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## **Transformed: Embracing the Death of Self and the Power of God**

Like a tree in rich soil, we must be rooted in Christ to thrive. We must embrace the death of our "selves" and seek to abide in Christ. As we grow in our sanctification and remain attached to the source, we mature and grow spiritually. The Spirit works in and through us to produce much new fruit and prove we are His disciples.

*In a word, we are transformed.*

"Transformed: Embracing the Death of Self and the Power of God" is a 31-day devotional by New York Times bestselling author and host of the nationally syndicated radio show, *The Rick and Bubba Show*, Rick Burgess, that will challenge you to evaluate just how God has changed you through the saving grace He demonstrated on the cross.

Has God transformed you? Is He transforming you?

For more information about *Transformed*, or to purchase your copy, please go to [ironhillpress.com](http://ironhillpress.com).

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# INTRODUCTION

The fastest growing “religion” in our country right now is the worship of self. But, of course, this has been an issue with human beings from the beginning. How did Satan convince Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? By convincing Eve that God couldn’t be trusted to decide right from wrong. The Tempter said that Adam and Eve should be able to determine that for themselves. “Did God really say you will die if you disobey Him? Surely not.” And so they rebelled against God, and from that moment until now, sin separates God and His creation.

But that’s also when we see the first inkling of God’s plan to redeem humankind from their sins. We chose to elevate ourselves to be our own gods, but Jesus took on human flesh and came to us when we could not come to Him. The Son of God came to redeem all who believe in Him, repent of their sins, and submit to His authority. If we are sincere in this belief, God makes us fully righteous. We are justified. We are sanctified.

Unfortunately, many see this as the end. But Jesus said it was a new beginning. Jesus was and is counter-cultural. In Luke 9:23 and Mathew 16:24, Jesus told all who desired to be His disciples that they must deny themselves and pick up a cross. To truly live, we must die to ourselves! Too often, we read the words and foolishly think this means becoming a “better” version of ourselves. That is not what Jesus is saying. He is saying our old self is dead, and now we have become transformed into a new self in Christ. Jesus says in John 15:5 we must abide in His power in order to bear much fruit because apart from Him, we can do nothing! He goes on in 15:8 to say that this fruit He produces in us proves that we are His disciples.

To follow Jesus faithfully, we must be rooted in Him. This is the image of the tree on the cover of this book. The tree is dead at the top, just as we must embrace the death of our “selves.” But the closer we get to the roots, the closer we get to the source of our strength; we are renewed with Spirit-fueled, Christ-centered life. When we abide in Christ, we seek Him, pursuing righteousness, godliness, faith, and endurance as Paul instructed Timothy (1 Timothy 6:11). As we grow in our sanctification and remain attached to the source, we mature and grow spiritually. When we are completely rooted in Christ, we produce much new fruit and prove we are His disciples. We die to ourselves and are transformed by Christ. It is a powerful picture.

I was reading “The Spirit of the Disciplines” by Dallas Willard, and something he wrote jumped off the page. Willard feared that we, the Western Church, have been selling short the power of the Gospel. Willard’s concern resonated with me. G.K. Chesterton

echoed a similar theme when he wrote, “Christianity has not so much been tried and found wanting, as it has been found difficult and left untried.” Many Christians today seem to be plagued with a lack-luster faith, one that lacks power and action.

It is true that we can do nothing to save ourselves from the consequences of our sins. We are saved from our sins by God’s grace through faith alone. The Apostle Paul makes it clear that we have done nothing to warrant God’s grace: “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). It is a biblical fact that we can do nothing to redeem ourselves. But the Bible paints a picture of saving faith as active faith.

Saving faith is a faith of action. What do I mean by this? First, Scripture teaches that we must repent of our sins. This isn’t an additional command, something added to saving faith. It is wrapped up in saving faith. In Acts chapter 2, we find Peter, now full of the Holy Spirit, preaching a message at Pentecost that God used to cut the hearts of all who heard it. Acts 2:37-38 tells us that upon hearing the truth of the Gospel message, the people responded to Peter, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Peter did not say, “You know? That’s a great question. I don’t know.”

He didn’t say, “Go home and let God work it out.”

Peter never hesitated. “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Their response showed Peter that they believed the truth of the Gospel message. When asked what to do next, Peter told them: Repent! Take action! Turn away from your sins and turn toward Jesus Christ for redemption. Watch your dead spirit be made alive by God’s Holy Spirit!

You see, apart from Christ, we are dead in our sins. But when we come to saving faith in Jesus, we are reborn. We are made new. In a word, we are transformed.

We are transformed by faith, not by works. But as James says, the active nature of our faith is proof of our transformation. We look to the Old Testament long before Jesus burst onto the scene and see men like Noah and Abraham. These men had a faith that led God to declare them righteous. But how was their faith measured? Abraham wasn’t deemed righteous solely because he believed God told him to go. His faith was proven legitimate because he went. Abraham had a faith of action! Noah wasn’t deemed righteous only because he believed God wanted him to build the ark. He was deemed righteous because he methodically built the ark by following God’s instructions to the

letter. Noah had a faith of action!

We are transformed by our faith in Christ alone through the work of Christ on the cross. But this transformation involves repentance from our sins, surrendering faith in our ability to justify ourselves, and placing our hope for redemption solely in Jesus. When we do so, He becomes Our Lord, our authority, and God's Holy Spirit replaces our dead spirit. This transformation continues until our earthly death or the return of Jesus Christ, when we will all be glorified.

When we are saved by faith, we are justified in Jesus Christ and made fully righteous. In what is a profound and wonderful mystery, we are sanctified, i.e., made holy, in God's eyes, and also begin the process of sanctification, i.e., growing in our Christ-likeness. All under the power and leading of the Holy Spirit. This devotion you hold in your hands will concentrate on the sanctification process described in Scripture. The Bible teaches us that those that are truly redeemed are being completely transformed into something that they were not before. We'll unpack this process over the next month and examine what it means for our lives.

Before we move on, I need to ask you: Have you been transformed? Do you see the drastic change in your life that only God can bring about? If we claim to be "saved," but we have not been and are not being transformed, then we are saying that somehow the power that raised Jesus from the dead has now entered our life, but it did not have much impact on us at all. Brothers, if God hasn't transformed you and isn't actively transforming you, it is not because He cannot do so.

If you arrive at this point in this introduction and do not recognize yourself in the description of what it means to be saved by faith, the best thing you can do now is to examine your relationship with God and ask Him, in prayer, where you stand with Him. The transformation brought about through saving faith is life-bringing. Without the salvation only God can offer, you stand separated from the nearly limitless blessings of God. Before moving on in this book, I would ask you to evaluate your life and do any work you need to do to get right with God. Too much is at stake for this to be left in the balance.

For those of you reading this who are confident that God's grace has saved you through faith, are you willing to take the next 31 days to allow God's Word to pose some challenging questions? If so, let's find out if our lives truly reflect the transformation available only in the redeeming power of the Almighty God.

Has God transformed you? Is He transforming you? It's an honor to join you as we answer these questions together.



# DAY 1

## WHAT DO YOU VALUE?

*“[7] But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. [8] Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.”*

- PHILIPPIANS 3:7-8

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When I was a “cultural Christian,” I had to pretend to be interested in the things of God when in reality, the things of the world were much more interesting to me. When Christ redeemed me, I began to notice that things I once deemed valuable had lost their luster. But this transformation took time.

When I finally surrendered my life to Christ, I wondered how it would affect my work. I do a secular radio show, and on the show, we talk about a variety of things, including much about our personal life. My first pastor encouraged me to work my faith into the show’s content. Early in my walk with Christ, it was difficult because I was still much more interested in the world than in my faith. I knew so little about the God who had redeemed me.

Sure, I knew the basic stuff I had been taught while growing up in the Bible Belt. But I had no real understanding or love for God’s Word. I pretended to be interested in sharing my faith on the show. But I was most excited about the next funny thing I could say on the show because that was my true passion and desire. At this point in my life, I struggled when the Holy Spirit prompted me to speak about my Lord and Savior.

Then a transformation began to take place. The more I worshipped, prayed, and learned the Bible, the more wonderful it all became. Twenty-six years later, I can honestly say with zero hesitation that Christ has so transformed me that instead of pretending to be interested in the things of God, I have to force myself to pretend to care about anything else. I just don’t find things in this world that interesting or desirable compared to what I have in Christ.

The Apostle Paul talks about this in Philippians 3:7–8. Before Christ transformed Paul, people loved him. He was highly educated, wealthy, had the best seats in the Temple, and was revered both for his zeal for God and his persecution of the disciples of Jesus. But then Paul had an encounter with Jesus and was radically transformed. God made Paul a new man. God would use the same Paul who had persecuted the Church to grow the Church.

This transformation cost Paul, and it will cost us. Paul said that due to his devotion to Christ, he lost the things of the world he once had. But since he truly met Jesus, he considered anything he may have lost to be garbage compared to what he had gained.

Transformation changes your standard for what is truly valuable and what isn't. I remember thinking football games and deer hunting were far more valuable to me than a Bible study, mission trip, or making disciples. Today I can honestly say that while I still enjoy those things, I do not worship those things. Why? Because compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ and advancing His Kingdom, these things have lost their luster. Nothing is better than knowing Jesus.

#### FOR REFLECTION

**Are there things in your life you still value more than knowing Christ? If so, these things are inhibiting your transformation. Do what it takes to rightly order the things you value most in life.**



# DAY 2

## THE SECRET TO LIFE

*“[21] For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. [22] If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. [23] I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.” -PHILIPPIANS 1:21-23*

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What is the secret to life? You can exhaust yourself searching for the world’s attempts to answer this question. Every solution the world offers falls flat because they are rooted in our fallen creation. But Paul figured this out a long time ago. How? Because Jesus had transformed him, he understood that the secret to life is to live in service to Christ.

Paul wasn’t serving Christ to earn his redemption; he was serving Christ because of his redemption. His priorities had been transformed to the point that he realized that knowing Jesus is so wonderful that you can get to the point where you really can’t lose. If you live, you get to stay on earth to serve Christ to follow His commands. You get to be about the business of being and making disciples as instructed by the Lord. Far from being a burden, this service is a joy. Unlike the useless work of the world that never quite satisfies, this work has eternal consequences and reward.

We see in Philippians 1:21-23 that Paul had come to the place where he realized that if he were allowed to live, he would live to serve Christ. And if he lost his earthly life while serving Jesus, he then would be in the presence of Christ, which is even better! Paul appreciated the gift of life on earth but realized when it ends, then eternal life with Christ is even better. Paul wasn’t going to end his life on his timeline because he’d been transformed; he viewed his life differently than before he encountered Jesus.

Paul knew his life didn’t belong to him since he had been transformed through faith in Christ. God had bought him through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. Therefore, Paul realized that if his Lord thought it was better for him to stay and advance the Kingdom, he would submit to that call. But Paul also knew that if God decided to

end his earthly life and ministry, the results of that sovereign decision would even be better.

Paul was hard pressed between two desires: fulfilling God's plan for him on this earth or joining God eternally in Heaven. But Paul was committed to whatever God deemed best because Paul no longer considered his agenda to be more important than God's agenda. He had found the secret to life: to live is to serve Christ, and to die is to be in the presence of Christ! The transformed win either way.

Is your life devoted to advancing the Kingdom of God? God has transformed me to the point where I can say, without hesitation, that if my work does not point people to Jesus, it has been a monumental waste of time. Sadly, this has not always been my conviction. But because Jesus Christ transformed me, I no longer see value in seeing my life's work glorifying me. The only value to my life is whether it is used to glorify Him.

#### FOR REFLECTION

**Christ has transformed you. How has this changed how you answer the question, "What is the secret to life"? Paul reminds us elsewhere in Scripture that whatever we do, we must do it with all our hearts as if we're doing it for the Lord and not for others. Why? Because we can know that if we do so, we will receive an inheritance as our reward (Colossians 3:23-24). How does Christ transform our life's work? By reminding us that the redeemed serve Him. How does this help you to see your life and work differently?**

# DAY 3

## TOTAL SUBMISSION

*“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” - COLOSSIANS 3:5*

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The pastor God used to help save my life spoke to me the way Paul spoke to the Church at Colossae in Colossians 3:5. I had claimed to be a Christian from when I was a little boy. I was a pretty good kid compared to the other children around me. The same held for much of my teenage years. I attended church, but I was not immersed in church. (Attending church isn't the same as being involved in church.) I wasn't an agnostic or an atheist; I believed in God. I believed He sent His son, Jesus, to die on the cross to forgive me of my sins. I believed that if I wasn't "saved," I would go to hell. So, when I was around 10, I responded to an altar call, asked God to forgive me of my sins, and was baptized soon after.

But late in high school, I struggled with sins I couldn't control. So, like many of the people my age at the time, I responded to another altar call and got baptized again. Why? Because I wasn't living a transformed life. Unfortunately, by age 19, I had stopped attending church. I spent the 12 years after that living a life of deliberate and perpetual sin.

When I met my wife, Sherri, and we desired to be married, we went to find a church where we could have the ceremony. We chose a church, and when we met with the pastor, he asked me why I wanted to get married in his church. I replied that the church was the most convenient location for our families. Imagine my surprise when he told me that he would not marry Sherri and me because I was lost. This did not sit well with me, and I asked him what gave him the right to declare me lost. He boldly replied that it wasn't he who declared me lost; the lack of transformation in my life told him I was lost. He correctly pointed out that I was living a life of sin. I wasn't merely making mistakes, coming under conviction, and repenting. No, I lived a lifestyle of sin.

The disciple of Christ will always struggle with his sinful nature. But a disciple of Jesus, as Paul states in today's Scripture, doesn't live a life of deliberate sin. Paul

says that the redeemed once walked in a lifestyle of sin, but they don't anymore. Paul says the wrath of God is coming on those who do not repent and continue to live a life of sin. He says we must put sin to death because we are being transformed through the power of the Spirit. He says to put sin away. This is the action-oriented faith of the Bible.

This call to a new life isn't the call to become a somewhat better version of our old self. Jesus says in Luke 9:23 that His disciples must deny themselves and pick up their cross daily. This means the old you is dead. You are not a better version of your old self but a new self that is now selfless in Christ.

This is what the pastor was pointing out to me so many years ago. He did not see a transformed man sitting in front of him. And I knew he was right. I left that meeting, went home, and got out my Bible. God led me to James 4:7–8, a passage that changed my life: “[7] Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. [8] Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” I will never forget that moment.

I couldn't understand why I had not been transformed until that moment. Sitting on my floor, Bible open in front of me, I was convinced by the truth that I was still living as if I was under my authority. Though I believed in Jesus, I did not belong to Jesus. I did not love Jesus; my faith was still in me, not Him. Realizing this, I submitted to His authority, repented from my sins, turned from the devil, and put my faith in God. At that moment, God came near to me and began the process of completely transforming my life.

#### FOR REFLECTION

**Has Jesus truly transformed your life? Do you still see sin that should not be there in your life? Do you live a lifestyle of sin? Maybe you need to submit to God today, resist the devil and sin in your life, and come near to God. Trust that He is faithful and will draw near to you.**

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