

NEW HOPE GLOBAL SERMON TRANSFORMED LIVING 9/25/20



Transformed living is a theme that has emerged this week. It is the description of the power of God within believers that changes them from the inside out. Not unlike the transformation of popcorn.

Popcorn seems to be a staple in the West. Whenever I smell popcorn cooking in our home, I know Becky is about to watch a movie. It was even the staple with one family when I stayed overnight and this was all they offered me for dinner! It has been a food product in North America for centuries. In fact, at one archeological site in Mexico, researchers have found fossilized popped corn kernels over 5,000 years old—not surprising, since indigenous peoples in the Americas domesticated the corn plant 10,000 years ago! (Who Invented Popcorn? Max Falkowitz, Taste Magazine, <https://www.tastecooking.com/who-invented-popcorn/>) So how does this relate to us? Tony Evans uses this analogy:

Popcorn pops due to an explosion of moisture. Every kernel of popcorn has moisture in it. When you put popcorn in the microwave [or a pan on the stove], the heat creates steam. When steam rises inside the shell of the popcorn, it presses against the shell until the shell can't withstand the pressure anymore and it pops open, splitting open the shell. What was once a small, hard little object (a kernel of dried corn) has now increased in size and become soft and fluffy. In fold outward act, when the popcorn pops, it is hard to even find the shell. The old outward appearance is now dominated by the inside characteristics

God has seated deep down in your soul something that is ready to respond to the right environment. When the Holy Spirit begins to “cook” your divine nature so that the steam of your new life begins to rise and press through this outer shell called the body, you begin to “pop.” You will begin to look, act, talk, and walk differently because the change occurring on the inside will show up on the outside.” (Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations, Moody Publishers, 2009, p. 306).

I love his phrase “when the Holy Spirit cooks your divine nature!” Indeed. This is God’s agenda for all His followers – to be transformed into His image. This has been the power of Christianity throughout the centuries. In fact, when the early believers turned to Jesus Christ, their life change became known throughout the Roman World. Listen to Paul’s description of the Colossian believers:

³ Every time we pray for you our hearts overflow with thanksgiving to Father God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ For we have heard of your devoted lives of faith in Christ Jesus and your tender love toward all his holy believers. ⁵ Your faith and love rise

within you as you access all the treasures of your inheritance^[a] stored up in the heavenly realm. For the revelation of the true gospel is as real today as the day you first heard of our glorious hope, now that you have believed in the truth of the gospel.

⁶ *This is the wonderful message that is being spread everywhere, powerfully changing hearts throughout the earth, just like it has changed you! . . . Our beloved coworker, Epaphras, . . . informed us of the many wonderful ways love is being demonstrated through your lives by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Col. 1:3-7. (Passion Translation)*

Like the testimony of other early believers, the Colossians' love for all God's "holy believers, their devoted lives of faith," their confidence in their "glorious hope" is largely what caused the incredible multiplication of Christianity in the first centuries of the early church. And it happened through the Spirit and the Word. Former Dallas Theological Seminary professor, Dr. Howard Hendricks said, "The Bible was not given to satisfy your curiosity, but to overhaul your life." (quoted by Steve Douglass, CEO Campus Crusade for Christ, in MissioNexus 40 day devotional , Day 38, the task of the Great Commission). Ah-h. h. God's agenda!

How does life transformation happen? By the Spirit and what we focus on.

Romans 12:1-2 says: "I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice. . . .² Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think." (NLT) We copy the behavior and customs of the world if they are the center of our attention.

This has a very practical application in this age of Covid-19. Much of the literate world these days is focused for hours on computer screens – whether an i-phone, or an i-pad, or a desktop. Not so bad if we are seeing other believers via zoom, or listening to edifying speakers or researching the things that are pure and lovely and excellent and admirable (Phil. 4:8), but clearly all that comes up on the internet is none of those things – fake news, slander, detailed descriptions of all forms of evil, etc. These are what are consciously or even unconsciously "squeezing us into the world's mold."

So, how is what are you looking at changing you?

2 Cor, 3:18 says: ¹⁶⁻¹⁸ "Whenever, though, they turn to face God as Moses did, God removes the veil and there they are—face-to-face! They suddenly recognize that God is a living, personal presence And when God is personally present, a living Spirit, . . . our faces shine with the brightness of his face. And so we are transfigured much like the Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him" (The Message).

That's the secret. As we focus specifically on the Lord, we grow to reflect Him. But we have to choose that focus.

We have a small pond behind our house. When the weather is still, the water reflects the woods that border it. Almost mirror perfect. But when storms come, the waters become turbulent and the woods image is barely discernible. You become a mirror of the Lord by focusing deliberately on Him.



Both the *Message and the Passion Translation* use the word “transfigured” to explain this transformation process for Christians who are facing God. It is the word for metamorphosis. The analogy helps explain the transformation process. After a caterpillar eats and eats, it spins itself a cocoon where the inner processes of death and resurrection transform it into a butterfly. Feeding. Death. Life created by the Spirit. So Paul told the Colossians in 3:5-12: Put to death your old life of evil desires, lust, anger, slander, malice, lewd language, and clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness and the over-all covering of love.

This inner change of one's heart and mind – one's actions and attitudes – is the on-going process of being made more and more like Jesus Christ. In fact, Paul continues instructing the Colossians, Col. 1:7-12:

⁹ we've kept you always in our prayers that you would receive the perfect knowledge of God's pleasure^[c] over your lives, making you reservoirs of every kind of wisdom and spiritual understanding. ¹⁰ We pray that you would walk in the ways of true righteousness, pleasing God in every good thing you do. Then you'll become fruit-bearing branches, yielding to his life, and maturing in the rich experience of knowing God in his fullness! ¹¹ And we pray that you would be energized with all his explosive power from the realm of his magnificent glory, filling you with great hope. (Passion translation)

Life transformation continues as we are “filled with God's wisdom,” “pleasing God in all we do,” “maturing in the rich experience of knowing God in his fullness,” and “energized with all his explosive power.” That's the “cooking of our divine nature” we need. Thanks be to God, it is the work of the Spirit to make this happen as we choose to stay focused on the Lord.

Next time you make or smell popcorn popping help its inner transformation remind you of the life transformation God is working on in your life. May it be so – for Jesus's sake. Amen.

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