



## Notes

### Transformed Life (Part 1: Brand New) <sup>i</sup>

By Leston Blackburn

Today we start a brand new series called Transformed Life. Over the next few weeks, we are going to examine just what a transformed life is all about. In addition to exploring the topic on a Sunday, some of the Small Groups are going to be working through some material written by Dave Smith, and for those who are interested, there is also a 50 Day devotional Called Transformed Life by Dave Smith that can be ordered via Amazon.

*Text: Ephesians 1:1-2 <sup>ii</sup>*

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,*

*To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:*

*2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

### Introduction

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God...*

This sentence alone is a consequence of the absolutely life-transforming power and miracle of a brand new life through an encounter with God, and I'll explain why a little later. But first let me share an experience I had while praying this week.

While I was praying, I saw a vivid picture of a really well-dressed lady kneeling down on the side of the road. She was clearly very thirsty and wanted something to drink. She was so desperate, in fact, that she knelt down over the gutter on the side of the road with one arm and one knee on the pavement with the other arm and knee in the road so that she could drink the water in the gutter. It was a really odd image, as I am sure you can appreciate, and I wondered what it could possibly mean, or why the Lord had given me such a strange picture in the first place.

As I pondered this, I saw a cold coin in the water directly in front of her - kind of like the coins you would see in a movie about hidden treasure (a doubloon).

At first she obviously couldn't see the coin, but then she noticed it. She paused before picking it up and swallowing it.

I thought to myself, "What an odd thing to do!" But then the most amazing thing happened. The desperate expression on her face began to change. In fact, her whole appearance began to change. She began to glow from the inside out, and the most radiant smile broke across her face. I felt such a sense of peace, joy and contentment come over her. As she stood up, it was as if she was a completely different person altogether! The same – but different!

**As I contemplated all of this, I felt as if God gave me an interpretation.**

Until we have an encounter with God, we live our lives beneath our true purpose and identity. Like the lady in the vision, we are made for more, but living for less. Until God opens our eyes both to our reality and to His, there is a dimension to life that we are completely ignorant about.

**But then we glimpse the treasure of heaven.** The coin represents Christ (our Pearl of Great price) who comes to open our eyes to the reality of who God is and who we truly are in him, and when He does, a miracle takes place.

We come alive to the very life-transforming power of God. we begin a journey into the deeper things of God that up to that point we were oblivious to.

In fact, Jesus alludes to this when He speaks to the Samaritan woman at the well. He says;

*John 4:13-14 - Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*

Like the lady in the picture, our eyes are suddenly opened to the reality of the living God who alone sustains and satisfies the very depth of our being. We were made for more because we were made for Him!

We are opened up to a whole new dynamic dimension that we can experience no other way. We become spiritually alive and aware. In short, we become brand new! We begin to embrace and to live out a transformed life; the very life Jesus speaks about in John when He says,

*John 10: 9-10 (NLT) - "I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. 10 The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life."*

It's the only kind of life that can adequately answer 3 of life's most pressing questions; Who am I? Where do I belong? What is my purpose?

So without further ado, let's fasten our seatbelts and start the journey of discovering just what this transformed life is all about.

Now you may not realise this, but you are marvellous!

1. You have been marvellously made

Do you have any idea of what a walking marvel you are? You are a uniquely designed masterpiece! You are one of the most comprehensively complex individuals on this planet – and I mean that in the nicest sense!

I have an iPad in my hands. It is quite an incredible invention, isn't it? I don't know about you, but the very first computer that I ever saw was at my mother's work – it took up an entire room and had these huge reels on which data was stored. I thought it was awesome at the time – jaw-dropping to be exact. But then out came the first home PC of sorts – a Spectrum. Anybody remember those? I can't remember the exact specs, but I think it had a whopping 16k of memory! Wow! That's 16 000 bytes of memory.

Then came the home PC – with a screen about the size of car seat, and we all went – Whoa! What is more, the text on the screen came in two colours – green or orange! WOW! We were mightily impressed, weren't we!

Next was the colour computer screen (you still needed a wheelbarrow to transport it). And then came the internet with dial-up! You'd dial in, wait three years, and you were connected to the world-wide-web!

But who would have thought we'd end up with an iPad? This one is a baby – it only has 16 Gigs of RAM – that's over 16 million bytes! Yet as amazing as this little gadget is, it is completely incomparable you!

In fact, it is estimated that if our brains were computers, they would be rather impressive to say the least!

The human brain contains roughly 100 billion neurons. Each of these neurons seems capable of making around 1,000 connections, representing about 1,000 potential synapses, which largely do the work of data storage. Multiply each of these 100 billion neurons by the approximately 1,000 connections it can make, and you get 100 trillion data points, or about 100 terabytes of information.<sup>iii</sup>

But that's not all. Some of the latest phones have fancy cameras that can take pictures of 15 megapixels. In fact, one brand is even reputedly capable of taking a picture of up to 75 megapixels. But it is estimated that the human eye can see upwards of 576 megapixels! <sup>iv</sup>

**So you are jolly marvellous! Of course, if you were just a physical specimen, that in itself would be impressive enough; but actually, you are so much more than a mere collection of cells and tissues!**

In fact, it's not just the physical aspect of you that is the most amazing. You may not even realise this, but you are a **trichotomous being**. You might be sitting here saying, "I have no ideas what a trichotomous being is, but that is impressive!"

You are made up of three different 'dimensions' for lack of a better description. You are more than merely a body. In fact, the Bible actually teaches that you are a spirit that has a soul and lives in a body. What you see externally is only a fraction of who you are!

*1 Thessalonians 5:23 (NLT) - Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.*

Sadly, most people live blissfully unaware of their spiritual nature or the spiritual dimension of God.

Your body enables you to do some astounding physical fetes. I don't know if anyone watched the test match between England and South Africa yesterday. Did anybody see James Taylor's catch at short leg? For those of you who don't know about cricket, short leg is not a position that is reserved only for people with short legs, although, incredibly, James Taylor does have rather short legs come to think about it. It is a position directly behind the batsman's back, just a few metres away. Nobody enjoys fielding there. In fact,

when the captain tells you to field there, you wonder what you have done wrong and why he hates you so much. And the reason is quite understandable; you see, when the batsman hooks the ball, he gets his whole momentum behind the shot, so it can really fly off the bat at a rather frightening pace. That was the case yesterday. They showed a slow-motion replay and put a reaction timer on the footage. From the time the batsman played the shot to the time he dived full length to his right and caught the ball was 0.53 seconds! He then spent the next few seconds sprinting round like a headless chicken, which is understandable given, firstly that he had survived, and secondly, that he had actually managed to take such an amazing catch. That is about all I am prepared to say about the cricket!

**We are capable of some of the most astounding physical fetes! But think about the human soul for a moment.** Your soul enables you to think, feel emotions, reason, problem-solve, theorise, contemplate, dream, plan, write poetry, draw, communicate. You can do things that no other animal or species on the planet can do. You are jolly marvellous!

**And yet as amazing as your soul is, it is still not the best part of you.** The Bible tells us that we are also spirit beings. In fact, we are first and foremost spirit beings. People who have had an 'out-of-body' experience, who have actually died and come back to life almost all testify about actually seeing their physical bodies as they departed, yet still being able to think, and reason, and experience.

**We are spirits who have a soul and who live in a body.** Why? Because we have been made in the very image of God. We are unique in all of creation as a consequence.

Yet we seldom see ourselves as marvellous creations or as spiritual beings because we are too busy trying to be ugly ducklings! In fact, most people live blissfully unaware of the spiritual reality of who they are, and consequently, blissfully ignorant to the reality not only of God but of His desire to interact with us!

You are marvellously made! But here's the problem. Just like the lady kneeling in the gutter drinking dirty water, as marvellously made as we are...

## 2. We are also fatally flawed

Take the iPad again. Imagine I dropped it. What would happen? I'd cry, that's what! I dropped a spanner on my iPad a few months ago – it was a sorry sight – not the iPad, but me crying! You could still see what was on the screen – with a bit of imagination!

And that is kind of what we are like until we meet God – until we see God's treasure.

We only need to take a look around to recognise that the human race, while capable of moments of incredible kindness and love, is fundamentally flawed. We live in a time in history of the most opulent wealth yet at the same time, there is the most widespread poverty. We are capable of greatness and destruction. I believe it is fair to say that the vast majority of human suffering is actually self-inflicted!

Why? Because we have settled to live as 'gutter-people'. We have willingly elected to live in ignorance of the very One who created us in the first place for so much more! We live spiritually blind, dead, unaware lives.

In Genesis 3 we read how people turned their backs on God and became corrupt as a consequence. The truth is that we have all missed the mark – that is what the Bible defines as sin – falling short of the mark (God's standard – which is nothing less than Christ), and consequently, we have become spiritually dead, blind. But Jesus comes to set this straight.

*Romans 3:23 (The Message) - Since we've compiled this long and sorry record as sinners... and proved that we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us, God did it for us. Out of sheer generosity he put us in right standing with himself.*

*A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we're in and restored us to where he always wanted us to be. And he did it by means of Jesus Christ.*

But until we actually experience the God-life, we live with beneath our true identity, without a real sense of belonging, without a real understanding of our ultimate purpose in life. Dressed for more, but settling for less.

**Where does it leave us? It leaves us in need of restoration. In truth, we need transforming! But here is the wonderful truth...**

### **3. We can be totally transformed**

That's what the transformed life is all about. It is God's invitation to a brand new life, and it was Christ's ultimate purpose:

"I have come that you may have life in all its fulness!"

Steve Chalke tells the following story which relates this reality quite powerfully:

"An old story is told about a preacher who stood talking to a crowd at London's famous Hyde Park Corner on a sunny Sunday afternoon. As he did, so a young member of the crowd started to heckle him. He pointed to a shabbily dressed man sitting under a nearby tree and shouted, 'Socialism can give that man a new suit and change what he has! What can your Christianity do?'

The preacher gently replied, 'Your politics can put a new suit on that man, but only Christ can put a new man in that suit.'

Individual change is impossible without spiritual renewal. That is exactly the claim of Jesus Christ: 'I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever.' (John 6:51), and 'Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.' (John 4:14) The Christian faith is built around the claim of Jesus Christ to hold the power to feed hungry

souls, to refresh life's weary travellers and to bring hope, change and transformation both to individuals and to communities.

Transformation... knows that solutions never flow from the outside in. They flow from the inside out. Only Christianity can put new people in suits. Only God can see communities truly changed – life by life and street by street. Not only can he do it; He is doing it. Right now.”<sup>v</sup>

That was certainly my experience. I was hopelessly lost, and I knew it! My life felt empty and directionless. But when God breathed His life into me, all of that changed. I found I saw life differently. I saw others differently. I began to live differently. I suddenly found an absolute sense of purpose, of fulfilment, of meaning and direction, and I felt like I was home. THE LIGHT CAME ON!

### **Brand New**

#### **Now, getting back to our opening text...**

If ever we wanted an example of just how miraculous a transformed life is when God touches someone and reveals Himself to them, we need look no further than the first word of our opening text. Paul.

*“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,”*

To put it into context, the man who penned this epistle which is full of love, grace and majesty, the man who wrote arguably one of the most beautiful summaries of love – one that is often read out at weddings, namely 1 Corinthians 13; the man who demonstrated a life of selfless love and service and who eventually paid for the privilege by dying a martyr's death, was once a very different man.

You see, Paul the apostle of Jesus Christ was once Saul of Tarsus, the fearless and feared Pharisee who took great care and delight in exterminating Christians. Saul was present when Stephen, the first Christian martyr was stoned. Not only that, but it could be argued that, while he may not have cast

the stones, he was certainly one of the chief agitators. After all, it was at his feet that the people doing the stoning left their garments. Were we to compare Saul to someone in our modern day and age, he would have been just like one of the religious fundamentalists who torture, murder and maim anyone who happens to believe differently to them – and all of this in the name of God.

But God touched Saul. While he was still living in the gutter, so to speak, God touched him. Indeed, it was on the very Road to Damascus to carry out yet more murderous acts that Paul had a divine and undeserved encounter with Christ. He was touched by the very light of heaven. He heard a voice from heaven rebuking him, saying, “Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” It was such a profound life-transforming moment, that the man Saul would never be the same again. A miracle took place that day – a life-transforming miracle. It had such a profound impact on him that he would reality the very same story at least 3 times – twice while having to give an account of his faith in the midst of some serious, life-threatening charges because of his faith.

Saul the instrument of death encountered Christ, the author of life, and the light of God transformed his barren heart.

That, friends, is the transformed life I’m talking about – and this is what we are going to learn about over the next few weeks.

**When we discover this brand new life, we discover a brand new identity.**

**We are literally ‘in Christ’; we have a brand new identity! We are now in Christ. We are brand new!**

So Paul writes,

To God’s holy people in Ephesus, the faithful *in Christ Jesus*:

What is more...

**We have a brand new place of belonging.**

Paul touches on the second theme too. In verse 2 he writes;

**2 Grace and peace to you from *God our Father* and the *Lord Jesus Christ*.**

When you become a Christian, you become part of the greatest family on earth and in heaven – the very family of God. You belong to a people spread out across the globe and across the ages! You become family in Him!

We had the most profound example of this when we broke down France a couple of years ago. As many of you know, I was incapacitated at the time – I was in a cast from having ruptured my Achilles and was about as useful as an ice cube in the Arctic. We broke down in a foreign country, and none of us spoke the language. There was no way of getting towed back and we couldn't scrap the car unless we emigrated to France as it turns out. It is fair to say we were pretty much in a pickle!

But here's what happened. We texted our spiritual family here in Malvern (that's you) and asked you to pray. You in turn phoned our spiritual family in France – a church in Rheims – people we had never met before. Within 20 minutes of that phone call, on a Saturday afternoon in the middle of the French summer holidays, 3 members of our spiritual family – people we had never met before, arrived, arranged to have our car repaired – and then paid for the part - fed us while we waited and then arranged to send us on our way back home.

Here's the amazing thing; when we mentioned that we didn't know how to thank them enough, do you know what their response was? Something I will cherish for the rest of my life; "There is no need to thank us – we are family!"

**Friends, when God makes us brand new, we not only receive a brand new identity, we receive a brand new family!**

*Ephesians 2:19 (NIV) - Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household,*

Finally, Paul touches on the 3<sup>rd</sup> great theme of the transformed life. When God makes us brand new, we receive a new identity, we receive a new family, but we also receive ...

#### A brand new purpose

Paul says, 'I am living for God's plan for my life. I am now an apostle of God *by the very will of God!*

It was only when Paul was placed in Christ that he discovered what he was actually made for through Christ. Only when he discovered *who* he was made for could he truly understand *what* he was made for.

That is true of each and every single one of us too!

*Galatians 1:15-16 (NCV) – But God had special plans for me and set me apart for His work even before I was born. He called me through His grace and showed His son to Me that I might tell the good news about Him...*

As for Paul, so for us. We become brand new. We become part of a brand new family, and we discover in Him a brand new purpose.

Really, when you think about it, the mission statement we have adopted as a church reflects in a nutshell what the transformed life in Christ is all about. It answers who we are, where we belong and what we were made for.

To see people empowered through a life-transforming relationship with God, encouraged through the support of a diverse Christian family, and equipped to make a difference.

That's new life. That's transformed living. That's the transformed life!

**Altar Call** – Now perhaps as I have been speaking today, you have sense something (or someone) tugging at your heart. You might not realise this yet, but that is God.

Jesus only ever offered an invitation, never a coercion; 'Follow Me.' I believe He wants to extend that invitation to some people here today.

You may ask, 'Who am I?' it matters not who you are, but who you can be if you will just follow him!

Perhaps you wonder, 'Where do I fit?' I want to say to you today that God is our perfect fit! When we are in him we are truly complete! That is where it all starts because that is what we were made for.

Maybe you are saying, 'What am I living for?' Well, why not let God reveal to you, not only the joy of living for Him, but the life-transforming journey of actually finding and fulfilling His purpose for your life --one which transforms individuals and communities!

### **Prayer**

Father, thank You for the grace You have shown me through the cross of Christ. Forgive me for living my life apart from you. Cleanse me and fill me with Your Holy Spirit. Let Your will be done in my life so that I may know I am in you, that I may understand that I am part of Your great family, and let Your plans and purposes for my life be realised to the full that I may bring glory and Honour to You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Next week – what we will looking at who we are in Christ, how we are **eternally blessed** and what the implications are for us, so come along and discover more about this life-transforming reality of what it means to be brand new!

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<sup>i</sup> Based on the series Transformed Life by Dave Smith

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<sup>iii</sup> <http://io9.gizmodo.com/if-your-brain-were-a-computer-how-much-storage-space-w-509687776>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://gizmodo.com/what-is-the-resolution-of-the-human-eye-1541242269>

<sup>v</sup> Steve Chalke, Intelligent Church, Zondervan, Copyright ©2006