

How to Get Closer to God

50 Days of Transformation, Part 2, 10-15-17

Welcome to part two of our Fifty Days of Transformation series! This morning we're going to build on the foundation Michelle set last week...

- as we start looking at the first of seven key areas of our lives; Spiritual, Relational, Physical, Mental, Emotional, Financial, Vocational...
- Seven dimensions of our lives, in which most of us would want to make at least some changes or renovations.

Now, I don't know about you, but I'm a fan of HGTV's "Fixer-Upper," watching Chip & Joanna Gaines...

- Who have a way of transforming a home-improvement nightmare into a home that anyone who love to live in.
- Well, after watching the show a bit, you get a feel for how Joanna is going to respond as she walks into the house she's about to remodel.

As she walks in the front door, she's gonna take down the popcorn ceiling and put in can lighting...

- Then she's going to take down the walls and really open up the space while putting in new French doors.
- Then, in the kitchen, she's going to open the walls, add a big island, put in new cabinets, and so on.

Well, through these next seven weeks, we're going to walk through these seven rooms in our lives...

- So, that, at the end of this time, it **won't just be Chip & Joanna who did an amazing, transforming work** in our lives, but our Heavenly dad...
- Which is a great thing, because nobody knows us like Him... nobody loves us and has a vision for who we can become, like Him!

And even more than your typical transformation on "Fixer Upper," which can change a home from **empty to full**... from **old to new**... from **dusty to squeaky clean**,

- a God-inspired life-transformation can move us from **defeat & disappointment...** to **faith & victory...**
- from **insecurity & inferiority...** to **courage & to boldness.**
- It helps us to become all that God wants us to be... whether its in our spiritual life, vocational life, or emotional life.

And yet, because God is the source of transformation, we're going to see that the further away you get from God,

- the more out-of-focus and unmanageable your life can become.
- Why? Because **when you're not listening to Him**; When you're **trusting in your own wisdom** rather than His;
- When you **turn off the path He's invited you down...** the further away from His best you'll find yourself.

Maybe you've had one or two experiences with this... where you've felt the impact of not following God's plan for your life.

- Of course, it shouldn't be such a surprise. In fact, **Proverbs 13:15** says that *"the way of the unrighteous is rough."*
- It's full of thorns. It's difficult. It's a rocky, steep road that will always, in the end, **leave you worn out and frustrated.**

On the other hand, experience has also taught us that **the closer we get to God**, the more our lives are going to be transformed.

- We see this all through Scripture. **When Paul finally met Jesus Christ** face to face, he was radically transformed from a persecutor of the faith – into the apostle of love.
- **Isaiah was transformed** from a depressed person into the voice of a nation;

A **Moabite woman named Ruth** was transformed from fearful widow to a courageous woman of God who ends up being the great grandmother of King David.

- **Esther** was transformed from a timid harem girl into someone who saves her people from genocide.
- **Moses** spend 40 years shepherding a small flock of sheep in the desert. But, His encounters with God transformed him into the deliverer of Israel.

We all want to be close to God. You wouldn't be here this morning if you didn't want to be closer to God in some way.

- But the Bible says ***“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way...”***
- In other words, like sheep we tend to wander. **You don't have to teach sheep to nibble their way into trouble.** They just do it naturally.

Why? Because sheep aren't really that bright an animal. They'll walk into a den of wolves;

- they'll walk off a cliff if they think there's some more grass down at the bottom!
- Sheep tend to wander... even into all kinds of difficult and dangerous situations.
- The Bible says *“We all, like sheep, have gone astray.”* We don't tend to stay close to God. We tend to wander off.

So this morning, as we continue our 50 Days of Transformation we're going to talk about how,

- **rather than wander off from God**, you can grow closer to God & stay closer to God.
- Of course, it's no surprise that the Bible has a lot to say about all this... how you can **connect or reconnect with God**...
- how we experience for **first time** or **re-experience in a whole new way**,
- the kind of **friendship & intimacy** we can have with God.

In fact, one of the most famous stories in the Bible speaks to this.

- It's a story Jesus told, in chapter 15 of the Gospel of Luke often referred to as the parable of “the Prodigal Son.”
- So, let me read you the story. And, afterwards, **we'll talk about some of principles from the story** that can help us experience transformation in our relationship with God.

*“Jesus told this story: **‘A man had two sons. The younger son told his father, ‘Give me my share of your estate now, instead of waiting until you die.’ So his father divided his wealth between his sons.** Read entirety of Luke 15:11-24 from Bible.*

Don't you love that story! It's Jesus' tender way of pointing out **not only the propensity we all have to wander away**

- from the **intimacy & friendship our Heavenly Father desires to have** with us
- But it **shows the heart of our Father** who's always at work drawing us back to Himself.

So, in the beginning of the story, the young man starts off saying, "Father, I want you to give me what's rightfully mine..."

- I mean, I know I'm supposed to get my inheritance after you die, but I'd like it now."
- Now, **if that would be unheard of today**, then believe me, it would have been perceived far more harshly back then.

How dishonoring... how incredibly hurtful. But the young man couldn't see any of that...

- he was **too focused on what he perceived as his rights... his right to live the life he wanted to live...**
- a life where he's the main character... the star of the show... always getting what he felt he deserved when he felt he deserved it. It was an **incredibly self-centered life**.

And so, in spite of how horrible it is asking one's father for their inheritance while they're still alive, he does.

- And after he gets the money from his dad, he packs up and heads off for the Las Vegas strip...
- far away from his home, where he can do whatever he wants without being censured by his fellow Jews living all around him.

And as soon as he arrives in this distant, pagan land, **he begins wasting his time and inheritance** on booze & women.

- It's amazing how a story, several thousand years old, continues to speak to the human condition like this.
- Clearly, the son was acting out of some emptiness... that **idea that what he was lacking could be filled by the world**.

Truth is, I think that the further the young man traveled from his father, the deeper his emptiness became...

- And **the more he tried to fill that emptiness** with the stuff of the world.
- You see, like the abuse of alcohol, immorality is, at its root, a false affection **seeking to fill inside of us what only God can fill.**
- In a way, it's a counterfeit to the experience of the Father's love.

Under the **guise of affection**, the parties, the booze, the immorality all **provide an artificial sense** that those deepest longings in us are being satisfied.

- But, the reality is that, the more we try and satisfy that emptiness with things that could never satisfy, the emptier we become.
- Just **think about the reality of pornography** in our culture. 25% of all online search queries are pornography related... that's 68 million/day.
- Every second, another **28,500 people are watching porn online...**
- 40 million Americans regularly visit porn sites... one third of which are women.

At the very least, it reflects a desperation within our culture to fill an emptiness inside of them.

- And, **as we can all imagine or have experienced**,
- as that desperation is matched by the force of addiction, it can be so difficult to turn away from it.
- But **those caught in its web** are ultimately **desperate for the One who can fill that empty place** with a love that will never abandon or fade.

Perhaps for the "Prodigal Son," the parties and sex were able to distract him from the pain for a little while...

- But, after his money ran out, **there was nothing left to distract him...** nothing left to emotionally hide behind...
- **Nothing to anaesthetize the pain.** All he had left was that God-sized hole in his life.
- And then, after losing everything, he becomes homeless... living on the streets.

But, because of a famine that's swept across the land... because nobody had very much to eat... **no one was going to give to some panhandler** on the street.

- So, now, without any job or any food, things go from bad to worse,
- **though finally, he finds a farm where he hires himself out** to do what, for a Jewish man, would be the worst job ever.

Now, I don't know what you'd consider to be the worst job ever... maybe a waiter a Chucky Cheese... or a Telemarketer...

- Or the guy who picks up all the dead deer on the side of the road each night... or the guy who cremates bodies.
- But, for a Jewish man, **being the guy who feeds and cleans up after swine** is pretty much as bad as it gets,
- because, according to the Torah, a Jewish man is not only prohibited from eating pork but he's not even supposed come near them.

But, just when you thought it couldn't get any worse, we're told here that **he gets so hungry and so desperate,**

- that the very food he's giving to the swine seems appealing to him.
- And yet, as much as he longed for the food the pigs were getting, we're told that he couldn't even have that.

To one degree or another, we've all lived that life where, in spite of the fact that we have **a Father who longs to prepare the greatest of feasts** for us,

- We're somehow ready to settle for the slop the pigs are eating.
- While He's invited us to a banqueting table, we settle for the dried crumbs that fall from that table.

We don't know how long all this lasts, but **at some point the son remembers all he left behind.**

- In fact, it occurs to him that his father's servants, those making the smallest salaries on his dad's farm, are eating better than he is!
- And it hits him... *"What have I done? How I could I have thrown all of that away? How could I have wasted a third of my father's estate... wealth that my father spent his whole life working toward? How could I have done that to my dad? What have I done?"*

So, he decides that he needs to go back to his father's estate. But, **he couldn't possibly ask his father** to just accept him back into the family.

- Instead, he's thinking: "*I could never deserve that. I'll go back and ask my father if he would hire me as one of his hired hands.*"
- So, why do we settle for the crumbs? Because we see ourselves as hired hands rather than sons and daughters.

We'll talk about his Father's response to all that in just a few minutes, but from this story so far,

- we can see **a process unfolding regarding how one might be restored back to God...**
- how you can discover new intimacy & friendship with your Heavenly Father.

Now, I may not know where you are today with regard to your relationship with God.

- Maybe you're here this morning and you're not even sure you have a relationship with God.
- Perhaps you're here feeling a million miles away from God.
- Maybe you've experienced a deeper relationship with God but something got in the way... maybe work or another relationship.

Maybe it's not been all that bad, **though you know that you've been settling for a certain level of disrepair** in your relationship with God.

- Regardless of where you're at, if you're at all wondering how to connect or reconnect with God,
- then this story Jesus shares with us can **provide a pathway back to intimacy** with Him... a pathway to spiritual transformation.
- And the first step in that pathway is this...

1. GET FED UP WITH MY LIFE

I know that, for me, any real change in my life begins with a sense of discontent...

- Where we get fed up with our circumstances. We get fed up with the way we've been living.
- We're too stressed out... too disconnected... too frustrated... too overworked and busy.
- Where we just don't like the life we're living right now.

Nothing is going to happen in your life in the next seven weeks until first you get dissatisfied with where things are at.

- If you think that everything's just fine, **then where you are now is probably where you'll stay.**
- But, remember, that **it's easy to get used to a certain level of disrepair** in our lives...
- Disrepair in our relationships, at work, with our finances, our emotional lives and so on.

We've all experienced this. If your car is messy right now, my guess is that you would never have let it get that way the week you first bought the car.

- That's because it takes time for us to accept that disrepair... and once we accept some, we'll naturally accept more.
- But, at some point, you've got to say, *"It doesn't have to be this way... I can clean this car and keep it clean!"*

So we really do have to be in that place of being fed up. *"I'm tired of being stressed out... I'm tired of being frustrated all the time.*

- *I'm tired of being busy all the time. I'm tired of feeling distant from God."*
- Nothing happens until you get fed up!

In the story of the Prodigal Son, it says that **"He wasted it all and had nothing left."**

- And then, from there, we're told that *"he got desperate & hungry... And he finally came to his senses."*
- That's where transformation starts.

Are you there yet? If not, that's okay. God will still love you where you are. And yet, **because of that love, He may allow a little rain** in your life.

- And if that doesn't get your attention, **then He may let the winds blow a bit more in your life.**
- If that doesn't work He may send a storm. And, why?
- Because God loves you just the way you are **but He loves you too much to let you stay that way.**
- Because He created you for more.

So, the first step in the transformation process is for you **to get fed up with the way you're living**... But then you need to own up...

2. OWN UP TO MY SIN

This is where we own up to that disrepair in our lives... Own up to the brokenness... to the hurtful patterns... to the pain... to our sin.

- You see, the son first got fed up... realizing what a mess his life had become.
- But then in verses 17-18 it says that, ***“When he came to his senses, he said... ‘I will set out and go back to my Father and say to Him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against You.’”***

Suddenly, he gets some of his perspective back... and he realizes how unfulfilling... how unsustainable his life had become **with God on the outside**.

- You see, a big part of “owning up” is facing the fact that I’ve been living according to my wisdom rather than God’s;
- That I’ve been living with the illusion of being in control, when, in reality, I’m in control of far less than I’d like to admit.

Owning up is facing the reality that **every time I search for unconditional love** where it could never be found... that I’ve become the Prodigal Son.

- It’s about owning up to the fact that **I’ve forsaken the home of true love** in the Father’s presence,
- and embraced those counterfeits **that can offer no more than a temporary distraction** from the homesickness we all have for the Father’s house that we’ve drifted so far from.

So, I own up. What do I own up to? Ultimately, I own up to my sin.

“When he came to his senses he said, ‘I have sinned.’”

- Isaiah 59:2 *“Your sins have separated you from your God...”*
- Have you ever prayed and you felt like God was a million miles away?
- Have you ever prayed and felt like your prayers were bouncing off the ceiling where you felt you were just talking to yourself?

Where does that come from? Well, Isaiah 59 reminds us that our sins have a way building walls of separation between ourselves and God.

- I remember, years ago, hearing someone say that, *“If you feel far from God guess who moved?”*
- You see, God hasn’t moved. God isn’t taking a break from you. God has always been there and will always be there. And, why?

Because as much as **our sins can block the intimacy & friendship He longs to have with us**,

- According to Paul in Romans 8, nothing can ultimately separate us from His love... because His love is unconditional.
- So, if over a stretch of time you’re feeling far from God, just ask yourself how you may have moved.

So, we own up to our stuff... knowing that our sins get in the way of the kind of intimacy God wants to have with us.

- The fact is, you’re as close to God as you choose to be. You can’t really blame anybody else.
- You **can’t blame your husband**. You can’t blame your **wife**. You can’t blame your **mom**, your **dad**, your **big brother**.
- You can’t blame the **government**; It’s not Donald Trump’s fault.

The fact is, we **may have to own up to the fact** that we just haven’t been desperate enough.

- You haven’t been fed up enough to say, I am desperate to know God more today than I knew Him yesterday.
- When I own up and I say, "God, I’ve blown it... I’ve been going my way... I’ve been doing what I want to do..."
- When you’re fed up and own up, that’s when you know God will respond.

And how will He respond? Does he go, *“Yeah, well, you made your bed, now you lay in it. In fact, let me tell you what else you’re doing wrong.”*

Of course not.

- In fact, after being confronted regarding **not only** his adultery, but having the women’s husband killed,
- King David finally came to his senses and owned up to what he had done.

- And so, in **Psalm 51:1-4** David cries out to God, saying, *“Be merciful to me, O God, because of your constant love. Because of your great mercy wipe away my sins! Wash away all my evil and make me clean! I recognize my faults (I own up) and I am well aware that I’ve sinned against you.”*

But how will God respond? Well, look at the next verse: *“The Lord says,*

- *‘No matter how deep the stain of your sins, I can remove it. I can make you as clean as freshly fallen snow.’”*
- Maybe there’s a stain in your life... something that could stay with you the rest of your life... one that you can’t let go of.

God says, *“I can remove that stain.”* In fact, in **Isaiah 1:18**, He says, *“Come now, and let us reason together... Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.”*

- I love how that passage begins... *“Come now, and let us reason together.”* It’s an invitation to take an inventory of our lives.
- In **Psalm 139:23-24**, David does just that and says, *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.”*

What we’re talking about here has to do with taking regular spiritual checkups.

- Many of you **already do this physically**... getting your yearly physical exam.
- I know that when I turned 30, my doctor wanted me to see a proctologist as part of my regular exam (now they wait till you’re 40).

Well, the crazy thing is that the only appointment I could get was the same day I was getting my wisdom teeth pulled.

- Unfortunately, **the night before I tripped and sprained my ankle** pretty badly.
- The next morning, I went to the ER and they put a brace on it and gave me crutches.

So, I **hobbled into the dentist's office** to have two wisdom teeth removed.

- But there was a problem with one of them and the bleeding wouldn't stop.
- So, I now had to **hobble into the proctologist's office** on crutches with a sprained ankle, with a mouth full of bloody gauze.

And, if all of that, wasn't enough, I was now being instructed to drop my pants and bend over!

- And can you guess the name of my proctologist? No kidding... Dr. Butt.
- Well, so much for a routine, yearly physical!!

Perhaps some of you have **regular reviews at work evaluating your job** performance.

- Perhaps, in your marriage, you **go out every now and then, and just ask each other**, "How are we doing? How can I do a better job supporting you?"
- You see, that's what we're talking about here... having a regular check-in with God.

And where do you start when you sit down with God for your routine check-ins?

- Well, it can start with **a prayer like David's** in Psalm 51, "*God, I invite you to look at my life... to look at my heart. Where have I allowed disrepair to go on unnoticed? Where haven't I owned up to my actions?*"
- *In what ways have I moved from You? God, point out any behaviors that need to change... any thoughts that need to be adjusted."*

If you were here last week, Michelle spoke about setting a goal for each week during this series.

- Well, here's your goal for this week... besides setting apart time, starting tomorrow, to read your devotional each day,
- I'd like you to have your first spiritual check-in this week with God.

Now, before I close, I want to **add one final layer onto the process** of transformation that we've been talking about.

- First, we need to **get fed up**... then we need to **own up**.
- But then we need to **offer up our lives to Him**.

3. OFFER UP OUR LIVES TO HIM

The story here in Luke 15 began with the son demanding his share of his father's estate.

- But then, in verse 19, having come to his senses and having owned up to his sin,
- **he begins his journey back** to his father's home.
- Of course, the journey represents a process.

And, **at this stage of the process**, the younger son still felt as though he wasn't good enough for the Father's love.

- "I'll go back to my father... but I could never be his son again. I'll ask him if I could be one of his hired servants."

Rather than trying to fill that emptiness inside with the things of this world,

- the Prodigal Son decided that **he'd rather live with this emptiness as a slave in his Father's household** than live a life of sin apart from him.
- But, clearly, as we'll see, the Father wanted so much more than that.

But though the son's perspective fell short, you could see the transformation happening!

- **He's not where he needs to be**, but he's also not where he was!
- His heart was already moving from self-centeredness to God-centeredness... from pride & arrogance to humility & honoring.
- That's how transformation works... as a process rather than an event.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul says this. ***"We reflect the Lord's glory and are being transformed to be more like Him..."***

- That expression, "*are being transformed*," reflects this process of being transformed. Not just once but an ongoing basis.

- In the New Testament, that word “transformed” is the Greek word, “*metamorphoo*” from which we get Metamorphosis.

And, when we think of metamorphosis most of us think about the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly, right?

- From their **eggs attached to the back of a leaf** to a **caterpillar** to a **cocoon** to a **butterfly**... it certainly doesn't happen overnight.
- But what will **eventually emerge from that cocoon** is quite stunning!

Honestly, that's what I want. As we begin this 50 Days of Transformation,

- I'm believing that, in the different areas of our lives,
- **we'll find ourselves breaking free of the cocoons that hem us in...**
- And **emerge with wings on our backs** where we can live, more & more, in the **joy & freedom of being God's sons & daughters**.

But this transformation process starts with **getting fed up** with the way you've been living.

- **Then continues as we “own up,”** as we get honest to God. “*God, I admit it, I've been living for myself. I've been doing it my way.*”
- **And then, as we offer ourselves up to our Father...**
- who created us for friendship & intimacy and **longs to have that intimacy & friendship restored**.

So, how will the Father respond to the son's return? Well, if you remember, **the son had prepared a speech** for that moment...

- Where he would declare that he was a sinner, not worthy to be his father's son.
- But **“while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him!”**

You see, Jesus wants us to know that the Father wasn't just getting on with his life...

- Instead, he was there on the front stoop waiting for his son to return. And when he saw him, **he ran out to his son...**
- **And, before the son could get those rehearsed words out of his mouth,** the Father embraced him and couldn't let go...

- **and when he did, it was to prepare a party** for his son who,
- as **verse 32** says, was dead, but is now alive... who was lost, but now is found.

The idea of his becoming a servant never made it to his father's ears... because **he wasn't a servant... he was a son!**

- If, in your relationship with God, you've been relating to him more as a servant than a son/daughter,
- Than just know that this is something He's passionately wanting to change in your relationship with Him.

Guys, the moment you just say, "God, I'm tired of living the way I've been living. I want more."

- The **moment your fed up... the moment you own up and offer yourself up to Him,**
- Before you even knock at his door, **God will race off His throne and into your arms...** embracing you and kissing you.

He says, "I know you blew it... but all I really care about is that the son who was lost...

- The son who lost his identity... the son who tried to fill the God-sized emptiness in his life with the small things of this world...
- That **this son has been found...** his **identity restored...** his **emptiness filled.**

I remember back in college reading this story of the Prodigal Son. I looked up the meaning of this word, "Prodigal,"

- And it **has to do with being lavish & extravagant.** But far more lavish than the son's lifestyle while in that distant land,
- Was the **lavish love of the Father who ran to his son...** who embraced him and kissed him and welcomed him home.

For me, this will always be the Story of the Prodigal Father... the **story of a God who loves with great extravagance...**

- A **God of transformation who longs to be encountered by us** in every aspect of our lives,
- From our Spiritual lives to our Relational, Physical, Mental, Emotional, Financial, & Vocational lives.

To all of us, this God has given us this opportunity to devote 50 Days of our lives to this transformation.

- If, **in your heart you haven't yet signed on**, then it's not too late. Get the devotional book if you haven't...
- Join a Transformed Life Group if you haven't. Because if you do, by the end of this time, like the young man in Jesus' parable,
- You'll end up in a whole better place than you started...
- that place of deeper intimacy & friendship with your Heavenly Father.

Response:

- New Identity: Servant versus Sonship
- Filling emptiness with things that can never last... like trying to fill the Grand Canyon with a glass of water.
- New understanding of the Father's love... How will he respond to you?