**Spiritual Formation**

**Changing for Good – Understanding How Lasting Change Happens**

**Lecture 8**

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**Introduction**

Our topic for today is Changing for Good, understanding how lasting change happens. Lasting change is an important part of this lecture because we are not looking for small changes or short-term changes. Spiritual formation is looking for long-term change. We are moving towards glorification, where God changes us for the long-term, specifically when we get to eternity.

**Two Critical Components –** of Spiritual Formation

1. **Understanding the Process of Change** – What does the process of change look like in spiritual transformation? What is that change component?
2. **Role of Environment** – How does the environment we choose to create or place ourselves in help to facilitate that process of transformation within us?

Pray and invite the Holy Spirit to be your teacher, encourager, and counselor today.

**Overview**

What is at the core of spiritual formation? Change. We are all being changed into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Today we will explore what that process of change looks like for each of us. We will discuss what it means to intentionally create and cultivate Godly, lasting change. **That lasting change will impact us in two ways: character and faith**. God is working to transform both those areas in us.

**Three Levels –** that are crucial for us in the process of spiritual formation

1. **Conduct Level** – *behavior* – How other people see us as we are being spiritually transformed
2. **Character Level** – *reputation* – How others know us
3. **Core Level** – *motives* – Our motives are being changed and challenged through this process

What is the change process that impacts us on all three levels? If we believe that God oversees all lasting change and in engaged in this process, then at the same time he also invites you and me to be a part of that change process too. What does that change process look like from God’s perspective and from our perspective?

**Assignment –** Type the following link into your web browser and answer this question: [**http://www.iamsecond.com/struggles/substance-abuse/**](http://www.iamsecond.com/struggles/substance-abuse/)

**What does that progression look like as Brian encounters Jesus?**

This is an 8-minute video about a man named Brian Welsh. Brian is an interesting person. He was the lead guitarist for the band Koran. This is an amazing story of his transformation. As you watch this video, you will see a progression in Brian as he talks about how God transformed his life. Observe and make notes as you watch the video now.

**Theology of Change -** What does the change process look like?

Every person desires change, but there are assumptions that guide us in our thought process. All of us develop a “Theology of Change”. These are beliefs and assumptions about how God and we are involved in the process of spiritual formation, and how change occurs. Every counselor, teacher, student, pastor, parent, coach, and mentor has a “Theology of Change”. Many times these assumptions are not cognitive, meaning we are not aware of them. We subtly operate by them and assume that they will happen. This “Theology of Change” is important because it answers some key questions for us.

 1. **Why do people change?**

2. **How do people change?**

3. **Why do people fail to change? –** Not all change is successful.

4. **Why do some people change for the worse? –** Not all change is good.

We want to create an environment that fosters change, through the use of the spiritual disciplines that we have talked about, along with the development of accountable relationships. Let’s consider what God has to say about this change process.

**Read 2 Corinthians 3: 15-18**

These verses are the cornerstone of our understanding of spiritual formation and what God does in this process. The context of this passage is about Moses in Exodus and how he would spend time alone with God. When he would come back to the Israelites he would be so radiant from his encounter with God that the Israelites asked him to put a veil over his face. This process of change is modeled in Moses. In this passage in 2 Corinthians 3 we see a new ministry that the Holy Spirit is doing. Paul is alluding to the work of the Holy Spirit in us. **Where do we get the power to change?** Perhaps you have experienced a deep desire for change, but you are aware that you have fallen short. You have fallen short of the change that you have desired, the character transformation that you have expected in your life. You never seem to be able to pull it off by yourself. If you find yourself giving into impulses, those are issues of self-control. How does God help us with issues of self-control? Maybe you struggle with issues of gossiping; when you get with certain people you talk about others in a demeaning or derogatory way. Maybe you are addicted to pornography, a secret that sin that has you in its grip. In 2 Corinthians 3:16 we see the phrase “whenever anyone turns to the Lord”. Verse 17 says, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom”. Verse 18 says that we are being transformed with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. So this **transformation is God’s work**. He transforms us.

**Misconceptions –** Other people may disagree with that.

1. **Power of transformation does not come from within** – I have had this conversation with some New Age friends; the concept of God changing us is foreign to them. They say, “My spirit transforms me and gives me the power to change. By my inner power I can change.” This is not the transformation that we are looking at today. We do not have the ability to change on our own.
2. **Power of transformation does not come from a psychiatrist/counselor** – It is not a therapeutic experience. As we see in 2 Corinthians 3, this change comes from the power of God. But we are required to do something too.
3. **God does it all** – You may have heard someone say, “It’s my job to preach God’s word and He does the rest”. God does change us, but all the responsibility is not His.

**What is our responsibility in the process of spiritual formation?**

1. **We must discern God’s desires for us and respond to Him** – God has power to convey to us what he desires for us to become.

2. **Cultivating the soil of our hearts to be receptive** – Our hearts must be receptive to all God has for us to hear.

a. Example: Read Luke 8:5-15 - Parable of the Soils. Jesus is talking about the condition of the soils and their receptivity to the word that comes to them.

b. Ken Gire says, “If the parable of the soils teaches us anything, it teaches us this: that no matter how worthy the one who sows, or wonderful the seed, it is the condition of the soil that determines the crop. As the parable illustrates, the seed may fall on a heart that is packed hard from feet too hurried to stop and reflect on all the seed has to offer. The seed may fall into a heart that is shallow in its understanding so the roots can’t penetrate deeply enough for the plant to survive the inevitable scorch of difficult days ahead. The seed may fall into a heart that is overgrown with distractions which seem harmless in the beginning, but in the end chokes out the growth. But if the seed falls into a heart that is prepared, it will yield a harvest 30, 60, and in some cases 100 fold.”

c. In this parable, God is asking “What is the condition of the soil (your heart) and how will it receive the word that I bring to you?”

d. **What kind of soil am I? –** Am I receptive to hearing God’s word and to the ministry of His Spirit?

 e. **What kind of soil am I becoming? –** This is with regards to spiritual transformation.

**What is God’s responsibility in the process of spiritual formation?**

A. **God has power to convey to us what he desires for us to become.**

B. **God has the power to transform us.**

1. Dunameis – the word from Scripture that is most often used for power. The English word “dynamite”, which is a powerful form of explosives, comes from this ancient word.

a. **This is the power of God to transform us.**

b. **This power is not an explosive power**.

1. Paul on the road to Damascus did have a sudden encounter with God. God comes to him in a bright light and his life is transformed. There are occasions when God can transform us suddenly, but most change is not a sudden change, but a slow and relentless action.

2. WD40 – Not long ago I was working on my lawn mower. I tried to use a wrench to loosen a bolt on the lawn mower, but the bolt was stuck. WD40 is a solution that loosens and lubricates machinery. I took my can of WD40 and put some on the bolt. I waited a few minutes and tried the wrench again. It was difficult but I could feel the bolt starting to move. As I turned, it got easier and easier until it finally came off. As God’s Spirit permeates our lives, He is loosening us. He is breaking up the hardened places in our hearts, those habits we have developed, so that He can transform us.

3. A road near my house recently underwent a transformation. It was a two-lane road, but it became a four-lane road. That process did not happen overnight. It took over three years. God is working on our hearts in a similar way. The process of transformation comes a little at a time. We may not notice it, but over time other notice it. God is the one working, but we may not see the work He is doing at times. Take heart; He is at work in us.

c. **How do we appropriate God’s power?**

 \* Pray – Ask God to transform our lives. God, in his graciousness, doesn’t reveal all the areas in our lives that need change at once. They come at different times. *“God, I want to be a clean vessel for you. There is a desire in my heart to be a different man than I am. I want to be more like you. Please cleanse the areas of my conduct, character, and my core motives. Create in me a new heart. Give me your perspective on these areas of my life. Give me the power to change them. I need your help in doing that.”*

1. God may reveal to you that you are a greedy man, addicted to money. You may have a hard time giving it away because it represents life, power, and success. God can create in you a generous spirit. Instead of holding onto money tightly, we freely give it away so that others benefit from it.
2. God may reveal areas of selfishness within you. Everything in your life revolves around you. You may orchestrate your relationships based on how you benefit from other people. As God changes you, you start to learn how to serve others. You give out of what God has given you.
3. Perhaps you have an area of distrust and un-forgiveness towards others. You may be known as a person who holds grudges. God wants to transform that and become a trusting man. He wants you to give up your right to be right. He wants to be in control of your life. He will take care of those injustices, hurts, and harms. God wants you to model His love to others.

d. **How do you know when God is at work within you?**

1. **Peace** – When you change in these areas of sin, God will give you peace so that He gets all the glory.

a. Read Philippians 4:7 – The peace of God is a sign that God is present in our lives working.

2. **Gratitude** – When God changes your life, you rise up to thank him. Through gratitude, you will experience God’s presence.

**What does the process of change look like?**

A. **Six Markers (Indicators) of Change** – series of progressions that demonstrate God’s work in our lives.

Example: People who work in HOSPICE can determine within hours how long a person has until they die because they are surrounded by very ill people every day. They have learned to look at the markers, or indicators, of death, which to us may be indistinguishable.

1. **Denial of Sin** – **This is where we unknowingly live in the grip of sin.** We need to recognize that we are living in sin. Jesus comes to us and makes us aware of our sin in this process of transformation. Then we repent of our sins and are justified. Sanctification is the process of ongoing transformation. We are transformed in Christ, and we are constantly being transformed. Denial is the first stage of transformation. God’s role in this process is to make us aware of these areas of denial in order that he would transform them into the image of Christ.

 a. *My Heart, Christ’s Home* by Robert Munger is a simple analogy about a man who comes to faith in Christ. He says, “Jesus, I want my life to be your life. Would you take over each room of my house?” His house is a representation of his life. So he starts in the library, which represents his mind. First, our minds are transformed into the likeness of Christ. He and Jesus journey through his house together. Jesus says to the owner of the house, “I’ve noticed a smell coming from somewhere in this house.” But the man denies smelling it. Day after day the smell grows stronger until Jesus says, “This smell is getting stronger and I think it is coming from this closet. Can we go into this closet?” The man shrinks in horror because he knows what is in that closet. The man keeps pushing Jesus away, but Jesus says, “Let me help you. Let’s both work on that closet.” The man gives in. They go into the closet and they find some old, nasty habits. Together they clean out that closet. Often times we have that closet in our lives. We want to keep the door closed and keep everyone out of it. It is a secret place of sinful habits in our lives that we want to keep hidden. We don’t want anyone else to see it. At some point, denial of that sin will no longer work. These areas need transformation.

 b. Murphy’s Law of Home Repair – One area of home repair inevitably leads to another area that needs repair. If you start repairing your shingles, you may find that your roof is leaking, which will lead you to repair your shingles and your roof. In the process of transformation, God works in these areas of denial. As we move forward from denial and deal with those areas, God reveals another area in our lives that is in need of transformation. In His graciousness, He does not make us aware of all of these areas in need of transformation at once or we would feel overwhelmed.

 c. Read Luke 18:18-30 - *The Rich Young Ruler* - In this passage we see what happens when God tries to make a man aware of his sin and this rich, young ruler is living in denial. Jesus made him aware of an area in his life that was in need of transformation: a generous heart. He was a man who accumulated much and had grown his empire. When Jesus pointed out this area of sin to him, he went away sad because he was very rich. The rich, young ruler stopped at this stage of transformation: denial of sin and did not progress.

2. **Awareness – Once God makes us aware of these areas in our lives that are in need of transformation, we embrace that awareness and move forward.** There is the possibility that as we become aware of areas of sin in our lives, we will not embrace this awareness, but move back into denial. This is regression, not transformation. Often times there are people who help us to be more aware of these areas in our lives that are in need of transformation. If you are married, you spouse will help you in this way. **Marriage is made not for happiness, but for holiness.** God moves us to places of holiness because of our spouse.

a. Phyllis has been my wife for over 25 years. She has revealed to me places in my life that need change. I have realized that I can be a very defensive person. At times I feel that my confidence is being challenged and I don’t want to address those issues so I avoid them. My wife helps me to see those areas that need to be addressed. Usually my motives and my beliefs need to be transformed. If I believe that life is about never being wrong or never being confronted, then God is going to challenge those beliefs. Jesus will address anything that becomes an idol in my life.

B. **How do we increase our awareness of sin?**

- **Our Responsibility** - is to place ourselves in an environment where we will be receptive to the transformation that God wants to do in our lives. Remember the parable of the soils? The environment we create is like the soil in this parable. The key to transformation is creating an effective environment where your soil is receptive to the changes God wants to make in your life.

- **Moving from denial to awareness often comes through an environment that exposes us to our need for change.**- McDonald says about discipleship, "I am convinced that spiritual growth happens best in an environment of intimacy." Intimacy is not going to happen in the congregation when people are look at the back of one another's heads. The Bible shines best when its truth is being pressed up against the walls of real life scenarios and situations. You can't get that very often in the sanctuary. In the sanctuary you can remain anonymous. You can come and go, but there is something that is more important for us in the context of truthful, honest, embraced community. And when we encounter that, it is an encouraging place that we can find. Environment is crucial to this process of change.

C. **Two Types of Environments – where awareness takes place**

1. **Truth** – Truth comes in three different ways. If you want to change, choose an environment that will transform you. **Find an environment, and the environment will grow you.**

a. **God's Word** - Truth comes by exposure to God's word, by teaching and reading it. Truth comes by prayer as the Spirit ministers to us on a regular basis. To understand the truth about us and the truth about God, we have to embrace the truth that is presented to us through His word. That means we have to spend time with God. We have discussed the role of spiritual disciplines, which create an environment that makes us receptive to the things of God. Remember the spiritual disciplines of reading God's word, of meditation, listening to his word, dialoguing with him in prayer, fasting, and journaling. All of these things help us encounter the truth of God that changes our lives. Remove the things from your life, which hinder or prevent you from hearing truth. If you want to hear God's truth, this is the process whereby God reveals his truth to you. Embrace truth. Encountering truth is at the core of all transformation.

b. **God's Spirit** - God will speak truth to us through the witness and testimony of his indwelling Spirit. His Spirit will tell us through our conscience that we have transgressed against God. He prompts us, teaches us; He is referred to as the counselor. If we lack wisdom, all we have to do is ask of him. When we invite the Spirit of God to speak truth into our lives, we are moving towards transformation. We are moving towards awareness. The Holy Spirit helps us relate differently to our boss, our spouse, and our coworkers. He helps our attitudes to become Godly as we relate to those around us.

c. **God's People** - This is when we move towards relationships that speak Godly truth into our lives. These are people that give us safe, authentic, desired change. They give us encouraging relationships. Encouragement is not entirely affirmation, but also involves disruption. When we're not behaving as we ought to, when we're not believing as we ought to, and when we're not relating as we ought to, these relationships will challenge us.

2. **Community** – Community is a key aspect of moving from denial to awareness, and even beyond awareness.

- **Do you have a transforming community around you?** - Larry Crabb says, "Moving through our problems towards finding God requires a fresh understanding of community and courageous willingness to enter it. We must learn how to talk with one another so that the object of our conversation is to disturb each other with how manipulative, defensive, and self-serving we are. Our conversation must also entice us to influence others for good, to enjoy our uniqueness, and to rest fully in the goodness of God no matter what happens. When community is working, tensions may seem irresolvable and pressures overwhelming, but the opportunity to find God will remain if we stay involved. We must not yield to the urge to retreat into silence of safe, superficial chatter. We must keep talking and our words must matter. They must reveal what is most shamefully true about us. Good community includes meaningful moments where the quality of our relationships with God and others is discussed. Each of us has friends who know as well as care about us, friends who live honestly enough to wrestle with unanswered questions. With those friends we need to risk a level of self-disclosure that makes us uncomfortable." Do you have such a transforming community? Are you a part of such a transforming community? Have you invited people into your life that are allowed to speak into it and you can do that for them as well? It should be a mutual community of engagement, a transforming community. That is the environment we all want to pursue if we are longing for change in our lives.

      a. **Recommended Relationships** – The following are good, Godly, recommended relationships that should be part of your community.

1. **Small Group** – This is the minimum recommended relationship. A small group environment is essential to transformation. It should consist of 3–12 people that are a regular part of your life. You should meet with them on a regular basis, maybe every week. Talk through and walk through life with one another. This is the type of transforming community that Larry was talking about. It is not just a social group, but you should be engaged at a heart level, honestly sharing what is happening in your world and the struggles you are challenged with each day. Let God speak through these people regarding your struggles. This gives you a Godly perspective on life. Through this you become a Godly man or woman. This is a wonderful type of relationship that is essential to spiritual formation if you are intentional about it.

2. **Mentor** – This is essential for the man or woman who wants to grow even more in spiritual formation. You mentor should be someone who is older, wiser, and more experienced in life than you are. This person is able to speak into your life and point out areas that are in need of change. This person can speak more effectively about these areas because he or she has had more life experience. I have found in my life that a mentor is usually 20-25 years older than I am. This is a person whom God brings into my life, who is able to speak wisely and give advice about crucial areas in my life that are in need of growth. These may be areas of leadership, character, or relating to others in more effective ways. If you are aware of an area of change that you want to pursue in your life, look for someone who can give you direction and guidance. This person may refer you to resources that relate to your life issues. Ask questions about the areas of life with which you are struggling. Use the circumstances of life as topics of conversation. God uses real life situations to speak to us and transform us. **You should enjoy spending time with you mentor because he or she refreshes your soul. This should be a person to which you are drawn.** **Mentors empower you, give you grace, give you perspective, and help you to define reality.**

a. **Consistent Mentor** – This is a mentor who meets with you on a regular basis. Use the circumstances of life as topics of conversation.

i. Years ago I needed someone to speak wisely and give me advice about how to relate to my wife. I also wanted to develop my leadership skills. My father became a mentor to me as I worked with him for 10 years. We would talk about what challenges I was facing in life, and how to develop me as a leader. The other mentor God brought into my life was Gene Williams. I met Gene when I was able 35 years old and Gene was in his late 60s then. He was an amazing man, who had been a fighter pilot in World War II where he was shot down and became a prisoner of war for two years. Later he became a professor of communications at Michigan State University. After that he went to Trinity Divinity School where he became the Dean of Communications. Later he became the leader of a mission organization that was involved in 70 countries worldwide. He came to my church at the time because God told him to go there. Gene would say, “I’ve never had to ask for a job. God has always provided a job for me.” It was refreshing for me to talk with him about life, leadership, and disappointments. He helped me to make crucial, important decisions with Godly wisdom. All of us need a mentor that can help us make decisions wisely.

b. . **Occasional Mentor** – These are people who you may not see on a regular basis, but they are willing to listen and give you advice when you need to talk with them. You may not even live near this person, but you can call or email them when you need to. You will probably connect with this person 2-3 times per year. You can discuss specific challenges you are facing during that time and God will use them to listen to you, speak wisely, and give you advice about that issue. Use the circumstances of life as topics of conversation.

c. **Peer Mentor** – This person should be in a similar stage of life as you. Perhaps they work closely to you in ministry, or work with you vocationally, or are just in a similar stage in life as you. These are people who are experiencing the same things you are at the same time you are. These are also people who share a similar interest for growth and learning as you, such as leadership development, or ministering to homeless people. Peer mentors are like-minded with you, but you challenge each other. These are people you enjoy being with because they refresh your soul. Peer mentors help to surface deep issues because you will likely be struggling in similar ways. You will find mutual encouragement through these people. Use the circumstances of life as topics of conversation.

d. **Mentee** – This is someone who you are mentoring. This is someone who is younger than you or behind you in ministry development. You will share what you have learned, and encourage this person. Giving to your mentee becomes an encouragement to you as well. You will notice this person’s potential and ability. Perhaps you recognize something in this person that he or she does not see. Mentor this person so that he or she will become more of what God wants them to be. Invite your mentee out for lunch and ask questions about their life, about his or her relationships, and what he or she is struggling with. You are there to give perspective. Let the mentee ask questions; become a resource for your mentee. Or refer your mentee to another person who can better help, such as a counselor. Refer your mentee to a book that will help. You could even talk through the book together. Use the circumstances of life as topics of conversation. Ask your mentee, “What is one thing that has become clear to you since our last meeting? What is something that God has revealed to you lately?” Let that lead the conversation, so you see how God is moving, or how your mentee is growing, what he or she is struggling with, or where God is providing clarity.

1. Faithful – Mentees are trustworthy. You can count on them to be consistent.
2. Available – Mentees have time to meet with you and learn from you.
3. Teachable – Mentees are longing to learn.

D. Personal Example:

1. **Background** - A few years ago, I reached the age of 40. At 40 I found a pervading question in my soul. The question was, **“Will what I have learned in the past be sufficient for me to continue in my roles for the future?”** The answer to this question for me was, “no.” Then I asked myself, **“What do I want to become? And how can I become that? What will help me become that?”** God, in his providence, provided what I needed. I heard about a ministry that invested in developing leaders over a 2-year period, leaders who were the age of 40 and younger. **There was a desire in me to be more Godly, wise, effective as a leader.** This ministry was known as Aero Leadership Ministry. This started a 2-year process that was scary to me at first because I didn’t know how I would be able to do this. However, this ministry helped me to become a different man. It was a journey with 30 other men and women who all had a similar desire. We all wanted to become more; we knew we needed to, but we didn’t know how. **We submitted ourselves to this environment that grew us.** There were a few steps to this process. I share this, not to say, “this is what you should emulate”, but as an example to show you what worked for me.

1. **Customized Learning Plan** – We listed the places, topics, and themes that we wanted to focus on over those 2 years. These were all goals I set for myself. I wanted to focus on the following:
	1. Spiritual Disciplines - Often times in ministry, we find that the spiritual disciplines, such as prayer and Scripture reading, are overshadowed by other tasks. When this happens, you are no longer feeding your soul; you are just producing for other people. I found myself in a place like that; my soul was dry.
	2. Rest & Work - Often times in ministry, you find yourself believing that your value as a person comes from what you can produce. I found myself weary. I needed to understand what it means to engage in work and what it means to find rest.
	3. Relating with my Wife - I wanted to know how to grow my relationship with my wife.
2. **Personality/Ministry Profile** – This scared me at first because I didn’t want everyone to see me so that I lost my anonymity. I felt vulnerable, but it was part of submitting myself to a process in order to better understand myself. This was very enlightening. Part of this process was taking a “Myers Briggs Assessment” of my personality. I found out that my personality is an “INTJ”, which means “Introvert, Thinking, and Judging”. I found out, as I went through this process, why I felt differently about certain people: it was because they were feeling people, very subjective, and I am an analytical person. When they got emotional, my personality reacted to their personality. It helped me to fully appreciate other as I engaged in those relationships. I noticed differences in other people and propensities in myself.
3. **Leadership Style** – I often thought of leadership as being what you do in front of other people. I thought if you weren’t up front, you weren’t leading. An assessment process revealed to me that I was an outstanding leader, but not because I was up front or voicing all my opinions, but because of who I am. It was because of my character and my influence that people looked to me to lead because they knew me to be a person of discernment and Godly wisdom. My leadership style was through my influence and my personality, not being in front of people. This was key to my understanding of ministry and my personality as well.
4. **Mentors/Instructors** – These were experts in certain areas. When I talk about truth being an important part of environment, these men and women were engaging my heart and my mind in areas I had never considered before.
	1. Eddy Gibbs– He was a professor of evangelism at a significant seminary. He would speak on evangelism, and how to be more engaged in a thoughtful process of evangelism.
	2. George Barna– He talked about developing and defining your core mission and ministry, you life vision. I came to the understanding that God has a mission for me. He is enabling me to enable other to think deeply, to choose wisely, to live Godly, and intentionally multiply others who will do the same. God brought clarity as I learned from George Barna about my life’s mission.
	3. Bob Biel– He helped us with life planning and understanding the big picture of what our lives are to be about.
5. **Seasoned Ministry Partners** – These were often people about 60 years of age, who had significant ministries. They took a week off from work to have conversations with us around a table. We were able to talk about areas of life and they would ask us questions. They were part of the process of transformation, and they were encouraging as well.
6. **Personal Mentor** – Each of us had to invite a person into our environment. I invited a pastor, a Godly man I respected, at a church to which I belonged. We would meet once a month and discuss a list of topics. He had my personality profile. He was able to speak wisely about my life in an effective way.
7. **Peer Groups** – The large group of 30 would break into groups of 5 or 6. We would meet once per quarter and talk about what we were learning and our learning goals.
8. **Mentee** – Each of us had someone to whom we were investing throughout this process. I had to give an account of how that relationship was progressing, and how I was investing in that person.
9. **Doctorate Program** – This was an option during this leadership development training. It was one of my life goals to pursue a doctorate. This added another level of academic challenges. Finishing my doctorate took another 5 years after those 2 years of training.

2. **What I learned - If you are looking to change, find an environment that challenges you beyond where you are.** **In the process of submitting to that environment, you find yourself rising to another level of learning and growth that you have not experienced before.**

1. One of the results for me during this process was having a clearer understanding of my life’s mission and vision.
2. My soul grew deeper; I asked questions that had consequences, questions I had never asked before. I was able to see more clearly the consequences of those questions.
3. I also found an increased capacity. **All of us have a capacity level, how much we can do. This determines how much struggles we can handle.** I found God increasing my capacity through this 2-year training. I became more resilient to the struggles of life and the issues I faced.
4. I also found an increased level of contribution to other people. As I learned, I was able to invest more and give more to others. I had to first learn those things before I could give them away.

3. **What does this environment look like for you, one that challenges you beyond where you are?**

A. Examples:

1. If you want to become a more patient person, what environment will help you with that? If you struggle with impatience, what relationships will help you with that? Perhaps, you find someone around you who has peace. He or she seems to be a peaceful, steady person. Can you invite that person into your life to speak wisely and give you advice? Tell that person you admire him or her and ask that person questions that are on your heart. Ask that person to respond to the issues in your life.
2. If anger rises up inside of you, go to someone around you who you never see getting mad. Talk with that person about the situations where anger rises up, such as with a spouse, or at work. Ask that person how he or she deals with those situations in life, such as anger. Invite that person into your life to speak into your life about the issues you are encountering.
3. Perhaps, if you want to be a more generous person because you have found yourself holding tightly to the resources God has given you and you don’t share those freely. You have decided you want an environment that will help you to become a more gracious and generous person. How do you do that? Maybe you look for environments that will help you to become a more compassionate person, a more gracious, giving person. Maybe your church group is going on a trip to Mexico, for example, investing in an orphanage there. You would get out of your comfort zone by going. You would see how people who have nothing are so easily satisfied with life. Life is not about stuff, but about the simplicity of relationships. Life is about the graciousness of God working their lives. They don’t need stuff in life; they enjoy each other’s company. If you expose yourself to people who have nothing and see how content they are, your perspective will start to change. You release some of your resources to others because you no longer find life in those material things. You could go on a mission trip, or you could go down the street to a homeless shelter. You find that all those people have is what is right beside them. You will find that there is a tenderness of spirit even though they wrestle with the realities of where they are. What does it look like to become a more generous person? Choose an environment where people have very little and as you move towards that, you will find you need very little to be content. You will be able to give away those things that have been so important to you in the past.

B. Choose your environment wisely, and it will grow you.

C. A good environment will constantly challenge you, and it will constantly increase your awareness, which leads to our spiritual transformation.

**…Back to the Six Markers (Indicators) of Change -** When we embrace the process of change, when we move towards God and encounter God in the changes that need to be made in our lives, how do we respond to those changes? To move forward in this process, moves us into repentance and confession.

3. **Repentance & Confession** – This is simply agreeing with God about our sin. We are saying to God, “Lord, you see my sin. You know it; you have been so gracious to reveal it to me. And you are asking me to agree with you that this is an area of transformation. Another marker of transformation that is essential in our walks with God: Are we people who are repenting? Are we a people who confess? Are we willing to reveal secrets, to make them public before God and others in a safe place, which releases us from the bondage that those secrets have over us?

a. Read 1 John 1:9 – This is an important passage for us to embrace as we consider repentance and confession. God is faithful to forgive us for all wickedness. We find a release when we actually repent and confess before God.

b. **Sin** – **Those things, which take a precedent over Jesus in our lives.** It could be your job, a relationship, or your title. Jesus is saying, “I am enough for you.” **Is Jesus enough for you?** When you recognize these areas of sin, you need to repent of them. In this process, we give these things over to Jesus. When your identity is found in something other than Jesus, instead of Jesus alone, you can identify that as sin, as an idol. Jesus is sufficient for everything in life. In repentance, we are making Jesus the ruler of our lives.

c. These emotions tell us that something is out of place, something else in reigning in our lives other than Jesus.

i. Anxiety – When Jesus takes these areas of sin in our lives, we find that we no longer have anxiety.

ii. Fear - When Jesus takes these areas of sin in our lives, we find that we no longer have fears.

iii. Confusion - When Jesus takes these areas of sin in our lives, we find that we no longer have confusion.

iv. **Peace** – Anxiety, fear, and confusion are replaced by peace when we confess our sins to Jesus. Peace that surpasses understanding comes into our hearts when Jesus is in His rightful place.

 d. Psalm 51 – Here we see David after his adultery with Bathsheba. Nathan the prophet comes to David and shows him how his sin has affected himself, his family, and his kingdom. Nathan is an example of an important relationship. Nathan is a mentor in David’s life.

 e. Psalm 32 – In David’s repentance, he writes Psalm 32. He says, “How blessed is the man whose faults are forgiven by God.” He finds a place of release and peace because God has forgiven him. David has moved further in his walk with God.

 4. **Preparation to Change** – After we agree with God that change needs to happen in our lives, what will that change look like as we move forward? **What will be different about our conduct, our character, and the motives of our lives? Declare your plan for change before God.**

a. Read Luke 19:8 - Jesus comes into the town where Zacchaeus lives. Zacchaeus is up in a tree and he hears Jesus speaking. Jesus turns and says to him, “Zacchaeus, today I’m coming home to have dinner with you.” So Zacchaeus comes down the tree and takes Jesus home. Jesus, in an interesting way, reveals to Zacchaeus where his heart really is. Zacchaeus has been a tax collector and dealt with money all his life. He’s been a thief; he has stolen money from people. What does it look like when Zacchaeus repents? As a result of his encounter with Jesus, Zacchaeus’ life is different. Zacchaeus identifies a key area in his life that needs to change. At the core of his life has been greed. His plan to counteract his greed and become a generous man is to give away half his possessions. He has also been a thief, but his plan for restitution is to pay back everything that he has stolen four times the amount. Zacchaeus is moving from greed and theft to generosity and restitution. His character is being changed. He declares his plan for change before God.

 5. **Action & Commitment** – **This is where we step out in faith and commit to engaging this plan of change.** We talked earlier about one of the key catalysts for change being embracing faith in our lives. We have to step into things that are unsure because we need to trust God for the outcome of those things. The act of stepping out in faith and changing our conduct, character, and motives, is a process whereby we grow from glory to glory.

 a. 1 Corinthians 3 – Through this process of transformation, we are regaining glory.

 b. **How do we deal with failure?** – How do we deal with disobedience? How do we deal with our failure to follow through? Any theology of change must address the fact that we fail sometimes.

 i. Read Romans 3:23 – Even after Christ has come into our lives, sometimes we still fall short of the glory of God.

 ii. Remember the video of Brian Welsh? He failed and went back to drugs even after he came to Jesus, but God spoke to him and gave him grace and peace. Through that process, we see him embracing Jesus. He found, even in the midst of his failure, that he could ask Jesus to take all those areas of sin in his life. He asked God to take the desire away and give him hope for his future. **As we embrace Jesus, we find the hope of glory that is beyond our ability.** **We encounter this hope of glory in our failures.**

 iii. Colossians 1:26-28 – Christ lives in you, despite your failures. This gives you assurance of sharing in his glory. Christ is the hope of glory in the midst of our failures. In that process, he gives us the ability to move forward. We don’t have to fall back to our former ways of sin. We have with Christ hope, glory, forgiveness, and the ability to move forward.

 6. **Maintaining the Gains** – New patterns of relating to God are able to take root in our lives. As we move forward in this process, the former sins shrivel up and they lose the ability to capture our attention. The new patterns of behaving, relating, and thinking start to take root and grow. The spiritual disciplines help us in this process. Community also helps us in this process. We find new patterns forming in our lives. We become less angry and more patient with other people. We become more generous and we share more. As we do this, we find the blessing that comes with that: encouragement, which gives us the ability to do in again. **Christ encourages us as we conform more to his image. The power of God is working to maintain the gains of his Spirit at work within us.**

This is what Godly change looks like. Godly change is being conformed to the image of Christ. These markers of change are not things that we do, but indications of God’s work of changing our lives more and more. So what does the next step look like? If I am to embrace the desire for change, which is the core of all spiritual formation, what does the next step in this journey look like?

1. **Embrace the longings for change within you -** Pay attention to those longings, those nudges in your spirit. Pay attention to those longings to be more because they are things that God inspires in us. Those longings are part of understanding that we are made in the image of God and he is pulling us more towards his image and his likeness. God gives those longings to us.
2. **Satan is involved in this process as well** - There’s nothing more that Satan wants than for you to fail. Satan himself holds us in bondage to the power of maintaining secrets. Secrets are powerful, holding us in bondage. To break free from these strongholds requires a safe place to renounce secret habits that are a part of your life. Satan wants us to live in bondage, and he binds us my making us think we need to keep these sins secret. He makes us feel that we will be destroyed if these secrets come to light. That is not true. God wants all things to be out in the open, where he can speak to us about those areas of our lives.
	1. Read 2 Corinthians 4: 1-2 – The sinful practices in our lives that are pulling us away from God are often times maintained in secret or they are unknown to us. But when light shines into the dark places of our souls, Satan’s hold is broken.
3. **Godly relationships are critical to us engaging and growing in our environments** - They are essential to deep and lasting change, not short-term change. Those areas in our lives that are captivated by Satan because we keep those sins secret, God wants us to make those secrets known, so that the bondage of Satan is broken. That is why small groups, mentors, and peer mentors are so important to talk about life. As a man, you should talk about sexual lust. If you struggle with pornography, you should share with people that you need help in that area. As a woman, you may struggle with your image and think you need to look a certain way in order to be accepted by other people and God, but it is a secret that you don’t talk about with anyone. Renounce those secrets in front of other people, so that the hold that secret has on your life fades away. Your soul will be released from the captivity of that sin. We will find God transforming us more and more in our conduct, character, and core beliefs.
4. **Pursue environments that awaken you to needed change in your life** – Expose yourself to God’s word. Listen to God’s Spirit. And expose yourself to the relationships that allow you to grow into the person God wants you to be. You are being transformed. Your character is being formed. You are always being transformed through those environments God gives you. Change is likely to occur when you step outside your comfort zone, but often times you need people and conversations that will help you embrace those changes, and courage to walk outside your comfort zone.

**Next Steps**

There are places where all of us need change, so as part of our process of moving forward, there are 4 assignments I want to leave with you to do after this lesson. Many of these will be reflective experiences, but I trust it will also be an engaging experience as you move forward:

1. Watch the video of Brian Welsh again. Think about the 6 Markers of Change that we talked about in this lecture as you watch Brian’s story. Identify those Markers in Brian’s story.
2. Think back to a time when you made a significant change in your lifestyle in order to follow Jesus. This might have been an attitude adjustment, such as anger, or a problem with pornography, for example, or a substance addiction, or a pattern of pride that has been a part of your life. Take 10-15 minutes and outline how this change in your character and lifestyle occurred, using these 6 Markers of Change. One of the key points we have discussed is the importance of relationships in the process of change. As you think about your experience in light of the 6 Markers of Change, identify individuals that God used to help you move through those 6 Markers of Change. What people came into your life, or were with you through the whole process, that God used in significant ways? Was there a person that helped you make a significant change, a person who was brave enough to help you see something about your life that needed change? Or was there a person who you needed to go to and repent of something you had done as part of a behavior or an attitude that was wrong? As you think about that experience and those 6 Markers, ask yourself, “What people helped me?” and “How did they help me?” Let’s look at these relationships and how they have encouraged change.
3. The 6 Markers of Change function as indicators along the path of change. These are not steps taken for your desired and controlled outcome, but indicators as the Holy Spirit leads towards Christ-likeness. Here in Asheville, NC, there is the Blue Ridge Parkway, which is a road that has “mile-markers” on it. These markers number 1-452. Each one is not a destination, but a point along the way that helps you to see where you are in the process along the Parkway. How do you see the process? How do you recognize change as the Holy Spirit leads to closer to Christ-likeness?
	1. Can you identify any areas of conduct, character, or core beliefs that God is presently in the process of transforming in you? If so, what are these areas?
	2. What environments would be helpful for you to engage, so that you move forward in the process of change? What environments would help you experience a deep and lasting change? What environments should you embrace that will help you move forward?
	3. Post your response to the following question: What is one thought from this session about spiritual transformation that connected with you? Why?

Thank you. God bless you. It has been a delight to be with you and I hope that you will continue to move forward in the course. This is not just information, but this is for our transformation. I hope you find that as an encouraging part of the process as well.