

Becoming Like Jesus
EMBRACING ONGOING TRANSFORMATION

Luke 19:1-10

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Change in our lives doesn't just happen. It requires intentionality, planning, and tangible steps to stop doing something the way we have been and begin to change our typical patterns and thinking processes.

Take our finances as an example. Statistics support the fact that 2/3 to 3/4 of Americans manage their finances on their own without any outside help from a professional and the majority of us don't budget or plan our finances, we simply spend what we make and readily go in debt if we need more money than what we make. That was basically the approach my wife and I took to our finances until about 10-12 years ago when we started realizing the way we were managing (or failing to manage) our finances wasn't going to work if we wanted to help our kids get through college without substantial debt and if we hoped to retire in a way that didn't leave us financially strapped. To change our financial trajectory, we met with a financial planner, began saving intentionally for college, established a reserve fund and began paying more attention to our spending.

Or think about marriage relationships. Since God created Adam and Eve, the relationship between a husband and wife has been viewed as the foundation of health in a culture. There is no more important human relationship than the one we have with our spouse...and yet how many of us intentionally invest in strengthening our relationship with our husband or wife? In the frenzy of our jobs, raising kids and taking care of the routine, yet very consuming details of our lives, it's easy to take our most important relationship for granted. Accordingly, in our society 1 in 4 1st marriages end in divorce and 3 of 4 marriages after the 1st marriage end in divorce. If we want our marriage to change—to be strengthened and to thrive—we need to be intentional about taking tangible steps to invest in that relationship.

In this year's Lenten sermon series, titled "Becoming Like Jesus" our goal has been to provide people with tools—known as spiritual practices or disciplines—that followers of Jesus have used since the time of Jesus to grow in their relationship with our Lord. During our series we've encouraged people to experiment with the practices of SOLITUDE, SURRENDER, SABBATH

and MISSION. I hope you've taken advantage of the devotional booklets we've made available to assist you in exploring these practices.

Not unlike our finances or our marriages, many of us go through our lives following Jesus, but completely unaware or oblivious to the amazing resources and power that is at our disposal. We know Jesus and are confident that He has saved us—that we're forgiven of our sins and will spend eternity with Him, but we're not fully tapping into his transformation power that is available to us. We settle for far less healing, far less transformation, far less hope, joy, peace and life that is available to us.

In Romans chapter 12 we read, *“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”* Romans 12:2 Jesus' desire for every one of his followers is that we would continually be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Resisting being conformed to our world and instead being transformed as our minds our renewed requires intentionality. It doesn't just happen.

In 2 Peter chapter 1, the Apostle Peter—who knew a lot about being changed by Jesus—wrote, *“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”* 2 Peter 1:3 & 4 That's an amazing statement. God has provided each of us with everything we need to live a Godly life, to fully participate in his nature, rather than being corrupted by the world and its desires.

Those verses and others throughout the New Testament reinforce that change is available for all of us. Our past struggles and sin patterns, our personality quirks and tendencies that have been passed to us through our families, don't have to continue to define us. As James reminds us in chapter 4 of the letter named after him, *“But he gives us more grace.”* James 4:6 The challenge for each of us today is that we would take intentional steps toward positioning ourselves to receive more of what Jesus has for us.

Before we explore an account from the Bible that highlights transformation, I want to encourage us to prayerfully reflect on this statement author Ruth Haley Barton shares in her book, [Sacred Rhythms](#).

In what area(s) of my life right now am I most aware of my need for transformation and my powerlessness to bring it about? Acknowledge your powerlessness to God, and tell him of your desire to make yourself available to him in a consistent way so that he can do his transforming work in you. P. 163, Sacred Rhythms

I invite you to quiet your heart and pray that statement to God at this time.

If you worshipped with us in person or online back on March 13th—I know 3 weeks is a long time to ask you to think back to and remember—you may recall that in preaching on surrender I used the example of the Rich Young Man who came to Jesus asking what he needed to do to gain eternal life. After dialoguing with him a bit Jesus told him that if he wanted to gain eternal life he needed to sell everything he had, give it to the poor and then come and follow Jesus. I emphasized that Jesus' radical challenge was based on his assessment that greed had a vice-like grip on this man's heart. Today we're going to look at another wealthy man who willingly took radical steps to position himself to receive Jesus' transformation in his life. The man's name was Zacchaeus and his story is found in Luke chapter 19. I invite you to follow along as I read Luke chapter 19 verses 1-10.

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." Luke 19:1-10

Zacchaeus' story is well-known, but I'm guessing you've never heard it shared in the context of spiritual disciplines or positioning ourselves so Jesus might transform our lives. As I was thinking about preaching this message and how I might assist our church family in positioning ourselves to grow in our relationship with Jesus, Zacchaeus came to mind.

One of the things I've realized as we've been walking through our Lenten series focused on spiritual practices is that every one of the practices we looked at are extremely

countercultural. In other words, engaging in these practices requires discipline and intentionality. They aren't something we'll just kind of fall into. Solitude and silence—intentionally pulling ourselves away from the noise and activity of life certainly isn't a cultural value. Surrendering ourselves to God through simplifying our lives and fasting definitely isn't something the commercials we see all the time are advocating. Taking a day of Sabbath by stopping and removing ourselves from our work and regular activity isn't normal. And mission that focuses on serving others and meeting their needs above our own is given lip service, but examples of this seem to be few and far between.

Before I share some insights about Zacchaeus and Jesus' interaction and the steps Zacchaeus took to gain victory over the hold greed had in his life, I encourage you to take a moment (I'll actually time a minute) to study this picture and note what you see...



You probably observed Zacchaeus up in the tree; Jesus reaching out to him and interacting with him; and, the responses of the crowd—some look on curiously, others look away probably upset that Jesus is interacting with this disreputable character and still others appear to be completely ignoring the man in the tree.

I'd like to quickly highlight a number of observations from the story that jump out at me and which I believe relate to choices you and I might make as we position ourselves to receive Jesus' transformation.

The first obvious thing about Zacchaeus is that he was disrespected by those who knew him. We're told he climbed a tree because he was short, but if he was liked, people could have helped Zacchaeus see by allowing him to go to the front or by lifting him on their shoulders. His physical isolation—being in the tree—was a fitting picture of his social isolation. And when Jesus spoke to Zacchaeus and agreed to eat at his home, the people watching muttered, "*He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.*" Something else that's obvious from Zacchaeus' story is that Zacchaeus intentionally took great risk to get close to Jesus. Knowing the dislike people had for Zacchaeus it had to have been tempting for him to stay away from the crowd, rather than subjecting himself to ridicule, and climbing a tree isn't a very safe feat for a grown man. Zacchaeus' hunger to get close to Jesus led him to put himself at risk. My next observation is related to what I just shared. Zacchaeus blocked out everything and everyone else to focus exclusively on Jesus. We can see from the picture that Zacchaeus is locked in on Jesus. He's not paying attention to the people all around him or to the precarious position he was in. I think if I was Jesus, I'd be prepared to catch Zacchaeus if he were to fall. Perhaps that was part of the reason Jesus told Zacchaeus in verse 5 to come down, so he wouldn't fall and break an appendage or his neck. Finally, we see that unlike the Rich Young Man, Zacchaeus intentionally gave away much of his wealth to free himself from the hold greed had on his life.

Look again at verse 8:

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

I'm not sure how much half of Zacchaeus' possessions amounted to, but it was probably significant. And Zacchaeus' promise to pay anyone back four times the amount of what he'd cheated them was probably substantial as well. Tax collectors were notorious for gathering wealth by overcharging people what they owed the Roman government. That's why tax

collectors were despised—they not only collaborated with Rome by collecting taxes from the Jewish people, they padded their own pockets by overcharging people and keeping whatever they were able to get for themselves.

And what was Jesus' response to Zacchaeus? Jesus said, *"Today salvation has come to this house."* Zacchaeus was saved! He positioned himself to receive from Jesus and his life was radically transformed. There is much we can learn from Zacchaeus' approach to Jesus about positioning ourselves to experience Jesus' transformation in our own lives. Look again at Ruth Haley Barton's words, *"In what area(s) of my life right now am I most aware of my need for transformation and my powerlessness to bring it about? P. 163, Sacred Rhythms And my follow up question to that is, "What step(s) do I need to take to position myself to receive Jesus' transformation in this area of my life?"*

Last week at the end of his sermon on the practice of MISSION, Pastor Cody challenged us not to wait to begin serving Jesus, thinking that when we're more mature or older or whatever, then we'll be prepared to be on mission for God. I want to give that same challenge to us today. Listen to what Ruth Haley Barton has to say about this:

One of the great temptations of the spiritual life is to believe that if I were in another season of life, I could be more spiritual. The truth is that spiritual transformation takes place as we embrace the challenges and opportunities associated with each season of our life. Sacred Rhythms (p. 149)

My challenge for each of us is not to wait, thinking we'll get around to focusing on our spiritual growth during some future season of our lives. Jesus is calling to each of us now. As Peter reminds us, everything we need for life and godliness is at our disposal. Our job isn't to work harder at changing ourselves; our job is to position ourselves—like Zacchaeus—so we can receive more of God's grace.