

MILE

5

TRANSFORMED – Our Lives Renewed to be Like Christ (a DISCIPLESHIP Journey)

Mile Marker 5 ... “LIKE CHRIST – Holistic Transformation (ALL We Are) from the Inside-Out”

Various texts, including Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Jesus calls us to a life of faith that is so much more than just eternal salvation (as foundational as that is to the Good News). Even here, even now, He summons us to a discipleship journey of transformation – following after Him as His apprentices. That’s our broad focus in this material. For the past two mile markers, we have specifically considered this partnership between the Holy Spirit and each one of us, the basic participants in this work (remember Philippians 2:12-13). As we actively respond to His working in our lives, we are being transformed.

Transformed to be More LIKE CHRIST

The remaining sessions on this journey will help us reflect on **the basic goal or end result** of this *metamorphosis* – that is the Greek word we find in Romans 12:2 and elsewhere to describe this transformation. A caterpillar changes *into a butterfly*. Likewise, while on one level we are already new creations as soon as we come to faith in Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:17), on another level, we are also *becoming new* (see Ephesians 4:22-24 or Colossians 3:10) through this ongoing *process* of transformation. On the most basic level, we are becoming more “**like Christ**” (see 2 Corinthians 3:18). To use language of a renovation (*e.g.* a person’s appearance, a home, etc.), it’s the finished product – the better “AFTER” that stands in great contrast to the “BEFORE.” Throughout the next several mile markers, we are exploring more specifically what this means.



***When you think of someone being “Christ-like,” what comes to mind?
What does it suggest about the goal/end result of this transformation?***

Let’s make sure we keep these words in mind from Dallas Willard (shared back in Mile Marker 2). Here’s how Willard describes what it means for us to be Jesus’ 21st-century disciples or apprentices:

“I am learning from Jesus to live *my* life as He would live *my* life if He were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything He did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that He did all that He did.”

Being “Christ-like” means that we reflect Him in such a way that someone else might look at us and think “that’s what Jesus would be like today.” In these next sessions, we want to discover some of what that practically means in *every* dimension of our lives – when it comes to our thoughts, our attitudes, our motivations, our actions, etc. ... indeed, when it comes to **ALL that we are!**

Before we look specifically at these different areas, we first need to make sure we see that God truly intends for His Spirit's transforming work to be pervasive. Indeed, it's *supposed to* infiltrate every part of our lives! It's the opposite of a common myth regarding how we think about our lives of faith; it's the word **COMPARTMENTALIZE**. Perhaps it's best for us to think about it like a waffle – this delicious breakfast food that is made up of several different individual squares. That's how we might think about life: our lives as a whole consist of many different individual compartments. We have one important box for our family, a separate box for our job, a separate box for our social life, a separate box for our finances, etc. We could do the same thing with who we are as people: a box for our thoughts, another one for our attitudes, another one for our basic life perspective (*i.e.* our worldview), another one for our priorities, another one for our values, etc. All of these separate compartments come together to form who we are and even our lives.

Of course, it's easy to see how truly difficult it can be to even think we could keep all of these areas neatly separated. And yet, *especially with our faith*, we can easily think about it **as just one more compartment – the "Jesus box."** Maybe it's faith that we pull out and apply only in a limited number of circumstances. Maybe it's faith that is reserved for just what we do on Sunday mornings. Maybe it's faith that doesn't become integrated into how we think about other boxes in our lives – as though we don't mix it with our family, our work, our social life, our politics, etc. When we compartmentalize our lives and our faith, we end up reducing the influence of following Jesus down far beyond what God's Word intends.

Consider some ways you see this reality – in your own life first, but possibly in the way that we often package a life of faith in our culture.

In this mile marker, we want to see how this transformation process should not be reduced to a single COMPARTMENT of our lives, but **HOLISTIC** (ALL that we are) even **from the INSIDE-OUT** (externals that begin internally).

HOLISTIC Transformation – Total Devotion and Surrender ... ALL We Are

Within the Old Testament, there is a single command that is given to God's people that had the place of supreme importance. It comes from Deuteronomy 6. It's a re-affirmation of the people's covenant responsibility to live in faithful obedience to God's instructions. Here's what we find in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 - **READ Deuteronomy 6:4-5** (it might even be a good one to memorize 😊).

It's called the "*Shema*" based on the Hebrew word for "listen" or "hear" found at the beginning of v. 4. Throughout Jewish history – even today – these words from v. 4 have a significant place in Jewish faith; it's even the "centerpiece" of Jewish morning and evening prayers. In other words, this basic expression of Yahweh's uniqueness leading into this basic instruction of v. 5 represents a most foundational aspect of faith in God. That's how important this command is! Jesus Himself even confirms the place of this instruction. In fact, during the final week of Jesus' life, He even calls the command from Deuteronomy 6:5 "**the GREATEST commandment**" (see Matthew 22:37-40 and Mark 12:28ff – in Mark, the word used is "first"). If we were to rank everything that God instructs us about living as His people, there is a clear #1! In fact, along with a second ("Love your neighbor as

yourself”), Jesus says *everything* about what God requires of His people fits within the basic umbrella of these two instructions. ***That’s how important this command is!***

So, what does it have to do with the idea of “HOLISTIC” transformation? Glad you asked. Let’s look at this basic instruction to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your strength.” Let’s see it in two parts:

1. **The COMMAND itself – “LOVE GOD”** ... it’s not just calling us to a certain feeling about God (as if it were just an emotion), but a response of devotion in light of His goodness and all He has done. The word captures everything from our obedience, to our loyalty, to our affection, to our commitment, etc.
2. **The EXTENT of the command = “with ALL you are!”** ... the actual words are “heart,” “soul” and “strength.” We can try to parse out exactly what is meant by these words. On some level, that would miss the real point: ***it’s to be an all-inclusive LOVE = with ALL we are!*** In Mark’s re-telling of the scene in Jesus’ final week, he *specifically* includes the word “mind;” this command is truly intended to reach into every part of us! As Eugene Peterson puts it in *The Message* paraphrase, ***“with ALL that’s in you ... with ALL you’ve got!”*** One writer on the Gospel of Matthew captures it this way: it’s about a *“whole-hearted devotion to God with every aspect of one’s being.”*

Based on the command and the extent of it, how would you capture the basic message of Deuteronomy 6:5?

Whatever specific words we want to use to capture the message, that doesn’t sound anything like a “COMPARTMENTALIZED” expectation! Our most basic responsibility as God’s people is to respond to Him ***with ALL we are!*** Certainly that means our discipleship and transformation should not be reduced to just simply “parts” of us.

Really, that fits with Jesus’ most basic call to discipleship (see again Luke 14:35-35) – for Jesus’ first followers, there was no compartmentalizing their lives following Jesus; it meant being ***“ALL IN!”*** Likewise, our discipleship journey is to be HOLISTIC = with ALL that we are. It doesn’t mean we abandon our other responsibilities in life; it means making sure Jesus is #1 *above* every area and influencing how we approach that area. Even the basic title of “LORD” assumes Jesus’ place as Master over us, not just in part, but in full. He is a good and gentle Master for sure (see Matthew 11:28-30), but nothing short of our LORD who deserves, desires and demands our TOTAL submission.

Maybe there’s one more way we could consider how HOLISTIC God intends our transformation to be: simply consider all of the different areas of life in which God’s Word is going to instruct us: our families, our relationships, our job responsibilities, our finances, holiness in all parts of our lives, our speech, our conduct, our sexuality, our participation in society, our attitudes, our thoughts, our values, etc. There is no area of our lives off-limits to what the Holy Spirit wants to do in our lives as He transforms us to become more like Christ; in other words, it’s to be HOLISTIC transformation!

How have you perhaps compartmentalized instead of striving for HOLISTIC transformation? What are some areas in which you need to surrender more?

The Progression: INSIDE-OUT Transformation

Part of the “ALL we are” that God’s Word emphasizes certainly includes the “INTERNALS.” In fact, based on God’s Word, **transformation should really flow from the INSIDE-OUT!** Like dealing with a health issue requires moving beyond symptoms to the deeper problem, transformation has to move beyond the surface to address what is happening within.

From a Biblical perspective, the “heart” is seen as **our basic control panel** – the central command center of our motivations, desires, attitudes, character, values and priorities. Even some of what we put in the category of the mind (*e.g.* thoughts) or the will (*e.g.* decisions), God’s Word describes as coming from the heart. That’s why so much attention is paid to the HEART in Scripture. In light of this, consider the texts below; pay attention to the inside-out progression of how Scripture says we operate as people. Keep in mind, these references to the heart include *everything* within what we would categorize as heart, mind and will.

READ Proverbs 4:23 ... verses 20-22 encourage allowing words to penetrate to the very heart; the result of this is a positive effect on the whole person – inside-out. Specifically, v. 23 shows how the heart (the INTERNAL self) is the source of everything about who we are! It’s why it is so vital that we guard/protect the heart.

READ Mark 7:20-23 ... in the context of a controversy re: ceremonial hand-washing, Jesus reminds His disciples that being defiled is not an outside-in problem, but an inside-out problem. That’s the direction in which sin flows! So it is with the good as well.

READ Luke 6:43-45 ... in this text, Jesus says that this basic inside-out progression is true for good *and* evil – like fruit expresses what is within a tree, so the externals reflect what is within our hearts. (Of course, hypocrisy is possible – like with artificial fruit.)

Based on this flow, here’s what we need to see: **true transformation will not be the result of merely what happens on the surface, but from within.** Indeed, Christ-likeness involves what we do (the EXTERNALS), but also the INTERNALS ... a Christ-like mind, a Christ-like heart and a Christ-like will!

Allow the Holy Spirit to help you reflect on the following categories – consider the transformation that needs to happen not just externally, but with these internals too:

MOTIVATIONS (<i>why you do what you do</i>)	THOUGHTS
ATTITUDES (<i>the internal manner</i>)	DESIRES (<i>what we really want</i>)
VALUES/PRIORITIES (<i>what really matters to us</i>)	CHOICES (<i>practical decisions</i>)

Concluding Thought

When it comes to “spiritual formation” (being shaped into the image of Christ), Dallas Willard’s voice is an important one to consider. In *Renovation of the Heart*, he writes the following about the aim of spiritual formation: “[it] is to bring every element in our being, working from inside out, into harmony with the will of God and the Kingdom of God. This is the simple focus.”

Sounds like HOLISTIC, INSIDE-OUT transformation so that we become more like Christ! **Indeed, discipleship (including transformation) is not about faith being one more square in the waffle of life – it’s about Jesus being the SYRUP that fills every square!**