

Truth Transformation

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[0 : 00] How do people change? How do people change? How does someone go from an unbelieving, dead, unregenerated heart to a heart that worships those in Christ?

What difference does it make? Now that I'm a Christian, I've been sitting, some of you have been sitting on the pew longer than I've been alive.

What difference does it make that I am a Christian? You see, I enjoy cooking. I enjoy balancing out different flavors with a variety of seasonings, knowing that as long as I stick to some kind of general formula, the thing that I cook will come out at least halfway decent.

But I can't say the same when it comes to baking. Now anyone who's ever baked can relate to seeing a wonderful chocolate chip cookie on the internet recipe, finding the recipe, carefully measuring each ingredient only to have the cookies come out flat and unappetizing.

And so we try to figure out what is wrong. Should I adjust the measurements? Should I adjust the oven temperature? And we try over and over again until we realize that something else, perhaps our baking soda has expired.

[1 : 29] And how could we have missed something as simple as this? See, often we think one solution will fix a problem, only to realize that a different, less obvious factor is causing the undesirable outcome.

And that's what, that is what's true too, when it comes to changing hearts. Our inability to identify the cause of our issues extends to our spiritual health too.

We evangelicals know that the gospel is true. We know that the gospel has the power to transform us. Yet we continue to see ourselves struggle with sin.

We look at our marriage, our family, our workplace, our country, and we wonder, why hasn't God brought about any change?

Can the gospel really heal? Why am I still fighting with my spouse? Why am I still lashing out at my children?

[2 : 42] Why am I still indulging in addiction? Now what you're going to hear this morning is part of a four-part series that we just preached at Redemption Church called Heart Surgery.

And this is the culmination of four sermons. And we're going to look at this issue of true transformation. True transformation, true transformation, not true transformation.

And so at our church, we started with understanding the heart, guarding the heart, battling the heart, and we're going to, and this is the, really the climax of a four-part series that focuses on how people are transformed.

So how can we be speaking the truths of the gospel to our inner self day by day and in every moment so as to bring about lasting changes in our heart?

Now we learn to do so in three parts as you can see this in your sermon outline, in your bulletin. It's how transformation happens, number one, the obstacles to transformation, and the recipe for transformation.

[3 : 52] So let's start with how transformation happens. See, like the baker who frantically tries yet struggles to identify the problem behind his failed chocolate chip cookie recipe.

The problem with us, I'm going to say it very carefully, the problem with us is that we have fundamentally misunderstood how transformation happens.

We have fundamentally misunderstood how transformation happens. much of what I'm about to say is actually taken from sessions given by Andrew Cattay, the City of City Australia CEO, at several church planting trainings, and I'm going to attempt to paraphrase his content to the best of my ability.

So what happens behind every decision we make? More specifically, what organs, what parts of the body are involved whenever we choose to do or not do something.

It could be the mind, it could be the will, it could be the guts, or the heart. Now, let's look at them one by one, starting with the mind.

[5 : 11] The mind is that part of our body that rationalizes and justifies. If I see that McDonald's is having a buy one, free one promotion for their Oriel McFlurry, my mind might say, yo, that's a pretty good deal.

Let's go and get one. My mind is doing the math, it's telling me, this is worth it. So 15 minutes later, you'll see me with a McFlurry in my hand. Now, we could extend this same logic towards sin.

My mind tells me, you have been wrong by your loved one. You have to fight back. You have to put them in your place. Tell them, you're the right one.

They're misunderstanding you. You are totally not being selfish. They are. Or, this client, this colleague, is overstepping boundaries. You gotta make it clear to him.

You gotta protect your own rights. So I justify my anger and retaliation as an act of stepping up for myself. Now, if transforming the mind is the key towards lasting change, we might think that the solution to sin is more knowledge.

[6 : 25] You just need to take more courses on the Bible. You just need to read the right books about anger, management, and lust. You just need to attend the best seminars about spiritual growth. In fact, the church only has to target the mind as its main mode of evangelism or discipleship.

So you'll organize the best courses, conduct the best Bible studies, have the best library collection.

We think if we just have the right understanding, the right understanding about the dangers of sin and right methods to draw near to God, then I will finally change.

My church will finally change. Let's drill the people in with knowledge because that's how people change, right? Now, of course, Romans 12, verse 2 does affirm the importance of transforming the mind such that by testing, you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

But if transforming the mind is the key, then people with PhD in theology or scholars with the best Hebrew ability will be the holiest Christians. Actually, why not send all of the church to seminary and we will fix all of our issues?

So clearly, the mind is not it. If targeting the mind only cannot bring about lasting change, how about the will? How about the will?

[7 : 55] The will is what chooses. In Joshua chapter 24, verse 14 to 15, Joshua tells Israel to fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and faithfulness.

Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served before beyond the river and in Egypt and serve the Lord. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the river or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell.

But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. So clearly, the Bible emphasizes the importance of choosing, choosing to serve God over sin and to do good over evil.

Now, if we go back to the McFlurry example, even if my mind tells me that it's a good deal, I still have to choose to drive there. While our minds may sometimes justify sin, it is ultimately our will that makes the call to do or not do something.

When faced with temptations, there is a very real sense where we can choose, we can make the right choice to reject sin. Now, if we believe the will is the key towards transformation, then we will put our focus on developing stronger willpower.

[9 : 26] We will put our focus on developing stronger willpower. Now, John Piper, a well-known American author and pastor, has a YouTube clip where he talks about how to resist pornography.

Here's what he says. When you believe you cannot resist the temptation to look at some nudity online, and suddenly a Hamas figure drags your spouse into your room and says, if you look at that website, I will slit this throat.

You will have self-control. Now, what Piper does well is he show that Christians are not truly enslaved to sin as we might be tempted to think we are.

We do have the power to make choices. Where this analogy falls flat, in my opinion, is it misses the idea that willpower can at best bring about temporary change.

Willpower can at best bring about temporary change. There will be days when the enemy convinces me that the stakes are not that high, that nothing bad can really happen.

[10:37] No one will really know. Sin is, after all, confined within the privacy of my home, or so we thought. Nothing bad can really happen if I indulge in sin.

Now, the Apostle Paul himself talks about the shortcomings of the will in Romans 7, for I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

So it can be the mind, it can be the will. Now, let's try the guts next. What the guts does is it feels. The guts is where our emotions come from. Psalm 42, verse 5, writes, Why are you cast down on my soul and why are you in turmoil within me, hoping God, for I shall again praise him my salvation. So here, the psalmist is speaking to his inner self. He calms his emotions so he can redirect his mind towards God. Now, of course, our emotions are responsible for our actions.

[11:47] We do something because it feels good. I pay money for the McFlurry because it makes me happy. But sadly, sin also promises a kind of fulfillment too.

Sin tells us that it will make us happy and content and joyful, that all the issues in our family, in our work, in our personal walk with God, all of the things we feel we are missing in our life, sin promises to fill us.

Gossip makes us feel better about ourselves. Anger convinces us as if we are in control, while coveting, looking after what people have, offers the illusion of a better life.

love. Now, if emotions are the problem, then we'll just have to make sure the right emotions are kept out, or the wrong emotions are kept out, or the right emotions are kept in.

Maybe, maybe what I need for real change is to feel more guilt about my sin and hate it more. So pastors should then preach sermons that tell people how lawless they are about their lives, how lazy they are about their faith, and how loathsome their sins are to God.

[13:09] So we come to church to be figuratively whipped into shape. Fill people with guilt. You've got to feel extremely horrible about yourself, so you will not sin again.

Now, conversely, I need to fill my hearts with positive feelings about Jesus. I need to listen to upbeat worship songs. I need to pay attention to hard moving sermons so anytime my emotional tank runs low, I can fill it with more things that make me love Jesus.

Church has to be a place where God can feel that God is alive because that's how we change people, right? The problem with targeting the emotions is that our emotions are inconsistent.

We will inevitably run into seasons of sickness where we doubt the faithfulness of the Lord. We will inevitably run into seasons of financial shortcoming, stress, where we neither feel God is present nor want to worship Him.

We will come into seasons where we feel like everything in our life is crumbling and we ask ourselves, where is God? Our emotions are inconsistent.

[14:29] system. Then we have the body. Now this one is fairly straightforward. The body acts as the physical vessel through which our decisions and intentions are expressed.

While our bodies are corrupted because the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden, 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 17 writes, therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Behold, the old has passed and behold, the new has come.

So our bodies, redeemed by Christ, have the ability to carry out good and turn away from sin. Now methods that target the body might say, oh make sure you go to bed tired so you don't have energy to last or leave your house and take a walk outside anytime you feel anger building up.

Now while these suggestions can be helpful, they are never enough on their own. Because 1 Corinthians 15 chapter 42 to 44 verse 42 to 44 tells us we will only receive imperishable and glorified bodies when we are resurrected.

So until then, sin will always have its appeal and we will never truly achieve perfection. And finally, we come to the heart.

[15:49] Now I had a, at our church we spent a couple of series, some of us developing this, but to summarize, the heart is our moral and spiritual center.

It is responsible for our devotion, our hearts loves, worships, desires, and boasts.

And what's worse, Jeremiah 17, the heart is deceitful and wicked above all things who can fathom it. Our hearts always cling onto something for worship, including your unbelieving neighbor.

All of us long for the fullness in our lives that we think is not there. All of us look to a life that could be, and should be far better than what it is now.

And our hearts wander to look for things to feel it. It's the thing that you spend your most time awake daydreaming about.

[16 : 54] It's the thing that tells you once you have it, you will be satisfied. And so this is how human decision making goes.

What the heart desires, the will chooses. The mind justifies, the body does, and the guts feel good about.

What the heart desires, the will chooses, the mind justifies, the body does, and the guts feel good about.

To bring about true transformation, we need to target the heart. The gospel is a heart-changing activity.

The church is out here not to give people more knowledge, not to give people more guilt, not to make them feel more alive about their faith, not to punish people for sinning.

[17 : 59] The gospel, the church, is about transforming people through the heart. But what then stops our hearts from changing?

The obstacles to transformation. Idols. Our hearts produce false gods to which we cling to for meaning.

And the bad news is that not only are we oblivious to these idols, we give all that we have to defend them. Tim Keller writes, an idol has such a controlling position in your heart that you can spend most of your passion and energy, your emotional and financial resources on it without a second thought.

We spend every waking hour thinking about them. We believe that our lives will have meaning once we secure them. And so what I'm going to do is outline four of the most common idols of the heart. Again, quoting from resources published by City to City. And in no specific order, it is comfort, approval, control, and power.

[19 : 11] If comfort is your idol, stress is your greatest fear. You dislike being asked to do chores when you are just about to relax at the end of a long working day.

You find deadlines annoying. You definitely don't enjoy working with people who are ambitious, you know, type A people, hate them, I speak as a type A person, competitive, and usually impatient.

You definitely don't enjoy supervision. Why are you so tense? Stop worrying, I've got things under control. Now, often, comfort leads you to prioritizing your own needs above other people's.

It leads them to feeling hurt and neglected, and comfort can also be the real cause behind broken family relationships. rather than addressing ongoing conflicts, addressing something that you think your spouse is not doing well through open and honest conversations, we avoid such discussions by telling us, ah, we just don't want to bring out sensitive topics.

We just need to honor the Asian facade of having a family that's well and put together when deep down we know that it is broken. we might even think that it's because nothing will change if we confront, but beneath our justifications, the real reason for avoiding these conversations is our desire for comfort.

[20 : 45] Or think about the last time you had planned your day to go a certain way until something or someone pops up that demands your attention.

Suddenly, everything you look forward to is ruined, so you respond by speaking rudely or dealing impatiently with people. And so those of us who prefer the familiar and known, even if we know it is hurting us long term, those of us who prefer the familiar and known, even if we know it is hurting us long term, tend to avoid the discomfort and potential challenges that come with change.

approval. But maybe you're someone who willingly gives up comfort to serve others. Approval is another idol.

See, you don't mind giving up your time, resources, or personal preference to help those in need. You're often the first one to volunteer, and you're often the last one to leave, even if it strains your own well-being.

Yet behind these acts of sacrifice and selflessness lie our heart that is always in need of praise and affirmation.

[22 : 07] I'm the one who's holding this marriage and family together, not my spouse. And so you fear rejection, and you seek to please others by fulfilling their assignments faithfully.

You are easily influenced by what others think about you. You might have a lot of accomplishments, a lot of wealth, but you're insecure. You want people to think nicely of you, especially those you deeply care about.

How can my parents praise my younger sibling when I am the one who's been keeping the rules? You're always wondering whether what you're doing is enough, whether your significant other regards you well, and how people consider your career and your family.

Those who seek approval are always insecure, and they take criticism badly. Perceiving it as a personal attack against them, what seems like a very selfless sharing of a Facebook post, it's actually bottom, it's like, how many likes did I get?

How much attention did my children receive? And when people attack you, we retaliate, but worse, we blame our anger on things such as a messy home, such as noisy children, as a reason why we are unhappy, when in reality, it's because we are on the edge of losing people's approval.

[23 : 41] So when your spouse confronts you, it's not really because you had a stressful day at work, it's because the thing that matters to you the most, his or her affirmation is being threatened, and so we defend it.

Approval breeds pride when we receive recognition, or jealousy when we see others receive more affirmation than what we think they are due.

Now the third idol of the heart is power. power. The idol of power manifests itself through a relentless pursuit of position, influence, success, and strength.

Those ensnared by this idol find themselves driven to be at the helm. They have to be the one making decisions, and they cannot afford to take a backseat to others.

Fathers, spouses, or parents who struggle with power are often demanding respect. Remember, I am in charge, and insist on having the final say.

[24 : 54] Now we see this play out in the workplace too. If power is your idol, you will constantly look to put down other leaders and their work ethic, and you attribute your success to your intelligence and hard work.

Yet as one pastor points out, the reality is much more complicated. personal connections, family environment, and what appears to be plain luck determine how successful a person is.

We are the products of three things, genetics, environment, and our personal choices. But two of these three factors we have no power over.

Now sadly, this illusion of power, this idea that we are in control, this idea that we must be the one making decisions, demands all of our attention to keep it going, often at the cost of those around us. And we stress, we are afraid of humiliation, we cannot fail. And then lastly, related to the idol of power is control.

[26 : 05] While power is generally for people at the top, all of us can breed the idol of control, which comes in the form of a pursuit of security.

We sleep well at night knowing that there are enough digits in our bank account. We justify working overtime and neglecting our children or loved ones in the name of sacrificing the present to secure the future.

Control hides itself from its victim with excuses such as I'm doing what's best for the good of the family. I have to maintain order and stability.

And so if you struggle with control, generally speaking, you're someone who is quite gifted at doing tasks. And because you are more efficient than others, you struggle with delegating and rigidly insist that things be done your way.

this could be towards your colleagues, your children, your family. And so people who work with you are either great yes men who idolize and follow you loyally or they're stressed out of their minds because they fear your condemnation and judgment.

[27 : 23] And the greatest fear for the idol of uncontrolled is uncertainties. It's transition. We want to know how money is going to come in, how people will react to our proposals, how things will turn out.

We might, notice, we might even turn to religion for control. We say to God, Lord, look at how well I have been following you and serving you.

I give up my weekends, I submit 10% of my pay to the church, why are things so going poorly in my life? So outwardly it looks like we're very devout Christians, we read our Bibles, we evangelize.

But our obedience, like the elder son in the parable of the parable of God, are just ways, means to which we desire to control God.

What else do I have to do, Lord, so I can finally have more security? So what is the recipe for transformation?

[28 : 35] Knowing how people change, knowing the obstacles to transformation, how should we change? Well, it goes without saying that the first step is identifying the idols of the heart.

Which idol is your heart most prone to produce or pursue? Actually, what we did after church is that Sunday is we just ask a fellow brother or sister, hey, you know, Pastor Paul talked about four idols, which one do you think are you most vulnerable to?

And so, when you find your heart disturbed, ask yourself, what is underneath your distress? What is the sin behind sin? Let's say you're always worried about money.

The immediate problem, which some people might say, ah, just trust God more than he'll provide. But the real issue is that your heart is turning to money for control.

Or maybe you find yourself increasingly frustrated with your family, and you want to change. Now, the sin behind your anger is not so much impatience, but approval.

[29 : 50] their recognition and approval of you have become too important. And so, until you identify the idol of the heart, and you give it the right treatment, you will struggle to experience lasting change.

But of course, the next step is to confront your idols with the truths of the gospel. After all, idols promise a kind of fulfillment, and hope that only the gospel can provide.

So, we need to put the false truths or idols next to the beauty of the gospel in order for our hearts to be transformed. The reason you buy a fake product is because you don't know what the real one looks like.

And so, how do hearts change? Hearts change by recognizing the beauty of the gospel. If comfort is your idol, where a desire for personal pleasure and freedom leads you to be reserved in carrying your responsibilities and loving others, then you need to rediscover that God is good.

You need to rediscover that God is good. if comfort is your idol, remember, Jesus suffered discomfort so you can enjoy true comfort.

[31 : 16] You don't have to look elsewhere for peace and fulfillment. Jesus has given you all the comfort you need, secure in his home.

Your default status is a love child of God. And so, because God is good, the demands of others are not burdens. They're not duties.

Rather, they are God's way in his goodness to shape you into his image and to allow you to enjoy his goodness by sharing it with those you love.

And so, in seasons of change, when comfort is being threatened, you turn to God's goodness displayed on the cross, and you trust that a good God will watch over your well-being.

If approval is your idol, your heart has to learn that God is gracious. You don't have to prove yourself anymore. God sees you at your worst, including the days when you fail to measure up to people's expectations or expectations for yourself.

[32 : 27] The days when you are criticized, the days when you are attacked, the days when you feel like you are worth nothing. Jesus knows who you are at your core, more than you even know yourself.

Yet, he still went out to the cross and died for you. Your salvation was purchased by the blood of Jesus, secured by the Holy Spirit, and not by your works in him.

In Christ, you no longer need to impress or perform. Is it, are we saying that approval of others are not important? No! We're saying we love the small things, small amount, but we love Christ beyond the approval of others because he has first loved us.

If power is your idol, you have to see that God is glorious. You don't have to produce results. He's infinitely more capable than you are, infinitely more influential than you will ever be.

Yet he gave up his power. He gave up ultimate authority and came down in the form of a baby and a manger. He surrendered power on the cross.

[33 : 44] He was threatened, come down if you truly are the Son of God. Come down from the God. Perform your miracles and save yourself. Yet Jesus suffered ultimate humiliation so you don't have to be fearful of failure anymore.

You can enter into God's kingdom. You can enjoy true glory, true splendor, power that does not come from success or achievements.

Your default position in Christ is a wonderful child of God because of what he accomplished on the cross. Finally, if control is your idol, show your heart that God is great.

You don't have to be in control. He is so great that no amount of money, no amount of giftedness, no amount of meticulous planning can give you the control that you long for.

In his greatness, God has set out a plan to save the world through his son, a plan that involves you. You didn't have to make any judgment calls.

[34 : 56] You didn't have to show your capability. All you have to do is trust Jesus and receive. Brothers and sisters, I don't know what is the thorn in your flesh.

What is the sin that troubles you, the brokenness that wounds your heart, the circumstances that don't ever seem to change.

But here's the promise of 2 Corinthians 5, verse 16 to 17, once again. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.

Surrender your idols before the Lord. Let your heart be transformed by the gospel. Take part regularly in the spiritual disciplines of prayer, scripture reading, corporate worship, and meditation. Let these spiritual disciplines put your heart in a posture of worship, not just reading the Bible, not just doing these things for the sake itself, but doing it to worship and recognize the true beauty of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

[36 : 14] For it is in worship, it is in worship that the old affections of our hearts are expelled and replaced with a new wonder and appreciation for the gospel.

Destroying idols and replacing them is no easy work. It takes time. It might be painful. It might hurt those you love.

But if you preserve and run back to Jesus, you will find in the end a kind of beauty, hope, joy, security, and fulfillment that you won't ever see or taste in this life.

Let's pray. Father God, we recognize that our hearts have its own natural dispositions to incline to idols, to be easily swayed by things that deter us from worshiping you.

Lord, we even confess the ways that we have thought or believe to change, ways that perhaps deter us from the gospel.

[37 : 29] Perhaps we have at times looked to means as the way to save us. We look to different means of salvation apart from the gospel. But Lord, we come before the foot of the cross this morning, each with our own burdens, burdens, burdens of sin, burdens of its brokenness, burdens of failures.

And we submit our hearts before you, Lord, may you do heart surgery. May the gentle yet sharp incision of your word and spirit pierce our hearts, reveal what is broken within us, and restore to us the joy of your salvation, restore to us the beauty of the gospel.

That not only may we come to church individually to have our hearts be transformed, but we also encourage each other in community so we can be a church that's transforming hearts, that transforming lives, to the praise of your glory.

In Jesus' name, amen.