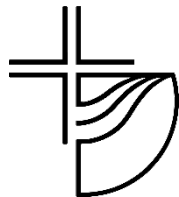


Compelling Vision

Together, as the Church of the Brethren,
we will passionately live and share the radical transformation
and holistic peace of Jesus Christ through relationship-based neighborhood
engagement. To move us forward, we will develop a culture of calling and
equipping disciples who are innovative, adaptable, and fearless.

Bible Study Series

Session 5
Thomas Dowdy



Radical Transformation

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Focus Question

What does it mean to be radically transformed through Jesus Christ?

Scripture Texts

John 3:5-7; Galatians 2:15-21; Romans 12:1-2

Focus Statement

The Christmas season is my favorite time of the year. It reminds me of the most significant radical transformation of all time when God became flesh for our benefit. This transformation, also known as incarnation, is beyond human comprehension; we accept it by faith or reject it. The next most significant radical transformation is God living inside us, daily converting us for the new kingdom.

Supplies

- Internet-connected device
- Copies of the handout on page 25
- Pens, pencils, markers or crayons

Tip: According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, radical is "having a profound or far-reaching effect." Transformation means "a complete or major change in someone or something's appearance, form, etc."

Media Suggestions

- **Videos:** [“The Poinsettia: Jesus' Life Story in a Plant”](#) by United Methodist Videos; [“Caterpillar Transforming into a Butterfly”](#) by In the Know; [“Growing Sunflower Time Lapse”](#) by Boxlapse
- **Poem:** “Though I Am Born Again” by Deborah Ann Belka
- **Song:** [“In the Bulb There Is a Flower”](#) by Natalie Sleeth, sung by Ashley Wagner Arts (YouTube)

Reflecting on the Texts

John 3:5-7 – New Birth - Transformed from Above

Nicodemus was a Jewish leader who came to Jesus at night, asking a profound and pressing question about entering the Kingdom of God. He was earnest about knowing what he needed to do. Maybe he thought coming to Jesus away from the other leaders would give him an edge on how to get into the Kingdom of God. Jesus replies to Nicodemus that the only way to enter the kingdom is through the radical transformation of being born again. To be reborn was confusing to Nicodemus as he asked Jesus how this physically could be done.

Jesus wanted Nicodemus to know that radical transformation of rebirth only comes from God. There is no shortcut to enter into the Kingdom of God. The process is very different than our normal way of thinking. We can't enter the kingdom by our human effort or ingenuity. It is a spiritual transformation that comes from God alone. Our responsibility is to faithfully align ourselves with God's process to be spiritually reborn.

Galatians 2:15-21 – Accepting the New Birth

Paul's radical transformation occurred on the Damascus road in Acts 9. After his encounter with Jesus, Paul understood that he had lived for the law, which was different from what God intended. Paul spoke of himself as chief of all sinners because he lived and did what he thought was right. Paul was determined to live by the law as a faithful and dedicated Jew. He believed that the law was the only way Jews could become the kingdom people of God. But God had a better way for Paul to spend the rest of his life. When Jesus confronted him on the Damascus road, Paul's mind became regenerated, and he became a radically transformed, faithful follower of Jesus Christ, caring for all people.

Paul's radical transformation provided him with three important insights. After God opened Paul's spiritual eyes, he could see his mistakes and cautioned others to avoid doing the same. Second, Paul recognized although he made great mistakes against Jesus, Jesus' love was unconditional. Third, Paul's transformation caused him to rededicate his life, reaching out to Gentiles and Jews for the Kingdom of God.

Romans 12:1-2 – Submitting All for Jesus

In his appeal to the Romans, Paul urged them to be a living sacrifice for Jesus, submitting their whole being—body, mind, soul, and spirit. The outcome would be pleasing to God. God is merciful to all humankind. Although we are all sinners saved by God's grace, our spiritual and physical response is to submit to God. God's act of mercy and grace comes out of God's LOVE for all humankind.

To be non-conforming to the world system requires an act of God in us. God knows that we are challenged every day with temptations to conform to the world around us, so God equips us with the Holy Spirit to guide our daily decisions. Although we can choose to submit to this guidance, God provides us with this guidance to aid us in our kingdom seeking. The reality is that when we submit all of ourselves to God in sacrificing time, talent, and desires, we begin our radical transformation into a love experience that transforms our action into true worship.

Gathering

Choose one of these activities to introduce the theme of the session.

- *Option 1*—Invite participants to share examples of where they see radical transformation in nature. Does this transformation take place slowly or is it more immediate? Does it happen in darkness, in the light, or both?
- *Option 2*—Watch one of the two time-lapse videos listed in Media Suggestions. What is the nature of the radical transformation taking place in the video? What do these transformative processes in nature tell us about how God might work in us?

Discovering God's Story and Vision

Invite participants to listen to the texts in an attitude of prayer while you guide them in this meditative reading. Participants may close their eyes or have their Bibles open and ready to follow along.

Loving God, open our ears to hear these scriptures anew. We pause in silence to allow your Word to transform us.

As we read John 3:5-7, open our hearts to being born anew by the power of your Spirit.

[Read John 3:5-7, then pause for a moment of silence]

As we read Galatians 2:15-21, open our lives so that Christ may live in us.

[Read Galatians 2:15-21, then pause for a moment of silence]

As we read Romans 12:1-2, open our minds that we may be transformed.

[Read Romans 12:1-2, then pause for a moment of silence]

Lord, transform our minds, our hearts, and our lives that we may be a living sacrifice for you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Exploring God's Story and Vision

Dig deeper into today's texts using these questions.

- How do you see yourself in these three texts—as the main character, the receiver of the instruction, or the audience? With whom do you most identify?
- Nicodemus was a devout Jew, committed to the law. How was his thinking transformed as he listened to Jesus answer his questions? What was so radical and new about Jesus' teaching?
- In the Galatians text, Paul calls out Peter for forcing Gentiles to follow Jewish laws and customs. What arguments did Paul use to counter Peter's opposition?
- Paul gives encouragement to the members of the church at Rome because he knows the pressure they face on a daily basis to conform to the world rather than the will of God. He urges them to be “transformed by the renewing of your mind.” How do you think that happens? What resources or guidance does God provide to aid in this transformation? How does this transformation help them resist the pressure to conform to the world?

The Poinsettia: A Symbol of Radical Transformation

Most people love to have a poinsettia plant during the Christmas season. For most of the year, the leaves are green like common plants and go unnoticed. However, around early October, the leaves start to change from dark green to red. When the process is complete, it becomes a unique, attractive red plant that accentuates the holiday season. Christians can liken the poinsettia's transformation to our Christian process. We start like everyone else, but when the conditions are right and set by God, we are radically transformed, which dictates our actions for the world to notice.

Like the poinsettia plant displayed at Christmas time, the church is on display to the rest of the world. When acting out its intended purpose, the church radiates God's beauty through its act of LOVE developed within. This display occurs after the church experiences the radical transformation that brings about development and growth. The key is for the church to persevere daily. As we go through our personal transformation, we eventually become one of the bright leaves on the branches of the loving community tree of God.

