



NAC-USA
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

Transformation

Transforming
from the
Inside Out

**MIDWEEK
SCRIPT**

Sharing our
Transformation

2019

March

Session 1 – Transformation

Welcome to our March small group topic – transforming! This month will bring the official beginning of spring in the USA. It's a fitting example for our month's topic: the powerful life within the natural creation reveals itself in new ways for all to see. There's a rebirth of new life in the plant world, and the beginning of the process of metamorphosis for certain species like butterflies. Take some time this week to talk to the children in your congregation about what they have learned in school about spring, growth, and metamorphosis.

The spiritual link to transforming connects us with the T in our THRIVE membership booklet – *to transform our nature using Jesus as our example*. As Christians, we want to grow and develop according to the image of Jesus Christ. In our faith, the baptism of water and Spirit is the beginning of this rebirth to a new way of living and preparing for Jesus Christ's return. The journey of spiritual metamorphosis is evident as we reveal fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). We engage in a cleansing process through repentance and by forgiving as Jesus forgave. This helps us to experience the transformational power of Holy Communion, which has visible effects upon both the individual believer and the congregation as a whole.

We journey together in fellowship, with word and sacrament, on the way to freedom (Community 01/2019). We can compare our journey to the one taken by the Israelites from Egypt to the land promised them by God. Our freedom from the slavery of sin starts with Holy Baptism. We were born into this slavery because of the original sin of Adam and Eve. Through Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit-inspired teaching of the gospel, we have access to freedom in Christ (John 8:36). We are free to walk the path of obedience. We decide of our own free will to love as He loves us, and practice serving according to His example.

The coming sessions will highlight examples of how believers in Scripture allowed Jesus to make them free, by following His teaching, learning to serve as He did, and helping one another. In the same way, we are transforming today and preparing ourselves to enter complete fellowship with the Lord as soon as possible. This is our promised land! This month we will not only consider, "What would Jesus do," but also how our feelings lead to our thoughts, which are then expressed in word and deed. As we read in Proverbs, *Above all, be careful what you think because your thoughts control your life* (Proverbs 4:23 ERV).

Monarch butterflies become delicate and beautiful new creatures after their metamorphosis. Weighing less than one gram, it takes multiple generations for these butterflies to migrate thousands of miles from around North America to just a few mountaintops deep in Mexico. What a beautiful image of our own journey! Multiple generations of transforming new creatures in Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit, from the far reaches of this world and the beyond will come to the same place on the Day of the Lord, in permanent and complete fellowship with Him! This is our promised land.

Session 2 – Transforming from the Inside Out

Welcome to our second session, as we continue our monthly study on transformation. Today we'll focus on Paul's teaching from his letter to the Romans. He experienced the transformative power of the Holy Spirit firsthand. We can read about his journey of transformation in the book of Acts. He was changed first on the inside; his heart and his mind were renewed by his encounter with Jesus Christ. Then he drastically changed his direction, actions, and teaching. Let's explore his teaching and discover how we are to be transformed from the inside out by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Apostle Paul begins his letter by teaching doctrine, and then explores practical applications. He begins this practical part of his letter with the following from Romans 12: *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this [world], but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God* (Romans 12:1-2).

In these two verses, there are three action steps that the Apostle is encouraging the believers to take. First, they are directed to present their bodies as a living sacrifice to God. Christians are to give themselves

completely, body and soul, to God in recognition of His saving grace through the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ on the cross. In other words, believers are to hold nothing back from God and give all that they are in worship to Him, so that He can be glorified in the works that they do. When that willingness and desire exists in the heart of the believer, then the Holy Spirit can perform His sanctifying work and continuously mold the person into the likeness of Jesus. That willingness will also prompt the believer to exercise their free will with a desire that mirrors Paul's words to the Lord on the road to Damascus: "*Lord, what do You want me to do?*" (Acts 9:6). And it will prompt them to follow obediently into Holy Baptism, Holy Sealing, the praying of the Lord's Prayer, and the celebration of Holy Communion.

Paul's second exhortation urges the believers to not be "conformed to this world." "Conformed" means "to form" or "mold." In both Paul's time and our current age, the values of society could easily overwhelm and incorporate themselves into a person's heart. When this happens, God's Word and His values must compete for the heart's attention. Therefore, we are encouraged not to mold our understanding and thinking to the ever-changing values of our time, as it prevents us from being an effective and credible witness of Jesus Christ. In Paul's case, the values that he represented came from the world that he knew at the feet of Gamaliel, the most illustrious rabbi of his day. However, once he encountered Christ and came to know the values of the gospel, it was his responsibility to commit himself to Christ. The same is true for us today. The world we know is not all bad, but once we know better, it is our self-responsibility to decide to be a living sacrifice to God's plan for us.

The willingness to give ourselves over completely to our Heavenly Father, and our firm commitment to not be conformed to this world, pave the way for spiritual transformation to take place in our heart and mind. Paul teaches us that transformation happens through the renewing of our minds. The beautiful truth is that this transformation isn't something that we can do on our own. It is only possible through the sacrifice of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, which changes us from the inside out. Paul's renewal caused him, over time, to recognize and teach truths of the gospel: a person is justified by faith and true religion is not a matter of rules and regulations.

Finally, how does the Holy Spirit go about transforming us by renewing our mind? We discover one way by reading Paul's words in the third chapter of 2 Corinthians: *But we all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord* (2 Corinthians 3:18). The Holy Spirit renews our mind by helping us behold the glory of the Lord – He sets our gaze on the glories of Jesus Christ, which give us new life. Carve out time to remember all that the Lord has done for you, and take moments throughout the day to worship Him.

Our renewal as Christians continues further. For example:

- We are simply motivated by our love of God to follow Jesus Christ on the path He has established.
- We have experienced that when we follow God's will, we feel His presence, and that is such a nice feeling.
- We want to be free in Jesus Christ. This is the way we have decided to take; nobody is forcing us to take this way, we want to take it. We are free to do that.
- We serve Jesus Christ and others without expecting anything in return. Everything we do, we do out of love for Him.

Think about how a renewed mind could change the way you act and speak. In the next session, we'll explore examples of this.

Session 3 – Sharing our Transformation

Welcome to the last small group session for March. This month, we've been talking about the journey of transformation that allows God to renew our thoughts, feelings, words, and actions. Our transformation, in the image of Jesus, will be evident in the way that we see certain things, in the way we might feel about a person, and in the way that we speak and act.

Let's also look at Peter as an example. He was a fisherman by trade, yet he allowed himself to be taught by Jesus. Jesus said, *"Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."* But [Peter] answered and said to Him, *"Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless, at Your word I will let down the net."* And...they caught a great number of fish..." (Luke 5:4-6). Peter was open to Jesus' direction, even though he had more experience when it came to fishing. When someone is willing to accept Christ-led direction and teaching, then transformation can happen.

We can see this transformation happening within Peter in Acts 10. Peter had a vision about being told to eat the animals of the earth, and responded that he does not eat anything common or unclean. He is then told, *"What God has cleansed you must not call common"* (Acts 10:15). Peter, although insistent that he was right, took time to ponder what this could mean. He then received visitors calling him to Caesarea because Cornelius, a centurion and Gentile, was instructed by an angel to invite Peter to his house.

For Peter, a Jewish man, speaking with Gentiles went against social norms and his own comfort. Even as an apostle of Christ, Peter was primarily responsible for the Jewish people, whereas Paul ministered to the Gentiles. When Peter agreed to meet with Cornelius, we can see that there is some change happening inside of him, which has been prompted by the vision he received. Finally, when Peter and Cornelius talk, he realized what God was trying to teach him. In verse 28, Peter says, *"You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for..."* (Acts 10:28-29).

Peter not only felt an internal shift in his understanding about Jews and Gentiles, but he also acted on this changed feeling: Peter preached to Cornelius and his household, and baptized them in the name of the Lord. With prompting from God, Peter allowed himself to be transformed.

When our actions and words change, our transformation evolves from a personal journey to a shared journey. Though we may not think that others notice, the way we talk and act is a witness to the people around us of God's presence in our lives. Consider now someone with whom you have struggled to build a relationship. A transformed perspective can begin by simply understanding we don't know the whole story of someone's life and experiences. If your actions then change to match your new perspective, won't it become obvious to others that something is different? Might people start asking what prompted this change inside of you? We see this with Peter in Acts 11 as he shares his transformation, so that others might learn from it.

As disciples of Christ, we are constantly pushed to grow in our understanding of God and of the world. We have a responsibility to reflect the renewing of our minds in our actions and words. As we mature in our faith and transform, we are expected to share our story with others. This is discipleship: encouraging others to follow Jesus and helping them on their personal journeys.

We must do this humbly. It's not possible to force others to transform. Only God can transform a heart when an individual allows Him to do so. Transformation is a journey that each person must choose to take. And we cannot be disappointed if we don't see change occurring quickly; after all, our own transformation to be more like Christ is a gradual and continual process.

Our love for Christ and belief in His teachings drive our transformation, when we seek His heart and mind. What would Jesus feel? What would Jesus think? What would Jesus say? What would Jesus do? Let us experience God's power and His ability to transform us!