

# **Sermon: Moving Inward: Seeking the Transformation We Need**

**Text: [Romans 12:1-2 ESV](#)**

Gary L. Wackler

September 19, 2021

**Introduction:** When I was in college the first time there was a saying that only a Lincoln Christian College student could find humorous.

**Question:** “Got change for a quarter?”

**Answer:** “Yes I do! Change would do you some good.”

**Fact is:** most of us need to change and need to be changed. And prayer is the key to godly change.

My sermons over the next three weeks are a response to a book on prayer by Richard Foster who says this:

“To pray is to change. This is a great grace. How good of God to provide a path whereby our lives can be taken over by love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control. “Prayer changes things,” people say. It can also change us.

The movement inward comes first because without interior transformation the movement up into God’s glory would overwhelm us and the movement into ministry would destroy us.”

I have seen too many people try to do ministry from the wrong motives or without God’s help, outside of their giftedness, and it is a disaster every time. Guilt comes from failure which produces a self-protective mode that results in **NO INVOLVEMENT.**

The idea of transformation is found in our text:

**[Romans 12:1-2 ESV](#)** <sup>1</sup> I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

The word “transformed” (μεταμορφωω) linguistically means a change that is external, but it also can be an inner change. Most of us believe we could use an external change or two. Have you ever noticed, though, how our world is obsessed with outward appearance? Now God is not wanting us to promote physically ugly Christians, but He is much more concerned about what is going on inside His people in their hearts and minds.

Change is stressful in our world because for the most part we have no control over it, nor choice about it. Prayer for God’s people becomes an avenue for change that is NOT out of control or someone else’s choice. It becomes a joint-venture in spiritual improvement with the most demanding yet understanding Boss in the world.

**Illus.** The best teacher or coach in the world is the one who presses us into areas where we are uncomfortable. If we set low standards, we will get poor results. What you sow you should expect to reap. If a discipline whether physical or spiritual is not practiced, one should expect predictable results. **Illus.** There is a difference between playing 18 holes once a year and golfing 9 holes a week.

Earlier this week as I was thinking about changes I need to make in my life. I decided this morning not to do the usual 3-point sermon. I have actually something almost three times as good: There are eight areas I want to briefly explore with you.

In the area of prayer I think we need to be **READY**:

### **1. Ready to listen rather than speak**

One day a friend of Richard Foster was walking through a shopping mall with his two-year old son. The child was in a particularly cantankerous mood, fussing and fuming.

The frustrated father tried everything to quiet his son, but nothing seemed to help. The child simply would not obey. Then, under some special inspiration, the father scooped up his son and, holding him close to his chest, began singing an impromptu love song. None of the words rhymed. He sang off key. And yet, as best he could, this father began sharing his heart. “I love you,” he sang. “I’m so glad you’re my boy. You make me happy. I like the way you laugh.” On they went from one store to the next. Quietly the father continued singing off key and making up words that did not rhyme. The child relaxed and became still, listening to this strange yet wonderful song. Finally they finished shopping and went to the car. As the father opened the door and prepared to buckle his son into the car seat, the child lifted his head and simply said, “Sing it to me again, Daddy! Sing it to me again!”

Prayer is a little like that. With simplicity of heart we allow ourselves to be gathered up into the arms of the Heavenly Father and let him sing his love song over us.

## **2. Ready to follow rather than lead**

When we give ourselves over to God's will, He is getting not just our strengths but also our weaknesses, not just our giftedness but also our brokenness. The good, bad and the ugly belong to the Father to shape and change as He leads us through this life. One early lesson we all need to learn is to follow God. The picture of the shepherd of Bible times is one of leading gently His flock, not driving them from behind.

Many more people need to be given permission to minister and serve and follow Jesus. Too many times we try and take credit for God's working or blame God when we aren't listening to what He has said. Some of us have the attitude: "How dare anything of importance happen without us there! We are a little like the fly on the chariot wheel in *Aesop's Fables* who looked back and declared, "My, what a dust storm I'm causing!"

## **3. Ready to be patient rather than always require it be done NOW!**

We should ask and continue to ask in prayer even though there is no forthcoming answer. We should seek and continue to seek even though we do not find. We should knock and continue to knock even though the door remains shut to us.

Sometimes it feels like we are "beating on Heaven's door with bruised knuckles in the dark, " to use the words of George Buttrick.

Sometimes our own spiritual growth is difficult to see until someone asks us to stand against the hallway doorjamb and measures us against how tall we were last year.

I have to admit: one of my biggest character flaws is a serious lack of patience.....

## **4. Ready to sacrifice rather than take or expect repayment**

Many religions are based on sacrifice as a means of appeasing their deity. In the O.T. sacrifices were made daily and at given intervals for the people's sin and just to honor God. In the N.T. Jesus becomes our sacrifice for sin and a motivation for us to copy His life.

**Our culture today is easily duped into believing that sacrifice isn't necessary and somehow degrading, but Jesus requires we give our entire self as a living sacrifice to please Him.**

**In a church service one Sunday, the offering plate came to a little girl at the end of the row. She took the plate, put it down on the floor, and stood in it. When the usher asked her what she was doing, she responded, "In Sunday school I learned that I was supposed to give myself to God." (Green, p. 425)**

## **5. Ready to be persecuted rather than retaliate**

**One of the most inspiring examples of courage in the history of the Church was the martyrdom of Polycarp, who was burned at the stake for his faith.**

**The aged Polycarp had been arrested by the Roman authorities and brought to the arena for execution in front of a cheering crowd. The proconsul pressed him hard about his faith in Jesus - "Swear, and I will release you. Revile Christ." Polycarp replied, "Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never did me wrong; and how can I now blaspheme my King that has saved me?"**

**Turning the other cheek to be insulted again ought to be a high privilege if it advances the cause of the Kingdom. Like the Bible says we ought to be in the business of heaping hot coals on the head of those who would mistreat us for the sake of Christ. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness." - Beatitudes**

## **6. Ready to be crucified rather than living the old life**

**When we say crucified with Christ, we are speaking of the crucifixion of our wills.**

**The Apostle Paul knew what a great gift this was. [Galatians 2:19-20 ESV](#) <sup>19</sup> For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. <sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**

**You will never be resurrected with Christ if you have not been crucified with Him.**

## **7. Ready to obey rather than rebel**

There are many reasons why we may obey someone, including God.

**There is fear: obeying to avoid punishment**

**Reward: Obeying because you are getting something for your effort**

**Love: Obeying because you love God and your neighbor.**

**Prayer ought to be “I want to”.**

**A little boy was riding his tricycle furiously around the block, over and over again. Finally a policeman stopped and asked him why he was going around and around. The boy said that he was running away from home. Then the policeman asked why he kept going around the block. The boy responded, “Because my mom said that I’m not allowed to cross the street.”**

**OBEDIENCE will keep you close to those you love. It will keep you close to God.**

**Sin, to be sure, separates us from God, but trying to hide our sin separates us all the more. Emilie Griffin writes, “The Lord loves us perhaps most of all when we fail and try again.”**

## **8. Ready to let go and love rather than always need to be loved and get our way.**

**And letting go is different than resignation just as faith shows strength not weakness. Catherine Marshall writes, “Resignation is barren of faith in the love of God.....Resignation lies down quietly in the dust of a universe from which God seems to have fled, and the door of Hope swung shut.”**

**I want you to listen in on another prayer by Richard Foster: “O Lord, how do I let go when I’m so unsure of things? I’m unsure of your will, and I’m unsure of myself....That really isn’t the problem at all, is it? The truth of the matter is I hate the very idea of letting go. I really want to be in control. No, I need to be in control. That’s it, isn’t it? I’m afraid to give up control, afraid of what might happen. Heal my fear, Lord.**

**How good of you to reveal my blind spots even in the midst of my stumbling attempts to pray. Thank you!**

**But now what do I do? How do I give up control? Jesus, please, teach me your way of relinquishment. —Amen.”**

The less we are manipulated by the expectations of others, the more we are open to what God expects. We find that time alone with God gives us power not to win the rat race but to ignore the rat race altogether. Slowly we find ourselves letting go of our inner desires to acquire more wealth than we need, look more youthful than we are, attain more status than is wise, i.e. become self-important. In our time alone with God our false, busy selves are revealed for the impostors we truly are sometimes.

**Conclusion:** Richard Foster said it best: “In the beginning we are indeed the subject and the center of our prayers. But in God’s time and in God’s way a Copernican revolution takes place in our heart. Slowly almost, imperceptibly, there is a shift in our center of gravity. We pass from thinking of God as part of our life to the realization that we are part of his life. Wondrously and mysteriously God moves from the periphery of our prayer experience to the center. A conversion of the heart takes place, a transformation of the spirit.”

John Chrysostom has said, “Find the door of your heart, you will discover it is the door of the kingdom of God.”

For the Church, Jesus is standing at the door and knocking wondering if anyone will invite Him in ([Revelation 3:20](#)).

To be a part of the dawning Kingdom of God there must be change. Before we move out into the world we must be ready and equipped with minds that have been transformed. Every person is called to repent, to change his/her mind.

“Therefore, prayer is in many ways the criterion of Christian life. Prayer requires that we stand in God’s presence with open hands, naked and vulnerable, proclaiming to ourselves and to others that without God we can do nothing. This is difficult in a climate where the predominant counsel is: ‘Do your best and God will do the rest,’ (*if we believe this*) we have turned prayer into a last resort to be used only when all our own resources are depleted. Then even the Lord has become the victim of our impatience. Discipleship does not mean to use God when we can no longer function ourselves. On the contrary, it means to recognize that we can do nothing at all, but that God can do everything through us. As disciples, we find not some - but all of our strength, hope, courage, and confidence in God. Therefore, prayer must be our first concern.”