

Transformation (spiritual growth) occurs through a network of relationships, as we relate first to God and then with believers, neighbors, and strangers.

- Transformation is both an inward (with God) and an outward (with believers, neighbors, and strangers) journey.
  - It begins with God; we have the most familiarity with God.
  - It includes believers (familiarity in Christ); neighbors (some familiarity—either geographic neighbors or people we have at least passing knowledge of); and strangers (low familiarity; people who are “passing through” our lives).
- Transformation is a process (Philippians 2:12-13 and Romans 12:1-2).
  - We *are* transformed; we do not transform ourselves.
  - We take action and cooperate with God who works with us.
- Transformation links several moving parts together.
  - Love for God is connected to love for neighbor (Luke 10:25-28).
  - Genuine love for believers is connected with hospitality to strangers (Hebrews 13:1-2).
- Transformation happens when we take action (Luke 10:37).
  - Not information, but (trans)formation. Thus, action.
  - Jesus told this man to “Go and do likewise.” Transformation occurs when we “go” and “do.”

We will be transformed spiritually through focus on these four areas of relationship that are described in scripture (with God, believers, neighbors, and strangers). They will transform us through regular, formative work in each area by creating the space God needs to lead us to deeper transformation.

- In this class, we'll look more closely at each area of relationship. I'll explore scripture about each one and suggest formative practices that will enable you to live into these four areas of relationship.
- In each area, we'll look at a core thought, a key scripture, a formative action, and several examples.

*Grow in God (Glorify God)*

- Core thought: Love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind
- Key scripture: Luke 10:25-28
- Formative action: Formative spiritual disciplines
- Examples: prayer; bible reading; bible meditation; silence and solitude; worship

Our relationship with God is transformed through relational love.

- It's easy to reduce our love for God to a checklist (a transaction).
  - As a teenager, I believed my relationship with God was based on my ability to transact with God by making “payments” of obedience to him.
  - In no other serious relationship do we limit ourselves to simply observing rules.
  - There is a difference between relating to God and having a relationship with God.
- We need to relate to God with our whole being.
  - Jesus teaches us to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind (Lk 10:25-28).
  - This challenges us to reorganize our lives and priorities around God.
  - We need to create space for God in our lives.
- Spiritual disciplines help us love God relationally.
  - What if Bible reading was not seen as a chore but as a life-giving activity?
  - What if prayer was not a shallow asking for things but a deep engagement with the Father?
  - What if worship was not about five things but about seeking the will of God (Rom 12:1-2)?

*Build Believers in Faith*

- Core thought: Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters
- Key scripture: Hebrews 13:1
- Formative action: Mentoring and encouraging relationships
- Examples: meeting with other believers over coffee; mentoring; small bible reading and prayer groups; reading the Bible with your family

Our relationships with other believers are transformed when we encourage, serve and mentor them.

- Believers are not the “necessary evil” in our relationship with God.
  - You've heard about the person who claims they like Jesus but not his followers.
  - Even those of us who are mature struggle with relating to other believers.
  - But the church is a “body,” not a solo enterprise.
- We love other believers by encouraging, serving and mentoring them.
  - One of the purposes for meeting together (Heb 10:24-25) is for encouragement.
  - We serve others by helping them grow in love and good deeds (Heb 10:24-25).
  - Mentoring another believer is a great way to “spur” them towards love and good deeds.
- Form small groups of believers for mutual encouragement.
  - What if a small group or a Bible class was not seen as just another activity but as an excellent way to connect with other believers?
  - What if an accountability “life transformation group” was not seen as a nuisance time to listen to complaints but as another way to gather with other believers on a smaller scale?
  - What if you saw your family as your closest and most important ministry for mentoring and encouraging?

*Nurture Neighbors in Faith*

- Core thought: Love your neighbor as yourself
- Key scripture: Luke 10:25-37
- Formative action: Evangelism
- Examples: lifestyle evangelism that occurs in many ways: friendship; service; teaching

Our relationships with our neighbors are transformed through love and service to them.

- Loving our neighbors teaches us who our neighbors are.
  - In Luke 10:25-37, Jesus defined our neighbor as anyone who is in need.
  - Jesus also taught that loving our neighbors sometimes means we will need to get our hands dirty.
  - Jesus further taught that loving our neighbors sometimes also means that we will need to love our enemies (also Lk 14:12-14).
- Loving our neighbors teaches us how to use our time and resources for others.
  - We typically serve others with one or the other (time *or* resources).
  - But the Samaritan did both.
  - He is a challenge to us to look at how we steward both time and resources for others.
- The best way to love our neighbors is to share the gospel with them.
  - What if you truly began getting to know your neighbors?
  - What if you began to read the Bible one-to-one with neighbors who show spiritual interest?
  - What if you saw your neighbors as a ministry and helped instead of hindered neighbors through the process of coming to know Jesus.?

### *Serve Strangers*

- Core thought: Show hospitality to strangers
- Key scripture: Hebrews 13:2
- Formative action: Hospitality (service)
- Examples: Have guests over for Sunday dinner; serve a family in the neighborhood; volunteer somewhere where you can connect with strangers

Our relationships with strangers are transformed through hospitality.

- We often limit hospitality to those we like and are comfortable with.
  - As children, we're warned to stay away from strangers!
  - Hospitality, if practiced, is often reduced to a small rotation of church members we have over for Sunday lunch.
  - Hospitality is also reduced to a “gift” that only a few have.
- Hospitality is a sign of God's grace and kingdom that we need to share freely with others.
  - Biblical hospitality places our emphasis on the “other” and seeks to meet their needs.
  - In Matt 25:31-46, Jesus commended and condemned people by whether they served him or not; these categories generally conform to hospitality categories.
  - Perhaps the stranger you find yourself entertaining in Jesus' name may be one of his angels? (Heb 13:2)
- Practice hospitality by focusing on serving others and being welcoming.
  - What if you began to view hospitality not as an “event” but as a way of life?
  - What if you had church guests—not only church members—over for Sunday dinner?
  - What might happen if you looked for families in your neighborhood who needed to be served?

Working in each of these four areas of relationship leads to transformational growth in God.

- [Briefly review the chart and each relationship.] We should be seeking to build a community (of groups) around these values.
- We must love God relationally. This is the most important relationship (though the others are not far behind). If necessary, work on this one first.
- Then, begin a habit of building into others' lives, whether believers, neighbors, or strangers. It is our role in transformation to be regularly involved in others' lives in each area of relationship.
- Be creative! Be flexible! But get started and take action to glorify God, build believers, nurture neighbors, and serve strangers.