually promiscuous, people feel that they can do drugs, people feel they can drink excessively, people feel that they can be bad stewards of their money and time, people feel like they don't need to be part of a community of Believers - we start to justify these things in our own minds instead of understanding that there's a reason that God wants us to so deeply love him and love others and to follow his ways. He knows you. He loves you. God will make your path straight if you lean on his understanding and in his ways. If we want to be more like Jesus then we must first put our faith and full trust in God and in his ways. And as Christians we sometimes add to this we sometimes find ways of trying to do these things with our own wisdom. We try to study beyond what God has told us and try to fill in where God has purposely not said anything. Or we try to do things that we think will get us points with God or make us more and more spiritual. For hundreds of years there were groups of people called Aesthetics who would do the weirdest things trying to be as holy as they could. Some people would stand on these pillars and put rocks in their mouths so all they could do is just stand there and pray. This is not what God has commanded his people to do.

Today we sometimes burden ourselves with our own expectations sometimes those expectations are too low and sometimes they are not even in the same ballpark of what God is asking for us. When we are reading a devotional and we get behind on the devotional and we feel like we're somehow disappointing the Lord that we're letting him down, but you can't let God down because we were never holding him up. Instead it's all about how the Father and Jesus and the Holy Spirit will transform us and transform our heart our whole being. So as we live out our faith our lives as Christians and we trust in him and lean into his wisdom and his understanding, we simply read his word, meditate on it, and pray for understanding, and we let the Holy Spirit continue to shape us and grow us into the likeness of Jesus Christ. And when God's word tells us that we need to love our enemies, to forgive others, to be generous, and to love the oppressed, can we find ways to bring him glory because we love him and trust him. Let's pray.