

## [The Process of Transformation](#)

Now, now we come to the major issue that we have to deal with, and that is in some detail how this happens. And I'm going to go over this in a general way now, and then in the meetings later, I will talk about some of the particular things that we can do.

### [Grace](#)

Not by human effort alone, OK. Let's settle that. So, not without grace. We're not talking about bringing the inner transformation of the self into Christlikeness by human effort. OK?

But note the next one. Not without human effort. We still have to act. The statement, "*Grow in grace*," from Peter is a command. That means that we do it.

### [Effort](#)

How do you grow in grace? That's our question. How do you grow in grace? Grace is a gift. Can you control that? Can you pull up to it like you would pull up to the pump at a gas station and just download grace.

Well, the answer is, sort of. Strangely enough. And one of the greatest difficulties that we have in our religious circles today is not understanding how effort works with grace. But you must make an effort if this transformation is to come about. Not without grace, and the [Holy Spirit](#). Obviously. But not by grace and the [Holy Spirit](#) alone. That's passivity. And the transformation of the inner being, the righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribe and the Pharisee is going to be something that will not happen passively.

### [Jesus](#)

So now notice the last line on the screen, because this will give you some balance I think. We're very familiar with the statement, "*Without me you can do nothing*." ([John 15:5](#)) And that is true. That is why there is no boasting in this matter. Paul makes it very clear, Boasting is eliminated because it's by grace. ([Romans 3:27](#)) Right? Boasting is a terrible thing that it disrupts everything in Kingdom living, so that has to be eliminated. But now notice also that you can be sure if you do nothing it will be without him. And there's again a place we just kind of need to stop and let the - just let sit with you. If we do nothing, it will be without him. Without me you can do nothing.

OK, yes, right. We agree. But that's not the end of the story. Because in the very passage in which Jesus is saying, without me you can nothing...do nothing, he's giving you a command. Do you remember what the command is? It is, "*Abide in the vine*." ([John 15:1-11](#)) That's a command. That's like grow in grace. Abide in the vine.

## [The Role of Grace](#)

So now this brings us to this issue that we've brought up several times, and now we need to try to say something a little more definitive on it. And that is the role of grace in the life we're talking about. So let's start with a statement about what grace is, and just try it on, folks. I'm not, you know, I'm not trying to dictate to you. I give you things that you can see how they work. So let's go with this idea of grace, and see if that is going to do the job.

### [God acting](#)

Grace is God acting in our lives to bring about what we cannot do on our own. That's grace. That's God's grace. God acting in our lives to bring about what we cannot do on our own. Is it unmerited favor? Of course it's unmerited favor. But if you just say grace is unmerited favor, you don't say what it does.

And this is where the teaching of grace can easily slip over into the default gospel that says grace just have to do with the imputation of righteousness. It has to do with merit of Christ being substituted for your demerit, to bring you out of the red and into the black with God, you see. So you have to say more about grace than just that it is unmerited favor. Is it unmerited favor? Yes, it is unmerited favor. What does it do? It does this. Grace is God acting in our life to bring about what we cannot make happen on our own.

## Supports effort

So now, we'll want to look at some of these passages in a moment to see how this works, but there're just another point or two here that we need to make.

And the most important one is that grace is not opposed to effort, but to earning. God acting in our life doesn't mean that we do nothing. But grace means that we never come to the place of saying we've earned what comes out at the end of the process. Earning out of the question. Whether it's earning your way into heaven, or earning success in your ministry, or earning a lovely family that you have. No, grace is involved in that. You can never say, I earned it. You always wind up saying, Thank God for that. Because that's the activity of God on your behalf.

And so, the effect is to eliminate pride, and boasting, and self-reliance, and self-will. It is to say to God, I am dependent on you. I am surrendered to you. I am following your direction. I'm expecting your help. I'm going to do my very best, but I'm not going to trust my best. I will engage in disciplines, but I don't trust disciplines, right. I will seek to know, to get knowledge, I'll try to keep myself strong on all of that. But I don't trust that. My trust is in God.

So grace does not make you passive, but it also doesn't allow you to be proud. It does not allow you to trust yourself. Because you recognize that what you're involved in is something that is far greater than anything that you can do.

## Paul on Grace

Well, this last point is we need to look at a few verses on this one. Here's a case that I spoke about last night, in [Ephesians 3:8](#). You remember what Paul said there? "*Unto me the least of all saints, this grace is given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ.*" Now just think about that. That's grace. Does it have to do with guilt? No. Does it have to do with God acting in our lives to bring about what we can't do on our own? Yes. Obviously. That's what Paul's talking about.

[1 Corinthians 15:10](#). Another statement by Paul about grace. He really does seem to have been the one who understood it best, and certainly he deserves a lot of attention for the way...for what he says about grace. [1 Corinthians 15:10](#) is he's talking about how he was born out of time as a witness to Christ. You remember this passage I trust. He's talking about all the people who had seen Christ, and he says in [verse 9](#), "*I am the least of the apostles. I'm not fit to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am. And his grace towards me did not prove in vain. But I labored even more than all of them.*"

## Grace as foundation for good works

And then he catches himself. There's a beautiful expression of the consciousness of how grace and effort

work together in the life of Paul. *"I labored even more than all of them."* Whoop! *"Yet not I, but the grace of God with me."* ([1 Corinthians 15:10](#))

Remember our little discussion of God with us, God with us, God with us, last...yesterday. See that's... Now, what is grace? Have you internalized this idea? Grace is God acting in our lives to bring about what we cannot do on our own. Paul. What is it he couldn't do on his own? He couldn't have had the tremendous effect he had in preaching the gospel on his own.

Strictly speaking, I'm sure that it's true at this time of all the [apostles](#), if you looked at the work that was done, Paul was miles ahead of them. Miles ahead of them. At that time. I don't say later. Maybe later on, some got it. And caught up and went ahead. I wouldn't want to say; I don't know how to judge that; eternity will tell, possibly. But at this point there's just no question.

But what, Paul had just gone along, crossed the Greco-[Roman](#) world like a cyclone. And was it him? Well, he did something; if he had stayed home it wouldn't have happened, would he? If he just said, I'm going to stay in my cave, or I'm going to sit around the Sanhedrin down here, and though they're Christian I'll sort of haunt them.

No. He got out. He went. [2 Corinthians 9:8](#) is a really good passage. This is a discussion of the Macedonians giving, and he's talking here about how they had given far beyond what they were able. And given not grudgingly or under compulsion, but they had just given. And so this is an offering situation, missions offering, or something like that.

Look at [verse 8 in 2 Corinthians 9](#). *"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance of every good work."* Every good deed. For every good deed. You see what grace is there? Is that guilt? Are we talking about dealing with guilt? No. It's not just for guilt. Grace is for life. Guilt is one of the things we need it for, but when we're done with dealing with that we still need grace.

## [Grace as fuel for living](#)

See, the person who is living fully in the [Kingdom of God](#) is consuming, if you wish, consuming grace all the time. But not just for guilt. The sinner needs grace for forgiveness, yes. To deal with guilt, there's not doubt about that. But compared to the grace that the saint uses in their lifetime, that's nothing. The saint burns grace like a 747 burns fuel on takeoff, see. They're burning it in quantities. Because what they're doing is always accompanied by grace, and much more is being accomplished than they could possibly do on their own.

And then one of the most famous passages on grace is Paul's statement: *"My grace is sufficient for you."* ([2 Corinthians 12:9](#)) This was not to make up for guilt; it was to supply the strength that Paul needed in his weakness to do the things that he needed to do. And because this was such a wonderful thing, you have the statement of Paul, *"Most gladly therefore I would rather boast,"* here's where boasting comes in, *"about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. My weakness is an opportunity for the grace of God,"* the power of Christ is the grace of God; God is acting and alive, *"Thank God I am weak."* ([2 Corinthians 12:9-10](#))

Now, try that on, would you? *"Thank God I am weak."* Why? *"Because when I am weak, I get to know the power of God working in me."* Look at what the man says! *"Therefore I am well content with weakness, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties for Christ's sake, for when I am weak, then I am strong."* ([2 Corinthians 12:10](#))

Now. Wow. We have to put that into ordinary life. And we think about all the things we might suffer from. The attacks... We might imagine a person who is being attacked in their ministry or their work, and say,

Thank God for that. Someone's being insulted. That actually happens in the church, doesn't it? Thank God I'm being insulted. Thank God I'm being attacked. Thank God I am weak.

Can you even imagine that? Why would one be thankful? Because they expected to see God acting in that situation. And that is better than them being able to control it themselves. That's what Paul is talking about.

## [Holistic Picture of Spiritual Growth](#)

Now, this is a kind of holistic picture of spiritual growth and I have to give it because we want to have all the picture...all the factors in place. And if we have these factors in place, our mind is centered in the mind of Christ, and we will gradually take on that mind, and we'll have it.

## [Action of the Holy Spirit](#)

You start at the top. This is the action of the [Holy Spirit](#). Don't go anywhere without that. That's grace in action. Down here at the left are the ordinary events of life. That means you take where you are. You accept where you are. You say, this is the place. This is Jacob saying, I did not know God was in this place. God was in this place and I didn't know it. This is the gateway of heaven. ([Genesis 28:10-17](#))

Well, that's what Paul is saying when he talks about taking pleasure in his weaknesses. He's saying the same thing. So we don't throw our temptations away. We don't flee to a monastery. We live in ordinary life and there we experience trials. So the ordinary events of life turn out to be trials or temptations. We're not distressed about those. Why? Well because we expect God to act in those situations. OK.

## [Planned disciplines](#)

But now wait a moment. It may not be possible for us to hold still and let that happen. That's where this side comes in, planned disciplines to put on a new heart. When you fail, what are you going to do? Try harder? No. See, what you require in this process of the transformation of the inner person, in the righteousness that is beyond the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisee, what you need here is not just trying. You need to put yourself in a position where you can train and receive help. And that is where planned disciplines to put on a new heart come in.

[2 Peter 1:5 through 10](#) is a story about a progression: "*Add to your faith, add to your virtue knowledge,*" and so up the line until you get to agape again. But the planned disciplines here are crucial. And this is I think the area where when we're thinking in terms of what we do in the religious life, we are most apt to miss. We are most apt to miss the understanding that we have to take practices that enable us to receive grace in the ordinary events of life, to keep our mind centered in the mind of Christ, and acting with the [Holy Spirit](#), to be the kind of person that Jesus has called us to be and gives us to be. You plan for this.

## [The VIM Principle](#)

VIM, the VIM principle, I'll talk a little more about that this evening. But these are the... This is the outline of spiritual growth. If you're going to change personally in any way, if you're going to learn to speak French, dance the polka, carry on conversation, save money, lose weight, any kind of change that you want to go through, you have to have these three elements. If you don't have them, and they're not rightly related, probably change is not going to happen. If you have them, and they're right related, change can happen, even at a natural level.

## [Vision](#)

You have to have the vision of the goodness of what you're after. You have to be convinced that's a good thing. And the educational illustrations are again the most familiar, and I think the most illuminating. Back to our talk about learning algebra or calculus earlier. If you have a vision of the goodness of it, then you're ready to move on to the intention to realize the vision. If you don't have that, the intention won't form.

Now, I have a very nice exercise machine at home. It is relatively unused. And I can tell you why it's relatively unused. I bought it once when I thought it would be a good idea. But I had no vision, and no intention to go with it. So, it sits there. And it's a means. It would work if I had the vision and the intention. I'm told that there are other people who have that same sort of thing. I understand it. It's how it works.

Truthfully it just doesn't mean that too much, that much, to me, and I don't think it's that important. I do try to watch my health; I try to be careful about eating and getting some exercise and so on. And I can ride that thing once in a while. But I don't do it consistently because I don't have the vision, and I haven't formed the intention. I just have the means.

Now, that's where, when we come back to the gospel gives us the vision. If we don't have a vision that's provided, a gospel that provides a vision of something to be done. In this case we're talking about living in the [Kingdom of God](#).

## Intention

If we don't have the vision, we won't form the intention. We won't decide to do it. And I spoke earlier about intention when I said the reason why we don't for example learn to bless those who curse us is because we never intend to do it. We don't intend it. It isn't the law of gravity. It's simply for the failure of intention.

Why does the intention fail? We don't have a vision of the goodness of it? See, when we get gripped with the vision of the goodness of it, then the intention will follow. And once we have the intention, then the means comes in. And we find the means and actually it isn't all that hard.

## Means

And, the means aren't...they don't fall in the area of righteousness and things we have to do to obey Christ. Christ doesn't tell us to go into solitude. He went into solitude. And one of the things that suggested to me I should go into solitude was that if he needed it, I might need a little of it myself. So, I got to thinking about well maybe there's something here. And that's what led me, as I said earlier, when I was concerned about being able to preach effectively, and realized that [prayer](#) was connected to that, and realized I couldn't [pray](#) in the condition I was in, then I moved more or less by accident into solitude and discovered what solitude and silence could do to build those connections. But that's all means.

Now my intention in that case, or my vision, my vision was a soul-winner. Preaching to bring people to trust Christ. And so that intention to do that based on the vision of this as good things, led me eventually into means. I had to back my way into it. But see I thought that solitude and silence sounded awfully [Catholic](#), and I wasn't into that bag at the time. In fact, I was young and full of spizz, and I thought they were all wrong. But I hadn't...I had no experience of it. I had to work my way back, then reading helped me see things differently, and practice a back and forth between - leads into means.

So that my intention to bring to pass a certain vision, and the vision changed as it went along because I began to realize that perhaps it was very important what kind of person I was. And not just a whizz bang preacher. I used to preach like a machine gun, until a man once said to me, "*Why do you preach so fast? Why don't you give people time to think about what you're saying?*" And I realized I didn't want them to think. I wanted to keep them back on their heels. I wanted them to respond. I didn't want 'em, to give them, to think. I wanted to

manage them and manipulate them, and get them to do what I wanted to get them to do. So I had to go through a whole process of rethinking that.

So the vision shifts, I think improves in some measure, as we go along. And as it does then our intention has to change. And so I became intent more on who I was than what I was doing. I'm still concerned about what I was doing. I'm concerned about results, but I now believe the most important thing that God gets out of my life is the person I become. Actually, I think the most important thing I get out of my life is the person I become. That the things I might accomplish in the way of ministry, it...they're very small compared to the importance of my becoming Christlike. I actually believe that the more Christlike I become the greater my results will be, but that's not why I do it.

## The Quality of Life

So now, that goes back to the statement I said earlier today that the church's problem is never that we need more money, more influence, more people. The problem is always of the quality of the people who are there, and that begins with me. If there's a problem, that begins with me. What is the quality of my life? Now, of course there are meaningful questions to be raised about other things, but that I think is really fundamental.

Well, let me just, I think the last thing I can get done in the time I have is just look at this list. And then maybe just an additional point or two, and then we'll have to quit.

## Understand the Disciplines

There are many ways of classifying disciplines. I think it's really helpful to understand them in terms of disciplines of abstinence, as opposed to disciplines of engagement. Disciplines of abstinence refers to things you abstain from, that you need to step out of in order to allow things to shift around in your soul and your body, and in particular to allow you to break free of old patterns that keep you enslaved.

Now, I started over here. You see. Study, [worship](#), celebration, service, [prayer](#), fellowship, confession. And those are good things. But the thing is I didn't know those were disciplines. I didn't know what a discipline was. So I was just trying to do those.

Now, if that's all you got, that's a short recipe for burnout. That's what that is. So you grind away at those. And especially in a social context where people have all sorts of things for you to do, that's going to burn you out. Because it will not put you in touch with the things that will nourish you and grow you. It will not allow you to have a joyous, strong, walk with Jesus. In order to get that you have to shift over, and you have to practice some of these other things.

And I've mentioned the importance of solitude, and silence is very important. Fasting. Solitude, silence, and fasting are the big ones on the list. The others are more like hygienic exercises. They're important, very important. But they don't have the importance of those first three. You begin to move into them. You begin to practice them, and as you do, they begin to sustain you.

Usually with something like solitude it begins very quickly. And I would encourage anyone to begin to try to have substantial periods of time every week when they're simply alone, doing nothing. Solitude primarily means doing nothing. Solitude is connected to Sabbath. And Sabbath is still one of the big deals, one of the big commandments, as in often people think that was the ritual law, and not the moral law. No, it turns out to be moral law, because it has so much to do with your wellbeing and the wellbeing of others that you're related to. And Sabbath means you do no work. And solitude is for most people the only way they can start practicing Sabbath is to go into solitude, because as long as they're around others the others will keep them working.

## Experiment With the Disciplines

So, you need to move over to that side, and begin to experiment with them. And as you experiment with them, they will begin to confirm themselves to you. You can talk endlessly about them, but when you really come to know them by practicing. And you enter into them experimentally, you enter into them expecting the Lord to lead you and be with you and he will. This will be a part of his teaching presence with you. Don't try to force things. Don't try to make things happen. Be gentle, be experimental. If you don't succeed with this for some reason, don't worry about it. Find out what went wrong, try to fix it, and try it again.

## Not righteousness

I say these are not righteousnesses. They are wisdom. They're not laws. They're wisdom. And as you enter into them, you will begin to experience from God and from your own nature and soul a kind of renewal and strength that will then put you in a position to engage in study and [worship](#) and celebration in a way you've never done it before.

And out of this will come a richness of your life in the Kingdom that will allow you to do the things that Jesus said at a walk. And all of the struggle and the tension will gradually move out of your life, and you'll understand what it means when Jesus says, "*My yoke is easy and my burden is light.*" ([Matthew 11:30](#))

## Not behavior modification

But now remember, this is not behavior modification. That's one of the differences between a wonderful program like [Alcoholics Anonymous](#) and [spiritual disciplines](#). [Alcoholics Anonymous](#) is aimed at behavior modification. This is not aimed at behavior modification. But it has as its result incredible behaviour modification.

But that's not what you aim at. You aim at the inner transformation of the self. And then that comes to pass as your efforts and your experience grows. And this is what it means then to grow in grace, because as you enter into these things you increasingly receive grace through your knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

## Practice the Disciplines

How does one practice the disciplines? Well, you decide to live a Jesus student. You begin to obey his teachings. You observe why you fail, and you will fail. And then do in reliance on the Spirit what will remove the causes of these failures. You will find that they are disciplines. Now that list is not a complete list. There are other things that also are disciplines.

And I'm - I notice that I did not give the standard definition of what a discipline is. You have to have the concept. So let me just give it to you now. A discipline is something in your power that you do. A discipline is something in your power that you do, in order to enable you to do what you cannot do by direct effort. It's something in your power that you do, in order to enable you to do what you cannot do by direct effort. So the principle is in direction. You find the things that will help you grow and change and you do those and then as a result what comes out of you is different, because what is inside you is different.

## Live as Jesus' student

So, that's the way you do it. If you don't decide to live as Jesus' student you're not a disciple, and disciplines are for disciples. They can do you a little good here and there if you're not a disciple, but still, if you're going to take an orderly approach to the change or the transformation into Christlikeness you need to do this.

Now, churches that are making motions in the direction of discipleship and transformation, always find that they have to organize their program of spiritual growth and development around the disciplines. Of course that includes church and giving and other things like that, but it's always much more.

You cannot get growth in Christlikeness out of church as usual. There just isn't enough there. You have to do more. A couple of hours in church, some giving, it isn't enough. So you have to plan for more. So many churches, like the ones I've mentioned, are making available more intensive experiences. For example, instead of having a group that instead of just going to church on Sunday, they take them to a retreat. And they have a Friday through Sunday evening retreat. And they allow them to be practicing some of these disciplines. And that's one way of going beyond things as usual.

The result will be you'll get out of improper subordination in yourself, where body is running the show, soul is subordinate to that, the mind to the soul, and the spirit to the mind, and God to the whole shebang. That's the situation that people live in, sometimes they just leave out God and live for their body. And the prominence of the body in human life is the result of that. Then the proper subordination shifts those, puts God first, the spirit is the will, it puts the will under God, then the mind at the direction of the spirit, thoughts and feelings, then the soul begins to respond to the mind and to the spirit, and to God. And the body finally takes its place under the soul, rather than driving the soul, which drives the mind, which drives the spirit, which tries to drive God, which doesn't work very well.

## [Relationship Between Salvation and Transformation](#)

So what does all this have to do with being saved? We have to come back to that question, because as long as you think it has nothing to do with being saved it will precisely amount to nothing. And I don't need to go back and talk about the situation we find ourselves in for the most part in our culture and in our churches, where discipleship is one thing, and being a Christian is another.

## [Regeneration](#)

But the way this works is, [regeneration](#), new life from above, comes at the new birth. Now we're entering into an interactive relationship with God and his Son Jesus, and in his Kingdom. Since that has happened, then forgiveness, [justification](#), is an appropriate thing. We are forgiven. I don't mean to suggest that you have to worry about which of these comes first, but they do come together. Then, that life which comes in [regeneration](#) naturally develops into [sanctification](#). [Sanctification](#) means simply the established relationship, walk with Jesus. And all of the parts of the self are involved.

## [Glorification](#)

Now that naturally progresses to glorification. Glorification has already begun. Remember [Colossians 3](#) again? "*When Christ who is our life shall appear then you also shall appear glorious.*" ([Colossians 3:4](#)) Well that glory begins to shine in you already, and when you're walking this path, you're going to look differently. And there's going to be something in you that people can see. And they will respond to it, and they will want to know where it comes from, and they'll want to have it themselves. There will be a beauty in you.

Do you ever use that song, Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me? Did you ever hear that song? Anyone? A wonderful song. Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me. I should stand up and sing it, but probably you couldn't stand that. And being saved is not a matter of where you're going, but who you are now. You are a participant in the life that Jesus is now living here.

And that's what salvation is. And that all fits together, you see, once you start at the right place, and keep Jesus in the right place in all of this, namely central, and you see him as King over a Kingdom, in which he



invites you to live with him now. And God then as [Colossians 1:13](#) says, "*We are transformed from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son.*"