

## **We All Want to Change (And We All Are)**

***Lent: Mission***

**Luke 6:46-49**

**02/18/2024**

### **Introduction**

**Luke 6:46-49 + 2 Cor 3:17-18.** (Pg 14+15 in Lent Guide). **Pray.**

**I'm excited to get to kick off our Lent sermon series today on the spiritual practice of *mission*. Or what others call "evangelism" or "sharing the gospel".**

**Now, just a fair warning as we jump in** – it's going to take me a lot of time to circle back to that idea. I promise when we get to the end I will tie the bow for us as it pertains to mission – but what I want to do for the majority of our time today is sort of a reset for us on what we call ***spiritual formation*** – How are we formed into the types of people God made us to be?

When you become a Christian – ***you're not just signing up for a change of destination after you die. Christianity is not "pray a prayer so you can go to heaven instead of hell."***

***Rather, when we say "yes" to Jesus we are saying "yes" to a lifelong process of being shaped or formed, more and more, to be like Jesus over the long haul of our lives.***

That's what it means to be a Christian, or better yet to use the more predominant language of the NT – **A disciple, a follower, an apprentice of Jesus.**

And that's what we've been focusing on as a church each year during the season of Lent – How does this process of formation actually happen? How do we *become* more and more like Jesus and live His life in the world?

Or even more simply – **How do we actually change?**

**Which I think is a question that all of us are asking on some level – whether we are followers of Jesus or not.**

We all want to change. We all have ways that we want to be different in the future than we are today. ”

- For all our culture’s talk of “just being ourselves,” and being “true to ourselves,” there’s another, very real side of us that doesn’t want to “just be ourselves” at all.
- We want to be newer, better, healthier, changed versions of ourselves.

But here’s the unfortunate reality – ***as much as we often want to change, many of us just aren’t all that great at it.*** Right?

- I mean, how many of us are ready to stand up and go “I completely succeed at all of my goals, every year. Everything that I set out to change about myself at the beginning of each year, I fully and completely accomplish just as I envision accomplishing it.”
- Maybe there’s a few of us like that – if so, teach me your ways – but that’s probably not the majority of us.
- ***The majority of us often really struggle with implementing change into our lives and our character.***

And that’s so often true in our spiritual lives as well – ***many of us don’t feel like we’re changing to become more like Jesus.***

- Maybe, in our best moments we see some growth.
- But there’s still a very real part of us that looks at our worst moments, our biggest failures, our most significant struggles, and feels like it’s a real one-step-forward, two-step-back type situation.
- We find ourselves more often than not saying or thinking “yep, still this. Still struggling with this. Still dealing with this. Still bad at this.”
- When everything hits the fan and life exposes the deepest parts of us, sometimes we are very underwhelmed and discouraged at what comes out.

***So it would be fitting for us to ask – how do we actually change?  
How do we slowly over time become more and more like Jesus?***

### **Luke 6 + 2 Cor 3**

***That’s the question I want to wrestle with today.***

***To do that, we’re going to look at two passages, we’ll start in Luke 6. Hopefully you’re there by now.***

### **Luke 6:46-49**

**46 “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you? 47 Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: 48 he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. 49 But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.”**

So Jesus tells a story about two men – one with a house with a good foundation – sturdy and stable no matter what comes and the other with a house with no foundation – easily knocked over at any moment.

And he uses it to illustrate two different responses to His teachings.

- One man heard Jesus’ words and was ultimately changed into a different type of person by it – steady, sure footed in the storms of life.
- While the other one simply heard it, and remained unchanged and unable to face what came his way.

And what does Jesus say distinguishes the changed person in the story from the unchanged person?

Well Jesus sums it up in one word: **practice**. Jesus says that the house that made it through the storm was the man who heard Jesus’ words and put them into practice. Both men **hear** His teachings, one puts them into **practice**. There’s something about the man *doing* what Jesus says that has changed him into a man with a firm foundation.

Hold that thought, turn over with me to 2 Corinthians 3...

### **2 Corinthians 3:17-18**

**17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.**

Paul here is talking about how we change, he uses the language of “transform” – it’s the same word where we get the English “metamorphosis”. We change – we are undergoing spiritual formation.

Who? All of us. We all, with unveiled faces – looking at Jesus. Beholding Him. Being with Him. Are being spiritually formed more and more into glory. And all of this is from the Holy Spirit.

### Intentional Spiritual Formation

**So how do we change? How do we, over time, become more like Jesus? Let me try to synthesize Luke 6 + 2 Cor 3 for us.**

This is my best explanation for how the Scriptures teach we actually change to become more like Jesus over the long haul...

#### **Truth**

You can also call this “teaching”. Jesus says in Luke 6 the man hears his teachings. He listens to and receives the truth about Jesus, about reality, about life.

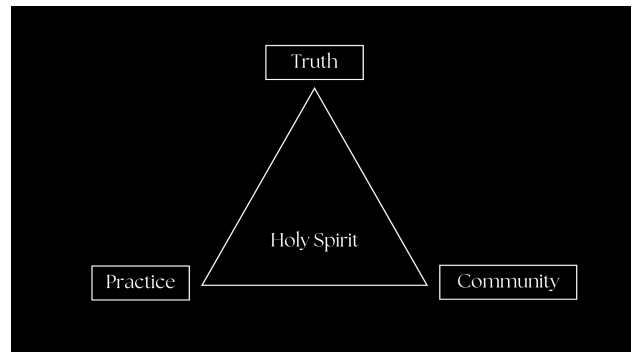
The first step in becoming more like Jesus is receiving and believing the truth. About God, about ourselves, about the world we live in.

***What we believe matters greatly to who we become.***

- We are story-formed creatures.
- Author/professor Bobette Buster calls humans, “narrative animals.”
- We are driven and shaped by stories at the deepest parts of who we are.

Our central nervous system is wired by God to search for meaning, to make what neurologists call “mental maps” of reality – frameworks out of which we make sense of our lives. Our conscious and subconscious beliefs affect our everyday lives.

Pete Hughes (KXC London) – ***“The story you live in is the story you live out.”***



What you believe and hold as true – about God, yourself, the world – changes you.

### **Example – Money.**

- If you believe the popular American story that more money = more security/happiness.
  - Good life = accomplishment + accumulation
  - It will end up *forming* you into a certain kind of person – driven, greedy, envious, discontent, distracted from God, never satisfied, busy and hurried.
- If you believe Jesus' story/view of money – all good things are God's gifts to steward.
  - He takes care of His people.
  - AND that more money = harder to enter into the Kingdom of God
  - You will be *formed* into a person of simplicity, generosity, and hospitality.

But it's not the only thing that changes you.

### **Practice**

We also change through our practices, or maybe better language – our habits.

Jesus says – one man is not changed because he only hears. The other hears the teaching and *does* it. Puts it into his life. Puts it into practice and this changes him into a particular kind of person.

In other words – *We become more like Jesus through what we do.*

Christian Philosopher James K.A. Smith wrote a fantastic book a few years ago about all of this titled *You Are What You Love* – I would highly recommend that book to you. In the book, he famously describes this “transformation through practice” with this memorable little sentence.

**“The things you do, do things to you...Quite simply, there is no formation without repetition. There is no habituation without being immersed in a practice over and over again.”**

There is a direct connection, in other words, between repetition and formation. We become the people we are largely based on the things we do over and over and over again.

### **Case in point – Coffee Drinkers.**

- Anyone else here drink their coffee the right way...black?
  - Chances are, you, like me, didn't start that way. No one starts drinking coffee black from the jump. If they do, that's concerning.
- For me, I started drinking "coffee" as a junior in high school.
  - A few days a week after school, I would drive to starbucks and get a mocha frappuccino.
  - Then after a few months of that, I switched to a coffee frappuccino.
  - Then, I started making regular coffee with cream and sugar.
  - Then slowly over time I would add less and less cream and less and less sugar, till I could drink it black.
- To where eventually, I became the type of person who not only didn't hate coffee, who not only enjoyed coffee, but now I am a coffee drinker.

I am the type of person who loves to drink coffee and try new coffees and explore new origins of coffees, etc.

**A transformation** of sorts has occurred. How? Through practice. Through new habits. The habit itself, practiced over and over and over again, changed a part of who I am.

*Our habits/our practices have the ability to turn us into different types of people over time. True in our everyday lives, true in our discipleship to Jesus.*

## **Community**

*We become like who we spend time with.* I know we all like to think we're unique individuals with unique style and interests, but let's face it – we become like who we spend time with. And in case you don't believe me, go ahead and take another sip out of your stanley water bottle.

We become like the people we spend the most time with. We all eventually tend to dress, think, vote like your group of friends/roommates/coworkers/family.

There's a reason why *influencers* are called *influencers*. Because we become who we watch or interact with on a consistent basis.

\*\*Married people — look alike.

**True in our spiritual lives as well.** And this isn't a bad thing!! This is a good part of how we change. It's part of how God has designed it to work.

Paul says in 2 Cor 3 – “We all...are being transformed”.

Spiritual formation is a “we” thing. Becoming more like Jesus is a “we” thing.

*Community changes us:*

- **Encourages** – “I love you. And that was lame...but I see what you can become.”
- **Exposes** – Brings out the best and worst of us...like the squeezing of a sponge. Everyone loves their neighbor until their neighbor is actually in the room (Bonhoeffer).
- **Equips** – As we learn to actually care for others, serve others, love others, carry one another's burdens, slowly over time learn to revolve life around someone other than ourselves.

**We change by receiving God's truth, practicing God's ways, with God's people.**

## **Holy Spirit**

*And all of this happens by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Paul is very clear on that in **2 Cor 3:18 – 18** **And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.**

We do the beholding. The Holy Spirit does the transforming.

**There's an active work and a passive work:**

- We do not form ourselves into the likeness of Christ.
- We do not make ourselves more like Jesus.
- We, through truth, practices, and community seek to behold Christ, to be with Him and then as we do what only we can do, the Holy Spirit then does what only He can do – transform us to be more like Jesus.

***Truth. Practice. Community. Empowered by the Holy Spirit.  
Over the long haul of our lives.***

## Losing Strategies to Change

Now, it's worth pausing here to note that this is very different from how many people think they become more like Jesus in the church today. So many individuals and churches tend to overemphasize or isolate one part of this triangle, much to their own detriment.

When you over-emphasize one part of this triangle, you fall into one of what I call "losing strategies for change."

### **Losing Strategy #1 – More Bible Study**

Truth is one part of the change triangle. And unfortunately in many Christian circles – it becomes the sole and only way people believe we change. If we're not like Jesus, it's just because we don't know enough yet and we need more Bible study.

Now, here me on this – I love the Bible. Studying and teaching the Bible is like 80% of my job. I am for Biblical knowledge. I am for studying to know God rightly and deeply.

I reject wholeheartedly the sentiment that says "theology is too hard" or "the Bible is too confusing". You can know God's Word and you can know God *through* His Word.

**BUT** I also wholeheartedly reject the lie that our lack of formation into the image of Jesus is solely a lack of knowledge issue. Because here's what I am convinced of – **You cannot think your way to Christlikeness. Information alone does not produce transformation.**

### **Let me prove it to you...**

- Anyone in here struggle with anxiety or fear? (Don't have to raise your hand).
  - I'm guessing that you, like me, know that Jesus commands you not to fear, right?
  - I'm guessing you know that he says peace that passes understanding is offered when we cast our cares on God, correct?
  - I'm guessing you don't like struggling with anxiety and worry, do you?
- And yet...I'm just curious – how is all that working for you?

Bible studies are good. Faithful sermons are good...better than good, essential.

***And yet by itself, knowledge has a very poor track record of yielding a high and sustainable amount of formation into the image of Jesus.***



## Losing Strategy #2 – Willpower

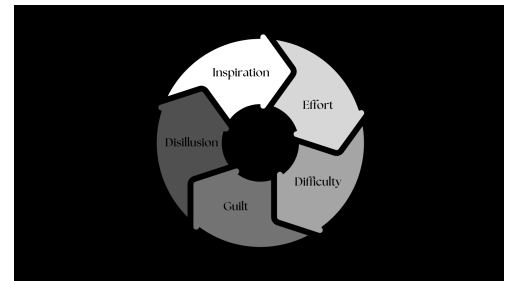
When you over emphasize practice, you can fall off the ledge of sheer force and effort. We change by more sweat. No pain, no gain.

The problem with willpower isn't that it's bad (it's not), it just doesn't work all that well by itself. (There's a reason why by February 1, 80% of New Year's resolutions have failed).

That's because willpower is a finite resource. We only have so much of it each day.

It can be helpful for small changes...But the sheer power of life and gravity of your busyness and responsibilities, the deforming realities of the world, flesh, and devil will eventually eat your willpower for breakfast.

Your willpower is not enough to stand up against the competing forces of formation in your life.



***Lest, you get caught in what I call the willpower cycle:***

Now, willpower is crucial. Effort is key to spiritual formation. You have to work, yes. ***It's just not enough.*** Because at some point you're going to run dry.

## Losing Strategy #3 – Osmosis

An overemphasis on community and community alone leads to the losing strategy of “change by osmosis.” Which means – I, myself, am not actually trying to follow Jesus, be His disciple, be formed into the likeness of Christ – but I'm in a community that is trying to follow Jesus so all good, right?

I'm not actually healthy at all, but my community is healthy so I *feel* like I am too.

I'm not actually growing, but my community is growing so I *feel* like I am too.

An overreliance on community, change by osmosis, can look like:

- The only time you think about the Bible is Sunday morning sermons and group discussions.

- The only time you pray is when someone else prays and you're in the room.

The problem is that you're not actually leaning into any of this yourself.

- It's like watching fitness influencers on youtube 3 hours a day for 6 months and wondering why you don't have any muscles yet.
- It's like watching HGTV cooking shows, never stepping into the kitchen, and thinking you're a good chef.

***A group of people seeking to follow Jesus together is essential for spiritual formation, but it cannot be the only way we think we change.***

- If it is, then what happens when we're taken out of that community for a season?
- What happens when that community doesn't live up to our expectations or we feel like it's unhelpful or we don't feel fed?
- How will we contribute to, what 1 Corinthians says – the whole church building itself up together in love if we must be the one pulled along?

#### **Losing Strategy #4 – “The Zap”**

##### ***Matrix Theory***

- Neo + Trinity trapped on the roof – but there's a helicopter.
- “Can you fly that thing?”
- “Not yet.” She calls the operator – “Tank, I need a pilot program for a B-212 helicopter...hurry!”
- You see her eyes flutter and then **BOOM** she can fly the helicopter.

That's how many people approach spiritual formation/Christ-likeness – waiting for a “download” from heaven to radically change them in an instant.

**Now, is the Holy Spirit the one who forms us? Yes. But Paul writes, and elsewhere in the Scriptures, it is very clear – we participate in that work.**

*But this is hard...* It's far easier to go to church once a week, seek a spiritual high, wait around and say “we're praying for God to change us” than it is to do the daily, unglamorous, painful, laborious, Spirit-empowered work of discipleship.

It's a way of wanting to bypass effort for a quick-fix, a shortcut. Trying to skip over our pain and just have Jesus "fix us". It's actually right in line with how we want the rest of our lives to go – fast, immediate, and pain-free.

Now, just to clarify – yes, there should be moments in the Christian life where the Spirit breaks through in a profound way, and the process of sanctification speeds up, and there's instant victory.

That just can't be what is always relied upon/expected. Growth spurts are necessary, but so are little by little moments of faithfulness that shape us over the long-haul.

### **Joining the Mission of God**

*This is how we change. (diagram)*

**Now, what does all of that have to do with mission? With demonstrating and proclaiming the gospel to people who don't yet know Jesus.**

I've been around the church world long enough to know – **mission does not come easily for us as Christians.**

For a whole host of reasons we're going to explore together over the next 6 weeks. It's difficult.

- I know that's true generically.
- I also know that's true specifically – in last year's member check ups (our annual church-wide survey), 70% of our church family said they aren't actively sharing the gospel with non-Christians or inviting people to be around and experience the gospel through church family.

And I don't say that to bring you any shame or guilt, just to help us acknowledge – it's hard for all of us, including myself.

**But here's the reality** – we will never step into this command of Jesus – go make disciples. Proclaim the gospel to all nations. We will never step into this calling, nor will we ever be formed into the type of people where mission is an embodied way of living that comes out of us as we're going about our lives... if we don't embrace the reality of how the Scriptures actually say we change.

**If we keep looking to these losing strategies to change us, we will never actually change to be missional people.**

- If mission is something we just learn about or read about or think about, we will never join the mission of God.
- If we just try to grit our teeth and gut it out, we'll never live a long-term life of joining the mission of God.
- If we just point fingers and rely on other people close to us being missional and “we'll pray for their relationships” so as to appease our conscience, we will never join the mission of God.
- If we just sit around waiting for the Holy Spirit to “change us” and “zap us with magical evangelism powers” we will never join the mission of God.

So here's the invitation for you for these next 6 weeks...***will you lean in?***

We've designed this series and this guide around our belief in how the Scriptures say we change.

- **TRUTH** – We've got time for teaching on Sundays.
- **PRACTICE** – We've got a practice for you to step into during the week.
- **COMMUNITY** – We've got a group discussion guide for you to go to group and work this out among community.
- **HOLY SPIRIT** – *And we're praying the Holy Spirit works in all of that to make us more like Jesus in living our lives for the mission of God.*

So will you lean in with us? If you do, by the end of these 6 weeks, I can guarantee, you probably **won't** be the type of person who naturally and easily shares the gospel.

**BUT you will be 6 weeks closer.**

**HARPER + GYMNASTICS.**

Harper, our soon to be 4-year-old, started gymnastics about a month ago. Monday afternoons running around a gymnastics gym for 45 minutes, it's great.

Now imagine I went up to her and I said – alright Harper – do a double back handspring. And she says “But Father. I cannot.”

- What if I said, well here's a book on it, just read up and study more. **Can she do it?**
- What if I said, well just try really really hard. You gotta want it. **Can she do it?**

- What if I said, don't worry just sit here and watch a bunch of people who can do double back handsprings. **Can she do it?**
- What if we laid hands on her and anointed her with oil. **Can she do it?**

How can Harper come to be able to do a double back handspring? By studying gymnastics? By trying really hard? By being around other gymnasts? That's all part of it, sure.

### **But mostly through patient endurance.**

- Every Monday. 1:30pm. Go to gymnastics.
- Work on the skills. Get better. Get stronger. Get more confident.
- Interact with coaches and other gymnasts who are learning and trying and striving.
- And a year goes by, 5 years go by, 10 years go by...and she might become the type of person who can regularly do a double back handspring.

Here's what I want you to see – **“It's not that Harper can't do a double back handspring. It's that she can't do it yet.”**

So maybe you're here and you're like – **I can't join God's mission in the world.**

I want you to know – it's not that you can't, it might just be that you can't yet. So will you lean in? One week at a time. Over the long haul.

### **This Week's Practice**

#### ***We'll start this week with a habit audit.***

We change through truth, practice, and community...but all of us are not starting at net neutral.

All of us already have stories we believe, habits we are living, and relationships that are forming us. Spiritual formation is a not a Christian thing, it's a human thing.

**Robert Mulholland – “Everyone is in a process of spiritual formation. We are being shaped into either the wholeness of the image of Christ or a horribly destructive caricature of that image.”**

So our first practice this week is that we'll first just consider together:

- How are the stories/truth I believe, the habits I have, and the relationships I live in currently forming me towards or away from Jesus?
- And how might they need to begin to change in order to step into the mission of God?

**PRAY.**