

4/15/18

TRANSFORMED

Transformed In My Spiritual Health Luke 15:11-24

Jeff Marian

Are you ready for a little transformation in your life? Are you willing to dare to believe that every key area of your life can be better than it is right now by God's grace and power? I hope so, because that's what this worship series called Transformed is all about. I can't wait to hear the stories of how God uses this series to impact lives in this community of faith! And transformed lives are what God uses to transform this broken world, revealing the Kingdom of God.

Last week Pastor Paul kicked off the series talking about the fundamentals of setting goals for life-change. While it is God who ultimately changes us, our faith also matters in the process. And goals are not just an expression of our heart's desire; they are also an act of faith. Every week as we set goals for transformation in a key area of life we're saying, "God, I entrust my life to you. I believe that you can change me, grow me more and more into the likeness of Jesus."

Today we're going to dive into the first key area of life – our spiritual life. But before we dive into our Scripture reading, let me remind you of our theme verse for this Transformed series. It's Romans 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect." I want you to notice that at the heart of transformation is a renewing of our minds, a radical change in the way we think. And that is certainly true when it comes to transformation in our spiritual lives. Let me suggest a few things I suspect we need to think about differently.

First, you don't have a spiritual life. That's just what you want to hear from your pastor, right? You don't have a spiritual life. You have a life and it is, in its entirety, spiritual. Let me say that again – you have a life and it is, in its entirety, spiritual. The way we've structured this series might lead you to believe that you have a spiritual life, and a financial life, and a physical life, and so on. But the truth is that it's all spiritual because God cares about every aspect of our lives and God is active in every aspect of our lives. How we treat our physical bodies is a spiritual issue. How we handle our finances is a spiritual issue. We're talking about the different areas of our lives for the sake of clarity, but please don't get

the idea that your spiritual life is somehow separate from every other area of your life. It's not. Your life is spiritual. Today I simply want to focus on growing our relationship with God.

Here's the second way in which I suspect our minds need renewing - While we often use the language of wanting to grow closer to God, the truth is you can't. You can't grow closer to God because God is everywhere, all around you, all the time. Just as a fish can't grow closer to water, we can't grow closer to God. We are, and always will be, closer to God than we could dare imagine. Listen to these awesome words from Psalm 139:

O LORD, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away.... I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me. I could ask the darkness to hide me and the light around me to become night— but even in darkness I cannot hide from you.

Now let's lean into our Scripture reading, one of the best-known stories that Jesus ever told – the story of the Prodigal Son. Let's read it together from Luke 15:11-24 [MSG].

When we hear the story of the Prodigal Son it's easy to think that we can stray far away from God, just as the son strayed far away from his father. But the truth is, you can't. Scripture teaches that God chooses, not only to dwell all around us but even to dwell within us. In Colossians 1 St. Paul writes, "The mystery in a nutshell is just this: Christ is in you." So, what's the point of the story of the Prodigal Son? This is the point I want you to get today: You can't get far from God, but you can stray far away from God's best intentions for you. Let me say that again: You can't get far from God, but you can stray far away from God's best intentions for you.

Let me give you an imperfect analogy that might help us here. When my wife, Nancy's, heart and my heart are "in sync" we could be thousands of miles away from each other and yet still feel close and connected. But when our hearts are not in sync, when I've done or said something that has wounded her heart or broken her trust, we could be sitting together at the dinner table and feel miles apart. Even in those difficult moments we still love one another, but in that moment we feel miles apart. So, when we talk about growing closer to God I don't mean that we need to somehow run after God, or go off and find God. I mean aligning our lives with God's best intentions for us. But how

do we do that? How do we continually align our lives with God's best intentions for us? I want to suggest to you that the story of the Prodigal Son gives us a pattern to live into and that pattern has three steps.

First, wake up! That's what the Prodigal Son did. He woke up to the reality of where he was and what he was doing. He woke up to the reality that there was more to life than what he was experiencing, and that "more to life" could be found in his father's house. And that's where the journey begins for many of us – with a wakeup call. We wake up to the reality of where we are and what we're doing. We wake up to the reality that we've settled for so much less than the abundant life that Jesus promises. In a sense we not wake up, but we get fed up with the way things are.

That moment of waking up can look different for different people. For an addict it might be that moment of hitting "rock bottom". For a successful business person it might be that moment when they realize that their bank account is full but their life feels empty. For a friendship or a marriage it could be awakening to the reality that the relationship isn't growing or isn't fulfilling. Or maybe you awaken to the fact that you're sick and tired of living in a world where racism and violence and injustice are far too commonplace, that the world you live in doesn't look a lot like the Kingdom that Jesus came to reveal. If we want to align our lives with God's best intentions for us, the journey begins when we wake up. This first step reminds me of Jesus' first beatitude, "You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there's more of God and his rule." That's the blessing of waking up.

Second, own up! Once the Prodigal Son woke up he immediately owned up to his failures. When he came to his senses, he confessed his sin. He took responsibility for how he wound up feeding pigs and going hungry. This is such an important step on the journey of aligning our lives with God's best intentions for us, because our tendency is to play the victim and blame others when we wake up to the reality of our circumstances. But that "victim mentality" is part of needs renewing. Nothing changes when we play the victim and blame others. There is no transformation without personal responsibility. We can't always change our circumstances. We can't change other people. But we can take responsibility for our part in why we are where we are in life. It may not be all our fault, but we need to own up to what we can.

In classic "church language" this is called confession. We get clear and honest with God and ourselves about how we contributed to our circumstances. Sometimes it's obvious what we need to confess – a decision we made, an attitude

or pattern of behavior we've allowed to wear a groove in our soul, something we did or said that damaged a relationship, or something we failed to do or say that let a relationship go adrift.

But sometimes we have to dig deeply to find our part in how we wound up where we did. Sometimes we need to spend significant time in self-reflection to discover what it is that we need to own up to. And then when we discover it we lay it before God in confession. That kind of honesty and transparency is critical to the process of real transformation in our spiritual lives because it realigns our hearts with God's heart. When Nancy and I have strained relationship and we're sitting at the dinner table together feeling miles apart, what brings our hearts back together is that kind of honesty and transparency. And that's true in our relationship with God. When the Prodigal Son brought his confession to his father, he hardly got more than a few words out before his father embraced him and welcomed him home. That's what happens in our relationship with God when we own up. We encounter love and forgiveness.

So, we wake up and then we own up. Finally, we offer up, we offer ourselves up to God in humble service. That's what the Prodigal Son did. He woke up – he came to his senses. He owned up – he confessed his sins. And then he offered up. At the beginning of the story the Prodigal Son says, "Give me my share." And then at the end of the story he says, "Make me a servant." Do you notice an attitude change there? When your heart moves from self-centeredness to God-centeredness, that is true transformation.

Are you there yet? Are you still saying to God and others "give me, give me"? Or are you offering yourself to God in humble service, saying "use me"? That kind of transformation doesn't happen overnight. But it begins when we ask God to change us, to change our heart and our mind. That's the transformation I want in my life, and it's the transformation I want for you. God can change the world with a church filled with people who have been transformed in that way.

This week in your workbook (hold up a copy) you're going to find both a small group guide and a daily devotional guide. I want to challenge you to use those resources this week to discern a three-month spiritual health goal. If you haven't gotten your workbook yet, you'll find them for sale in the Community Room after the service. I urge you to get a guidebook and use it throughout this series because you and your spiritual health are worth the investment.

.