

John 20:21-22 “A Transformed Life on Mission with God”

Intro. Today I conclude my series of messages on becoming a Transformational Church. God has called us to transform lives by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, by the power of His Word, by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, and by our love. When lives are transformed and as we do good works in our community, our community will be impacted as well, and we should have a part in impacting our world.

As I have read the book, *Transformational Church* by Stetzer and Rainer,¹ I have thought about the question, How is a life transformed by God?

- The starting place is conversion, to be born again by hearing the gospel and through repentance and faith in Jesus. Jesus said in John 3:7, “You must be born again.” The apostle Peter said in Acts 3:19, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out...” The apostle Paul said in 2 Cor. 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” That initial change from death to life is instantaneous. Yet that is just the beginning. We must take the next step to continue the process of transformation.
- Spiritual growth is the next step. 2 Peter 3:18 says, “but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” One way we grow spiritually is by learning and applying the Word of God to our lives. Jesus said in Mt. 28:19-20 that we are to “make disciples of all the nations, ...teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” Paul said in Romans 12:2, “be transformed by the renewing of your mind...”² I believe spiritual growth and life transformation also takes place through a process of nurturing and mentoring. Jesus said in John 13:15, “For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.” Paul said in Php. 3:17, “Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.”

My next question is this: What does a transformed life look like? If we are to transform lives, what is our goal? How do we measure success? Generally speaking, we are to become like Jesus. After all, Paul said in Romans 8:29 that we have been “predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son...” So what does a Christlike life look like? Let me share a few characteristics of a transformed life:

- A life of love and good works – 1 John 4:7 says, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” Peter said in Acts 10:38 that Jesus “went about doing good...” Eph. 2:10, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works...”
- A life of moral righteousness – God is pure and righteous and He wants to transform us into His likeness. A life of moral purity begins with repentance, but develops as we grow spiritually. 1 John 2:3 says, “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.” 1 John 2:29 says, “If you know that He is righteous, you know that

¹ Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church* (Nashville: Lifeway, 2010). Page numbers in () refer to page #s in this book. Most of this message is based on chapter 9. The outline and much of the added Scriptures and commentary by Dr. Felker.

² I could add a brief discussion of the role of the Spirit in transformation (Tit. 3:5; 2 Cor. 3:18; etc.)

everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.” 1 John 3:9 says, “Whoever has been born of God does not [practice] sin....” Romans 12:2 says, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind....”³ Any discussion of this aspect of Christ-likeness is lacking in too many churches today.⁴

- A life on mission with God – This is going to be the focus of today’s message. Again, Jesus said in our opening text, “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (John 20:21). Just as Jesus was sent by the Father on a saving mission to this world, even so we have been sent by Jesus on a saving mission as well. In his Great Commission He commanded, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...” (Mt. 20:19). Just before His ascension He also commanded, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Can we say that we have experienced transformation into the likeness of Christ if we are not carrying on the mission of Christ? In Acts 1:1 Luke says that his gospel was an account “of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.” He implies that the book of Acts is an account of what Jesus *continued* to do and teach by the Holy Spirit through His disciples. Thus, 77% of those surveyed in transformational churches agreed with this statement, “Our church’s members understand the importance of sharing their faith story with friends” (p.199). Transformational Churches engage people in ministry within the church and mission outside the church. They spread the vision that church members are local missionaries. Membership is equated with a commitment to both the church and to serve the gospel to the community (p.204). Our authors said that transformational churches are about “moving people from *new to the mission* to *active on mission* to *leader in the mission*” (p.221).

One barrier to Christians being on mission with God is the idea that the paid staff members are the ones who are to be on mission with God. The fact is God has called us all to be on mission. Eph. 4:11-12 says that God has called “pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”

So today, I want to share with you what it takes to be on mission with God.

I. IT REQUIRES EMPOWERMENT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Notice what Jesus said in the next verse of our text, “And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” Jesus knew that as He was sending His apostles out on mission for Him, they could not carry out the mission on their own. They would need the empowerment and guidance of the Holy Spirit. So He gave them a foretaste of what it is to receive the Holy Spirit. Then a little later He said in Acts 1:8, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

You see, Paul said in 2 Cor. 3:5-6, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves..., but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit....”

So I call upon you to be filled with the Spirit, and rely on the Holy Spirit to enable you to carry out the mission God has given us.

³ Romans 13:12, “The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness....” Eph. 5:11, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.”

⁴ There is scant reference to this aspect of transformation in *Transformational Church*.

II. IT REQUIRES TRAINING

Our authors provide the following illustration, “When teaching a teenager to drive, only the most irresponsible parent would simply hand over the keys to the family car and say, “The interstate is in that direction. Good luck. Don’t wreck it.” Rather, parents show the teenager how to drive first. Then they make sure the soon-to-be driver is educated in the traffic laws. Then, when they put them behind the wheel for the first time, it is in a parking lot or other place where there is no other traffic” (p.209).

Yet our authors point out that much of what passes as training is actually just orientation. Orientation just lets you know what is out there. Training prepares you to handle the circumstances adeptly.

They illustrate from what happens when you board an airliner. The flight attendant always gives you what is essentially an orientation on flight safety. They point out where the exits are, how and when to use the oxygen masks, flotation devices, and so forth. Yet the ones on that plane that have really received adequate training to handle an emergency situation would be the pilots and flight attendants. Do you see the difference?

So how are we to be trained to share the Gospel?

A. Learn a Way to Share the Gospel – It can be by sharing your testimony. It can be by learning a simple gospel presentation like the Roman Road (3:23; 6:23; 5:8; 10:9, 13). I still use a modified form of the FAITH witness presentation that I learned years ago.

Suppose someone had a terrible accident and their life’s blood was flowing out and they knew they were about to die. If they asked you, “How can I have eternal life?” Would you be able to share the gospel in that moment? If not, shouldn’t you be able to?

B. Mentoring Is the Best Training - While our authors affirm the value of formal training in evangelism, they seem to emphasize learning to share your faith “naturally,” through mentoring relationships (p.210) and in other ways. Paul said in Php. 4:9, “The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do...” Paul not only made disciples through teaching, but also by setting an example to follow. God has given us the responsibility to be a living example of Christ to other believers. If our evangelism training is nothing more than a few lessons in a classroom, we are just giving an orientation. Real training also requires ongoing mentoring in real witnessing situations until the disciple is adequately trained and even ready to mentor someone else.

Jesus mentored His twelve apostles. The apostle Paul certainly had a mentoring relationship with young Timothy and others.

How many of us need to be a Paul to a Timothy?

C. Share Stories from the Field – As I’ve already stated, people on mission need godly examples to follow. Therefore, transformational leaders tell stories of their personal involvement and efforts to touch people far from God. When the people hear the stories of disciple making from the leaders, then they are more likely to engage in the work themselves (p.213). In the conclusion of this chapter, they made a very convicting statement, “The people in our churches may not be living out a missionary lifestyle because they have yet to see anyone live that way” (p.222).

For example, they quoted Pastor Allison of Delaware, Ohio. He said, “I tell story after story of me hanging out with unchurched people in Delaware. The guy who cuts my hair, his wife is an atheist and they came to church two weeks ago.... In the process of my teaching, I will say, ‘Oh, by the way, I just shared the gospel’” (p.220).

I am thus reminded that I need to share Christ and then share my witnessing experiences in my sermons. S.S. teachers need to share Christ, and then share witnessing experiences in their lessons. Other leaders need to do so. If you have a recent witnessing experience to share, let me know. I will look for an opportunity to share at some time.

Another aspect of our training is this:

D. Be Prepared for Opposition – We are to be about advance God’s Kingdom, rescuing souls from the kingdom of darkness (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13). We cannot expect to carry on this mission without opposition from Satan and those in his kingdom. Paul said in 1 Thess. 2:2, “after we had... been outrageously treated in Philippi..., we were emboldened by our God to speak the gospel of God to you in spite of great opposition” (HCSB). The word for “opposition” in the passage is an athletic term that describes an opponent in a game or match.

Yet warning people of the possibility of opposition would be incomplete without also assuring our disciples that God promises to be with us (Mt. 28:20), to grant us boldness (Acts 4:29-31), and typically He will deliver us from harm (Acts 26:17).

Now in addition to training, let’s see what else is required to be on mission with God?

III. IT REQUIRES OUTREACH TO THE COMMUNITY

Here’s a major problem we are facing today. In the North American Religious Identification Survey taken again in 2008, those who claimed no religious affiliation grew 138% in 18 years. In 2014 those without any religious affiliation has grown to 22.8% of the population.⁵ While a good number of people will still accept an invitation to attend a church, especially in the Southeast, increasing numbers will not attend any church, even if invited. So how can we reach them with the transforming gospel of Jesus Christ?

A. By Good Works – Jesus said in Matt. 5:16, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” 1 Tim. 6:18, “Let them [rich believers] do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share.” Titus 2:14 says we are to be “zealous for good works.” While Scripture places the primary emphasis on good works of love for fellow believers (Gal. 6:10; 1 John 3:17), there are examples of good works to non-believers, especially by Jesus. Eric Swanson, author of *The Externally Focused Church*, said this, “Good news and accompanying good deeds are like the two wings of an airplane. Each is incomplete without the other. Each complements the other. Each gives ‘lift’ to the other. To study the life and ministry of Jesus is to study a tapestry woven of good news and good deeds.”⁶ Thus, 33% in transformational churches *strongly* agreed with this statement, “Our church intentionally provides service opportunities for our people to be engaged with the unchurched in our local city or community.” Rather than merely to invite their city to the church, they are committed to take their church to the city. Our authors wrote, “Too many churches limit

⁵ <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>, accessed 1/14/17.

⁶ Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson, *The Externally Focused Church* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2004), quoted in *Transformational Church*, p.200.

their ministry to the acreage upon which their building rests. To be transformational, a church must constantly commission their people into service for the city to display and tell the gospel” (p.218).

Yet I was glad to read the following statement by our authors, “But TCs place an emphasis on social ministry *only as far as it serves the purpose of sharing the gospel*” (p.203). Jesus taught that even a cup of water is to be given in His name (Mark 9:41). Therefore, 75% in transformational church agreed with this statement, “When our church serves in the local city or community, we look for opportunities to share the message of Christ.” After all, Stetzer and Rainer rightly say, “transformation of individuals and communities happens at the same pace as the gospel is proclaimed” (p.220). Social ministry alone is of little value if it does not result in a change of heart by the transforming power of Jesus and His Word and His Spirit.

The value of good works in the community is that they provide a bridge to the hearts of people in the community who would otherwise never have contact with our church. Loving people unconditionally and serving them like Jesus will cause them to look to the Father. We also build a positive reputation in the community that opens doors for the gospel. In fact, 64% in transformational churches agreed with this statement, “Our church has earned a good reputation among city leaders by meeting needs.”

We have tentatively planned to give another appreciation dinner to local law enforcement officers on April 1. When we call upon you to help in some way, will we be able to count on you?

B. By Building Relationships with Unbelievers – What I just talked about is a way to do so as a group primarily as a church body. Here the emphasis is on what you do as an individual or family. 78% in Transformational Churches agree with this statement, “In our church, we believe that relationships with unchurched people are critical to the mission of advancing the gospel.” In relational evangelism we look for opportunities to share Christ, not as part of a visitation program, but as you have life connection with that unbeliever.

One way we build relational bonds between unbelievers and believers is through our small groups, also called “missional communities” in many transformational churches. They will also have social events and encourage group members to invite unchurched and unbelieving friends, neighbors and co-workers. It may be the celebration of a group member’s birthday.

Sometimes our circumstances in life will providentially connect us with unbelievers. When Paul was charged before the Roman authorities and appealed his case, which put him before King Agrippa. He did not waste that witnessing opportunity, but boldly shared the gospel with the king, that people “should repent and turn to God, and do works worthy of repentance” (Acts 26:20). When Paul was in prison in Rome, chained to a rotating group of guards, he shared the gospel with them also (Php. 1:12-13). He modeled witnessing through personal contact with individuals.

One pastor mentioned in our book volunteered to become the girl’s basketball coach in his community. That gave him the opportunity to establish relationships with those H.S. girls and their parents. As a result, almost every one of the girls is now a part of the church youth group. He hasn’t reached the parents yet, but these formerly unchurched high school girls met a believer who entered their world instead of expecting them to come to his first (p.221).

I am very busy with all of my responsibilities as a pastor, but I would like to find some outlet for making connections with people in the community. I used to coach soccer, baseball, and even basketball. Rhonda Swayzee came to our church through that connection. I have been

thinking about teaching a course in a local community college. What will you do to make more connections with the unchurched in our community?

C. By Attractional Community Events – One example given in our book is Bubbafest. One church joined up with the Christian Hunters Association to put on a major event for local hunters on a larger scale than we have done. The pastor said, “We brought in people who put on camouflage and normally never come to church.” At the event they had opportunity to share with gospel with men who normally do not attend church.

D. By Direct Outreach to our Neighborhoods - Instead of waiting for the neighbors to come to them, transformational churches choose to go out and meet the neighbors.

They may do so with a prayer walk or other ways we have already talked about in this series.

For many years now we always have a really good Vacation Bible School in the summer, more recently led by my wife Cheryl. I would really like for us to be more intentional this year to get out into the neighborhoods of the church and personally invite children to come.

Conclusion: Being on mission for God and with God requires a selfless attitude. It requires sacrifice. Yet as Paul spoke of reconciling people to God, he explained his motivation in 2 Cor. 5:14-15. He said, “For the love of Christ compels us....” And then he said, “He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.”

Sources: Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church* (Nashville: Lifeway, 2010). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).