

# We All Want to Change (and We All Are)

Good morning, everybody. If you've got a bible, go with me to **Luke 6**. Happy New Year to you. Hope your Christmas and New Year was great. Ours was really fun. Our two year old daughter, Norah, discovered **Fruit Loops** for the first time. But words with lots of consonants in them are hard for her right now, so she calls them "Shrute Boops." And I personally hope she never learns how to say it correctly. Because that was amazing. We also went to stay with my in-laws for a week, and while we were there, there was an issue where the sewage extraction pump (we'll just assume I said that right), stopped pumping sewage out of part of the house for a bit (I know). So that's some exciting news to hear around Christmas. And it really all turned out fine, but maybe my favorite part about it was that I was planning to help my father-in-law *fix* the pump on the last day we were there, but at the very last minute we realized we had bought the wrong part for it. So my family had to leave to head back to Knoxville, which meant I didn't have to work on a sewage pump. And *that* is maybe the best Christmas present I've ever received. Merry Christmas to me.

But **all that said**, I'm glad to be back with you this week. If you didn't know, we took our typical one week off last Sunday, so if you were here staring at a locked door, sorry about that. But we're back at it this week. And to kick the year 2022 off, we're hopping into a series we do at the beginning of every year called **Formation**. And it's a series about the idea of *spiritual* formation. Which is a fancy way of talking about the art and science of how we *change* as human beings, and as followers of Jesus. How we are *formed* into the types of people God made us to be.

I think it's so **important to remember** that **when we become followers of Jesus, we're not just signing up for a change of *destination* after we die. Rather, we are signing up for a lifelong process of being *formed*, more and more, into the image of Jesus.** And that's what this series is meant to address: how does that process of formation actually *happen*? How do we *become* more and more like Jesus?

Or **put even more broadly**, how do we *change* as human beings? And when you put it *that way, that idea* (how we change) is something nearly *all* of us are interested in, to some degree or another. ***Especially this time of year***, right? It's January 2, which means that most of us are probably *slaying* it on our New Year's resolutions, right? Just *killing* it so far. If you *aren't* doing so hot after just one day, I don't know what to tell you—maybe **New Year's resolutions aren't for you**. I don't know. But around this time, every single year, a whole lot of us zero in on the things we most want to *change* about ourselves. Maybe we want to be *healthier*. Maybe we want to get a better handle on our *schedule*

or find a new *hobby*. Maybe we want to improve our *mental* health. Or any variety of other things.

But **this is the time of year that a lot of people focus** a lot on *change*. “What about me do I want to be different, and *how* am I going to *get* there exactly?” I find it interesting that **for all our culture’s talk** of “just being ourselves,” and being “true to ourselves,” there’s another, very real side of us that doesn’t want to “just be ourselves” at all. We want to be newer, better, healthier, *changed versions of ourselves*. We all want to *change*.

But **there’s a dark side** to all of this. Because **as much as we often want to change, many of us don’t feel very good at it**. Right? Like, can we be honest about that? I mean, how many of us are ready to stand up and go “I completely succeed at all of my New Year’s Resolutions, every year. Everything that I set out to change about myself at the beginning of each year, I fully and completely accomplished just as I envision *accomplishing it*.” Maybe there’s a few of us like that—if so, teach me your ways—but that’s probably not the *bulk* of us. **The bulk of us often really struggle with implementing change into our lives and our character.**

And I think **sometimes, that’s a microcosm** of a deeper, *spiritual* frustration we feel. Which is that **many of us don’t feel like we’re changing to become more like Jesus**. Some of us don’t really feel like we’re getting much of anywhere with *that either*. Maybe, in our best moments we see some growth. But there’s still a very real part of us that looks at our worst moments, our biggest failures, our most significant struggles, and feels like it’s a real one-step-forward, two-step-back type situation. **When everything hits the fan and life exposes the deepest parts of us, sometimes we are very underwhelmed and discouraged at what comes out.**

I’ve shared this before, but for **as long as I can remember**, I have struggled regularly with a tendency towards *bitterness* and *resentment*. I’m an Enneagram 1, which is basically a perfectionist. That’s not what they call it, but that’s what it is. I want everything to be *perfect*. And I don’t know if you’ve looked around our world much lately, but plenty of things are just a *hair* shy of perfect. Which makes me constantly frustrated, and sometimes bitter and resentful about all of that. And in some ways, I feel like I’ve *grown* some in my ability to deal with that stuff in my heart. But then there’s other times where I’m in the thick of it and I just think to myself: *why do I still struggle with this?* Why is this stuff still *in* my heart, and when am I going to grow out of it? **Have you ever had that type of experience as a follower of Jesus?**

Okay. So this all **brings us back to the question**, *how do we actually change? How do we become more like Jesus? How do we participate in long-lasting, meaningful transformation, in such a way that in those moments, what comes out is actually something that looks a little more like Jesus? And something that looks more and more like Jesus, as time goes on?* How do we accomplish *that* type of change? **That's the question I want to try and answer** together this morning. And *that* is a big part of what Jesus gets at in Luke 6.

So **take a look with me** there, starting in v. 47. This is Jesus speaking, and he says this:

*[47] As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and **puts them into practice**, I will **show you** what they are like. [48] **They** are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on **rock**. When a flood came, the torrent **struck** that house but could not **shake** it, **because** it was **well built**. [49] **But** the one who hears my words and **does not** put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground **without** a foundation. The **moment** the torrent struck **that** house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.*

So Jesus tells **a story that illustrates** two different ways of responding to his own teaching about life and reality. The story is about two men that each build a house. The first man digs deep and builds his house on the *rock*—a *stable* foundation. And because he did that, when the flood came, no matter how hard the water beat against the house, the house stayed put. It had a strong *foundation*. But the second man and the second house was a completely different story. That man didn't do the work of digging down to the rock. Instead, he just set his house on top of shifting ground. When the flood hit *it*, the house *fell*.

So these two men and their respective houses are **meant to represent two different responses** to the teachings of Jesus. One man *heard* Jesus' words and was ultimately *changed into a different type of person by it*, while the other one simply *heard* it, and remained *unchanged*. And what does Jesus say is the *difference* in the two responses? **What distinguishes the *changed* person in the story, from the *unchanged* person? Well Jesus sums it up in one word: *practice*. Jesus says that the house that made it through the storm was the man who heard Jesus' words *and put them into practice*. The house that *didn't* make it through the storm was the man who *heard* Jesus' words and *did not* put them into practice. Do you see that? The difference is *practice*.**

So I want to point out—as I do most every year when we cover this passage—that **the difference between these two men wasn't a matter of knowledge**. It wasn't that one of them *knew* things about Jesus, that the other one *didn't* know things about Jesus.

Jesus says plainly in the passage that both people *heard* the same thing. They both *ingested* the same information and were *aware* of the same ideas. **That's so important for us to see.** Because sometimes within Christianity, we can make it seem like *knowledge* is what matters most. We can make it seem as if becoming a follower of Jesus is simply about being able to recite a set of facts about God and/or the bible.

Now, hear me: **facts are important.** Absolutely they are. Some people try to follow Jesus *without* knowing much information at *all* about him, and that doesn't go very well *either*. Facts and information *do matter*. ~~A big part of my job is literally to stand up here every week and teach information about God and the bible. So it should go without saying that I'm a fan of learning information about God.~~ That all *matters*. **But—and this is what Jesus is getting at—facts about God will not change you as a human being.** ~~James and demons here?~~ **Information alone will not lead to transformation. If you want to be changed and transformed, you will need more than facts about God. You will need practice.**

And **that phrase** Jesus uses, **"puts them into practice,"** is pretty much exactly what it sounds like. It implies intentional, proactive, and especially *repetitive* action. **Becoming like Jesus is not just about what you know, and it's not even just about what you do once. It is about what you choose to do over and over again.** *That* is what creates change in your life. *That* is what forms your character. *That* is what makes you more and more like Jesus. **Not just what you know, but what you put into practice.**

To **put it another way**, a central piece of how we change as human beings is through **our habits: the things we choose to do over and over again.** A guy by the name of **James K.A. Smith** wrote a brilliant book about all of this several years back called *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*. And you could probably sum up the point of his book with this one quote from it. He says, as followers of Jesus, **"the things we do, do things to us."** There is a direct relationship, in other words, between *repetition* and *formation*. We become the people we *are* largely based on the things we *do* over and over again.

So let me just try and help you see this idea at work **elsewhere in the pages of the bible:** think with me about a passage like Jesus' famous teaching on money and possessions in **Matthew 6**. If you grew up in church, you've probably heard his line, **"where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."** And in context, what Jesus is doing is telling his people to invest more and more of their money and resources in things of eternal significance. He uses the language of "storing up treasure in heaven." And the reason given for why they should do that is that **"where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."**

So follow his *logic* there. He is saying **if you want to see *change* in what your heart cares most about, you should change your *habits* in that direction first. And as you change your *habits*** (in this example, the places you regularly give your money too), what you will find is that your heart will go with it. Your *habits can*, with the help of the Holy Spirit, change what you *love* and who you *are* over time. “Where your treasure *is*, there your *heart will be also*.” Quite often, the way we change is *through* our habits. **We become the people we are through the things we choose to do over and over again.** Is everybody following that?

Okay, Now something that is so important for you to know: **this is happening** in your life all the time, **whether you realize** it is happening or not. You are always becoming a certain type of person, and you are getting there largely through your habits. I want to show you *this* from another passage we find in Galatians 6. It says this in verses 7-9:

*Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*

So “**sowing**” is the language of *repetition*. When you sow seeds in a field, you’re doing the same thing over and over again. But *here*, Paul says that there are two types of “sowing” you can do. You can “sow to the Spirit,” or you can “sow to the *flesh*.” This is Paul’s way of saying that **we are *always* participating in habits, and those habits are *always* shaping the type of people we become.**

**So you have *habits, right now*, in your life, that are slowly transforming you into a certain type of person.** For better or worse. *We all want to change...and we all are changing.* The question for all of us is not “are we being formed?” The question is “*what are we being formed into?*” **Formation is not a *spiritual* thing as much as it’s a *human* thing.** Every moment of our lives, everything we do over and over again is forming us in a certain direction, and into a certain type of person.<sup>1</sup>

For instance, if you **wake up each morning** and sit with the Scriptures in order to hear from God *through* them...you will over time become the type of person who *wants* to hear from God through them, and who is shaped *by* them. If you wake up each morning

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<sup>1</sup> I owe much of the wording in this paragraph to John Mark Comer in many of his teachings on spiritual formation.

and spend fifteen minutes scrolling through Instagram before you do anything else...you will eventually become the type of person who *wants* to spend fifteen minutes scrolling through Instagram. If you spend your commute home each day *praying through* your anxieties from the day and handing them over to the Father, you will eventually become a person who is less and less anxious, and more and more at peace. If you come home from work every day and watch two hours of Netflix to take your *mind off of* your anxieties, you will eventually become the type of person who *needs* to watch two hours of Netflix each day to cope with reality. And we could go on.

But **do you see how this works?** Our *habits*—the things we do over and over again in our lives—*shape* the types of people we eventually become. To put it in business terms, your system is perfectly designed to give you the results you are getting. There's no way around it. You are *always becoming* a certain type of person. And you are becoming that person *largely* through your habits. The only question is this: what *type* of person are you *becoming*? Are we becoming people that look *more and more* like Jesus? Or are we becoming people that look *less and less* like Jesus? **In Paul's language from Galatians, are we sowing to the Spirit, or sowing to the flesh?**

Now, that **Galatians passage also hits on** another important component regarding how we change. Sometimes when we talk about how we change via our habits, it makes us nervous. Because to some, this **makes it sound like we create change in our life, instead of God creating the change.** And I really do understand that concern. Because at the end of the day, we believe here at City Church that *God* is the source of *all lasting change* when it comes to becoming more like Jesus.

But **notice from our passage** in Galatians 6 that **Paul does not view God's power and our effort as competing forces; he views them as partners.** We don't have to *choose* whether we want to try and change *ourselves*, or whether we want *God* to change us. That's a false dichotomy. Here's where I'm getting that from: at the beginning of the passage, it says "God cannot be *mocked*: a man *reaps* what he sows." In other words, if you think God is going to just *magically create* character change in you, while you refuse to adjust any of your habits to *join him in* those efforts, Paul says it is like you are *mocking* God. **You're asking him to do something for you that you are unwilling to do with him.** And that's not how God works. Rather, **God invites us to take active participation with him in his endeavor to transform us.**

Late author **Jerry Bridges**, who's written a couple of my all-time favorite books about following Jesus, puts it this way:

*The pursuit of holiness (in other words, transformation) is a **joint venture** between God and the Christian. No one can attain any degree of holiness without God working in his life, but just as surely no one will attain it without effort on his own part.*

The pursuit of holiness is a “**joint venture**” between God and the Christian. God’s grace and our effort are overlapping circles. There is a way to rely *only* on our effort for change, to a point that is unhealthy—to be sure. But there is also a way to rely *only* on God to change us and *not* participate with him *in* it—which is *also* unhealthy. **Dallas Willard** puts it this way:

*Grace (as in, God’s grace) is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to **earning**. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action.*

So **that’s what we’re after** as followers of Jesus. We want to actually *put forth effort*, to *join God* in his desire to form and shape us as human beings. And a big part of that happens through our *habits*. // So **in this series**, each and every year, we take some time to explore different ways that we join God in those efforts. And each year, we focus on one *particular* practice that accomplishes all that. Through the years, Christians have often called these the “spiritual disciplines.” But whether you call them *disciplines*, or *habits*, or *practices*, or really anything else—the name doesn’t really matter all that much. These are just things we do, on *repeat*, that help us become more like Jesus. So in years past during our Formation series, we’ve covered things like *prayer*, *bible reading*, and last year, *rest*.

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**This year**, we’ll cover the habit of **mission**. And I want to just give you a definition so we’re all on the same page. By the word **mission**, all we mean is **demonstrating and articulating the gospel to people who don’t yet know Jesus**. That’s what we’re talking about this year. *Mission* our practice for 2022.

Now that said, maybe to you, **mission doesn’t exactly feel like** a *spiritual discipline*. Prayer, bible, rest—those make sense. But *mission*? Maybe it feels like mission is something we should be *doing*, but not necessarily something we should be doing in order to be *changed by it*. **When we think about mission, we typically think of doing it to benefit that other person—not to benefit ourselves**. And that’s understandable. But the truth is that it’s actually *both*. Mission should be done for the good of those who don’t yet know Jesus—absolutely. *And* we should recognize along the way that *participating* in God’s mission is going to transform *us* in the process as well.

In fact, **as our pastors were talking through** this series, we were able to identify at least **three ways** that participating in *mission* transforms us and forms us into the image of Jesus. Feel free to write these down if they're helpful to you; I'll go through them relatively quickly. First, **mission helps you die to yourself**. As Jesus says *often* in the gospels, central to following Jesus is learning the art of denying yourself. **But as any of us who have followed Jesus very long have figured out, "self" is kind of our native language.** As in, *selfishness*. We don't naturally gravitate towards *dying to ourselves* as human beings.

**But** that said, **there is something about showing people Jesus** and telling people **about Jesus that almost requires a certain level of dying to yourself**. It forces us to deny the self-centered parts of us. **Our natural inclination is to be hyper-concerned about what others think about us and do anything in our power to maximize those opinions of us.** For many people, it is precisely that concern that gives us tremendous *anxiety* about discussing Jesus with people. In fact, we're going to talk in detail about *that* next Sunday. **But sharing our faith with others requires caring more about that other person than we do about their opinion of us. It forces us to prioritize their good over our comfort.** And those are the very basics of dying to yourself. *Mission* helps you die to yourself.

**Mission** also **helps you fine-tune what you believe**. There is something about specifically *talking* to others about Jesus that forces us to think about our belief system critically, right? Just by nature of what it is. **Those who work in education will tell you that you tend to study harder in order to teach something, than you do just to know it.** The same is often true of telling others about Jesus: it helps us fine-tune what we believe. But don't take *my* word for it. Here's the O.G. **Billy Graham**—who knew a little something about sharing *his* faith with others. He once said this:

*Our faith becomes stronger as we express it; a growing faith is a sharing faith.*

Mission helps us fine-tune what we believe. And then finally, **mission helps you rely on the Spirit**. We plan to get into a lot of this throughout the series. But there is hardly anything that prompts you to rely on the Spirit's *presence*, *power*, and *work* quite like living on mission. When done well, it makes you constantly ask questions like "what is the Spirit up to?" "Who is he drawing in close?" "How do I persist in loving this person who is notoriously difficult to love?" "How do I speak in such a way that is filled with conviction, and also compassion?" **Mission is the Spirit's work, so we need his help for it.**

There is a reason that **right after giving his disciples their final mission** to "go and make disciples," Jesus left them with an incredible, *timely*, promise. He says: "...and behold, /



*am with you always, even to the end of the age.” We do the Spirit’s work by the Spirit’s help. Mission helps us rely on the Spirit.*

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So right there are **at least three ways** that participating in the mission of Jesus serves to form and transform you in really helpful ways. And I’m operating under the assumption that if you’re in the room and are following Jesus, *dying to yourself, fine-tuning what you believe, and relying on the Spirit* are all things you want to be doing. If they aren’t, we might need to go back to square one. But assuming that we *want* to grow in those things, *mission* is one very helpful way to labor to that end. It benefits *us*, even as it benefits *others*. So that’s what we’re aiming to do through this series.

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Now, **practically speaking**: if you’ve been around for previous iterations of this series, you know that there are actually *two components* to it. One is the teachings we do here on Sundays. Each Sunday, me or another pastor will teach from the Scriptures on one aspect of *mission*.

But I do want to **remind you of what we talked about** just a bit earlier. We said, somewhat *repeatedly* and *emphatically*, that *knowledge* alone is not enough to *change* us. *Information alone* doesn’t lead to *transformation*. So you can show up here every Sunday for the next five weeks and listen *intently* to everything we tell you about mission. But if you *only* do *that*, do you think you will *change* much as a result of that? *Nope*. You’re still in the category of the man who built his house on sand. **If all you do is listen to these teachings, you will become a person who knows a lot about mission, and yet still is not missional.** In order to *change*, you need to *do something with what you know*. You need to *put it into practice*.

So **to help you with that**, we have a **second component** to this series, appropriately called a “**practice guide**.” It’s called that because it helps you put what we talk about *into practice*—we got incredibly creative with the name there. We’ll have them available for you to pick up next week (we planned for *this* week but COVID supply chain issues has affected truly everything, including printing companies that were supposed to print this booklet for us). But beginning next week, you can pick these up. And it’ll be available *online* beginning today. But what you’ll find inside them is a *practice* to participate in during each week of the series. We’ll talk a bit about each practice and how to do it here on Sunday. But each week, there is something for us to participate in to ensure that we are, as Jesus says, “putting these things into practice.”

And here’s all we’re attempting to do. **If I know our crowd**, I know that so many of us really do *want* to live on mission. We *want* to demonstrate Jesus to people in our life who don’t know him yet. We *want* to *talk* to them about Jesus. But at the same time, we may

not exactly know where to start. ~~Like, we're going, do I just wait for them to ask the perfect question at the perfect time and then launch into a monologue about how they can be saved? Do I just look for casual ways to drop Jesus into each conversation I have with him?~~—We're in this place where we may *want* to do this, but it just feels like such a monumental task. So **this practice guide is designed to take that big concept, and break it down into some very tangible, very achievable steps.**

So on that note, it's **possible that the practices** in the guide **might feel like a lot** to you. It may feel a bit “technical.” You might get this booklet next week and look through the practices and go “I don't know—this feels *complicated* to me. This feels too *systematic*. Too *process-like*.” And that's fine. This isn't *required*—you don't have to do it if it doesn't feel right to you. Total freedom there.

But I will **say this: if you decide *not* to** do the practice guide, I would just make sure it's because you already *are* regularly living on mission. If you *don't* already have a habit of living on mission, maybe give the booklet a shot. Even if it doesn't *feel* exactly like you want it to *feel*, it could be incredibly helpful. Don't knock it 'til you try it. Make sense?

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So let me just **land here** for today. I want to read to you this passage, that many of us have probably heard before from **1 Peter 2**. Speaking to followers of Jesus, it says this, in v. 9:

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession—*

So these are all **terms, rich in Old Testament history** describing the new identities God has given to people who follow Jesus. A *chosen* people, a *royal* priesthood, a *holy* nation. All these unbelievable things Jesus has accomplished in and through his life, death and resurrection. These are now who his people *are* as a result. But it doesn't just stop with a new *identity*. That new *identity* carries with it a new *purpose*. They've been given this new identity, *that* (back in v. 9):

***That (this is the purpose) you may declare** (that you may declare!) **the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.***

Friends. Brothers. Sisters. *This is why* we have been rescued into God's family. **This is why** we've been brought from darkness into light. So that we might *declare* his praises. His glory. His worth. His beauty. His goodness. His grace. We've been given a new *identity*—yes, with a new *purpose*. *Declaring. Demonstrating and articulating* who Jesus

is and what he's capable of. Living a life on *mission*. That is precisely what we've been put on this earth to do. So let's get after it.

Let's pray.