

FOUNDATION OF FAITH!
THE BIBLE
TRANSFORMED LIVES

This morning, as we continue our series Foundation of Faith we are looking at the Bible. And we have spent several weeks looking at different aspects in regards to the Bible and we have seen that it is the authoritative, inerrant, infallible Word of God that is our authority on faith and practice for our Christian life.

Now I am going to make a claim that some may not agree with but it is what the Scriptures teach weather people believe it or not. Hold on because here it is. The Bible is not just any ordinary book but it is living, it is powerful and by the help of the Holy Spirit working in our lives, it is able to transform us. Now if there are any of you that doubt that, if you don't believe me, then listen to what the Scriptures have to say regarding this. We are told by Paul in Hebrews 4:12, "**For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.**"

It truly does not matter what I have said but it does matter what God has said! And the Holy Spirit, through Paul tells us that God's Word is not only living, it is not just dead, lifeless information, it is alive to us, but it is also powerful and that is very important. You see, many today try to change themselves, change their lives, make their lives better and they do this by cleaning up their actions, what they do and what they say. It is a sort of cosmetic surgery you might say on their behavior. The problem with that is it will never completely work!

I know, Oprah has had people on that have written books and they tell you it will transform your life if you read it. But is that book or any other book besides the Bible living and powerful? Absolutely not! How do I know these other books won't change my life, make me a better person? Because the Bible tells us that, "**The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?**" Jeremiah 17:9.

That truly is the problem for man. I am sure you have heard people say this before, that "If only there was more love in this world there would be no problems. We need to just get along." That is the problem, we can't because man's heart is evil and the kind of love they are talking about will never be manifested in a person's life who does not know Jesus. How do I know that? Because the Bible tells me so!

You see, this kind of love is *AGAPE* love or unconditional love. It is seen in the life of Jesus and again, apart from Him, you will not have this kind of love. "Joe, how can you say that? I don't need Jesus to love people." In a sense, that is true, but the love you are speaking of is not the love that God is speaking of. You are speaking of a brotherly type of love or maybe even an erotic type of love but not agape love!

Look at Jesus. He healed those that were sick. He raised the dead. He opened the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf. He feed thousands. And yet, they tortured Him. They placed a cloth over His face and struck Him. They pulled out His beard. They scourged Him. They spit on Him. They mocked Him. His face was so disfigured, His body so bloody that He did not even look like a man! And they crucified Him. And what was His response to what they did? Did He toast them; wipe them off the face of the earth? No, He said, "**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.**" Luke 23:34.

Think about what you would do if someone did that to you! And think about what most people do with far less, like someone cutting them off on the road. Do they respond in love or in wrath, in hate? It is in wrath, they want to get them for what they did to them, they don't love them they hate them for doing that to them! You see, the problem is not on the outside, that is just the reflection of what is on the inside and man can't change what is going on inside of them, only God can!

And that really is our focus this morning, transformed lives, what God does on the inside of a person that is then manifested in their outward actions, the Fruit of the Spirit flows from them and it all begins with that agape love that only comes from God! Let me share this story with you and then we will look at some changed lives of people in the Bible as well as changed lives today. These are the words of a Scottish medical doctor named W. P. Mackay. He wrote,

My dear mother . . . had been a godly, pious woman, quite often telling me of the Savior, and many times I had been a witness to her wrestling in prayer for my soul's conversion. But nothing had made a deep impression on me. The older I grew the more wicked I became. . . . I was in danger of becoming an infidel . . .

One day a seriously injured [laborer] had fallen a considerable distance while climbing a ladder. The case was hopeless; all we could do was ease the pains of the unfortunate man. He seemed to realize his condition, for he was fully conscious, and asked me how long he would last. . . .

The patient was alone in the world. His only wish was to see his landlady, because he owed her a small sum, and also wished to bid her farewell. He also requested his landlady send him, "The Book."

“What book?” I questioned.

“Oh, just ask her for the book, she will know,” was his reply.

After a week of suffering he died. I went to see him on my regular visits at least once a day. What struck me most was the quiet, almost happy expression which was constantly on his face. I knew he was a Christian, but about such matters I cared not to talk with him or hear.

After the man had died, some things about the deceased’s affairs were to be attended to in my presence.

“What shall we do with this?” asked the nurse, holding up a book in her hand.

“What kind of book is it?” I asked.

“The Bible of the poor man. His landlady brought it on her second visit. As long as he was able to read it he did so, and when he was unable to do so any more, he kept it under his bed cover.”

I took the Bible and – could I trust my eyes? It was my own Bible! The Bible which my mother had given me when I left my parents’ home, and which later, when short of money, I sold for a small amount. My name was still in it, written in my mother’s hand. Beneath my name was the verse she had selected for me. . . .

I need not add much more. Be it sufficient to say that the regained possession of my Bible was the cause of my conversion.

- Wilbur Konkell, Living Hymn Stories, pp. 15-20

Yes, God's Word is living and it is powerful and it can and will transform our lives if we let it. I think this quote sums it up for us. Listen carefully to what is said because it does speak volumes of the changed lives of people. We are told, "No other religion, no other philosophy, gives a man so much to live for as Christianity. For this reason Christianity has a record of martyrology absolutely without comparison in the history of religions. Every religion has produced a Socrates here and there willing to drink poison hemlock, or a Buddha willing to forsake wealth and fortune for religious ideals. But where is the stream of martyrs like unto Christianity? What other devotees have been burned, tortured, torn asunder, and in many other diabolical ways have had their flesh baptized by excruciating pain, and yet have suffered it with words of forgiveness on their lips, with hymns of glory sung up to the last minute, with faces beaming and glowing amid smoke and torture, amid bleeding flesh and scorched limbs? And why do they so die? Because Christ has given them so much to live for that they choose to live for Christ and die, rather than deny Christ and live."

And please do not place Islam in the same category here. It is not, far from it. You see, they are not dying for their faith in the sense of being put to death for what they believe in. They are killing themselves and they are doing so with hate on their lips for the infidels around them, not love. So please don't compare Islam with Christianity, it is not even close!

We are now going to spend some time looking at various people in the Bible and see how God's Word transformed their lives. How God transformed them inwardly and that inward action by God overflowed in all that they did and all that they said!

We are going to start out with Abraham or Abram as he was called before God changed his name. Now this might be offensive to some, especially to the Jews, but Abraham, the Father of the Jews was an idol worshiping gentile before he got saved! In Acts 7:2-4 we see Stephen speak before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious council as he was defending his faith. And Stephen said, **“And he said, ‘Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, “Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.” Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell.”**”

Now that is interesting to me because Stephen starts out by speaking of how God appeared to an idol worshiping gentile, father Abraham, and called him to come out of the area of the Chaldeans and cross over into a new land, Canaan. Abraham was the father of the Hebrews, a term that means “one who has crossed over.”

Some have a hard time believing that Abraham was an idol worshiping gentile before he got saved, but what else could he be before he got saved! And we see Abraham obey the Words of God and he became the father of many nations just as God had said to him.

Not only that, but in Galatians we are told, **“just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed.’ So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham. For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.’ But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for ‘the just shall live by faith.’ Yet the law is not of faith, but ‘the man who does them shall live by them.’ Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man’s covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ.”** Galatians 3:6-16.

Father Abraham was highly esteemed by the Jews. They believed that father Abraham would pluck the worst Jew from the fires of Hell and that Hell was reserved for Gentiles! So Paul uses Abraham’s salvation to show these Judaizers their error, it is not the physical birth that saves you but spiritual birth, being born again. You see, Paul just finished showing the Galatians that they were saved by grace through faith and now he shows them this is not a New Testament idea. That is how Abraham was saved!

Abraham was righteous before God because he believed God – FAITH. In fact, he was not circumcised for another 14 years (Genesis 17) after God gave him this blessing in Genesis chapter 15 and the Law was still over 430 years down the road!

And here is the point, we see his faith lived out, it was not perfect faith but it was active faith. We see him go where God is calling him to go. We see him willingly ready to sacrifice his only son Isaac as God commanded. Here was an idol worshiping gentile that was not living for God, and yet, once God gets a hold of this mans life, it is transformed! The faith of Abraham!

Another story of a transformed life is seen in the man named Jacob. And truly his name reflected his behavior. Jacob was a schemer, a conniver, a plotter, he did things the way he wanted and he had ways of getting what he wanted. And he lived a long time in this condition until he wrestled with God one day. You can read of that story in Genesis chapter 32. Let me set things up for you and then we will look at what transpired.

Jacob has spent the last 20 years working at his uncle Laban's house, actually hiding out from his brother Esau because Esau wanted to kill Jacob. You see, Jacob stole his birthright and the blessing from his father Isaac and the sad thing here is that if he would have not schemed, God would have given it to him. But, again, this is Jacob! Now Jacob is going to return home and as he is traveling he gets word that his brother Esau is coming with 400 men. In Jacob's mind he thinks Esau wants to kill him so he begins his scheming, his plotting to save his own life.

That is where we will pick up our reading beginning in verse 22 of Genesis chapter 32, **“And he arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok. He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had. Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, ‘Let Me go, for the day breaks.’ But he said, ‘I will not let You go unless You bless me!’ So He said to him, ‘What is your name?’ He said, ‘Jacob.’ And He said, ‘Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.’”** Genesis 32:22-28.

Think about this. 20 years earlier, when his father Isaac asked him his name, he lied and said that it was Esau so that he could get the blessing by deception. Now, 20 years later the Lord asks him and he says that his name is Jacob or con man, schemer. You see, he saw himself as he really was. But now the Lord changes his name to Israel or “Governed by God” or “God rules.” Do you see the difference? One is self-centered and the other is God-centered! And it is from Jacob that we see born 12 sons and they became the 12 tribes of Israel! Yes, God’s Word, as God spoke to Jacob, it changed his life, it transformed his life. Not a perfect man, but a man governed by God!

Now we can see the transformed lives of Joseph and Moses, Gideon and Samuel, David and-so-on, but let's move to the New Testament and see some transformed lives before we look at the transformed lives of people today, that God is still in the business you might say of transforming us into His image!

Some of you remember the dishonest tax collector named Zacchaeus. He was a little guy and what I mean by that is he was short. Let's pick up the story in Luke 19:1-10 where we are told, **“Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.’ So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, ‘He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.’ Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.’”**

Here is this man, Zacchaeus, living in the upper part or rich part of Jericho, who made himself rich by being a tax collector. You see, Rome would use these men, hire them to collect taxes, but they could raise the taxes to whatever they wanted and the excess they made above what Rome wanted they got to keep for themselves. Thus, there was much corruption involved in this business. His fellow Jews hated them for not only selling out to Rome, but for ripping the people off. Interestingly enough, his name means “righteous one” or “pure one” which was far from the truth at this point in this little man’s life, but that is soon going to change as he has an encounter with Jesus.

Now I can relate to this man. You see, because Zacchaeus was short and he couldn’t see Jesus above the crowds, he climbed up this sycamore tree, not a very dignified thing to do for a grown businessman, but he wanted to see Jesus so badly that he was willing to do anything, even climb up a tree! I can imagine Jesus kind of chuckling as He looked up to see Zacchaeus in this tree and then He calls out to this man to come down, he was over His head you might say, because Jesus was coming home with him.

What was the response of Zacchaeus to the words of Jesus? I’m sure he almost fell out of that tree trying to come down as fast as he could. He was filled with joy that Jesus signaled him out of the crowd to eat with, a man that no one really liked, no one really wanted to associate themselves with except other tax collectors and sinners. These tax collectors were so crooked, so bad that they were not even allowed into the synagogues nor could they be used as a witness in a court room. But Jesus reaches out to this lonely man, He will never hold back!

Now what Jesus saw in this man there was a group that was blind to it. I am speaking of the Religious leaders. They rebuke Jesus for associating Himself with this sinner. But the reality is, if Jesus did not associate Himself with sinners, He would not have anyone to associate Himself with because we are all sinners separated from God!

Now as they finished eating, between verses 7 & 8, Zacchaeus gets saved, he repents of his sin, and the evidence of his salvation is seen in his care of the poor, those in need, something he did not do before, and restoring back to those he took advantage of, which could have been a large sum of money. You see, the Law required that if you stole something you had to return it plus 20%. Zacchaeus offers even more than what the Law required! This was a dramatic change in his life for his whole life was based on taking advantage of others to make a profit! Now his name matches his life, “Righteous one” or “Pure one” not because of himself, but Jesus!

Now you may be thinking, “Wait a minute, this has nothing to do with the Word of God transforming this man’s life!” I beg to differ. You see, who is the Word of God? It is Jesus and thus, as Jesus spoke to this man he got saved and the same is true for all of us today. God speaks to us today through Jesus and Jesus speaks to us through His Word! Now some still have a hard time with this because they see this man saved by his good works, but that is not the case. The good works he was doing was the evidence for his faith. How do I know that? Because Jesus says that he is “**a son of Abraham**” not just by birth, genetically, but he had the faith of Abraham.

Now what is the faith of Abraham? Paul tells us in Romans 4:2-5, “**For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.**” You see, a salvation by faith, not by works! I could just see a big smile on the face of Jesus as He said these words that Zacchaeus is saved, and the reality is, that is the reason Jesus came, to save those who are lost, all of us, if we would only receive that gift by faith. And I am sure there was a big grin on the face of Zacchaeus, a man who was lost and is now found. The Word of God transformed his life!

Saul or Paul is one of the great transformations we see in the New Testament. Here was a man who consented to the murder of Stephen for his faith. Here was a man who would arrest Christians for their faith. Here was a man that was on the road to Damascus to get Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem for their faith in Christ and that was not a good thing. He was a man who was on a mission, a mission of God or so he thought. The reality was, God was on a mission to get this young man, to save him!

In Acts 9:1-9 we see this conversion, this transformation of Saul to Paul. We are told, **“Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’ Then the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’ And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.”**

Damascus had a large group of Jewish people and Saul hears that many of the Synagogues are filled with Christians now; the people of the Way are there. This is where the Jesus followers are hanging out. So Saul goes to the High Priest for a letter to arrest and bring back these Jesus followers, and the Roman government would honor this.

Damascus was about 130 miles northeast of Jerusalem, about a six-day journey, but that didn't bother Saul, he was on a mission, he was on a crusade for God, or so he thought as I have said! He was actually on his own crusade, his own mission and in direct opposition to God! How often we do that, we are on our own crusade and think God is with us, and we miss the boat completely, even though we may be sincere!

Here we see the conversion, the salvation of Saul to Jesus Christ. Some may not be impressed, but this is a radical change in his life. Listen to what Paul tells us of his life before Christ in Philippians 3:3-6, and keep in mind that Saul the "requested one" became Paul the "little one" as he saw himself now in Christ! We read in Philippians, **"For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the Eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless."**

If anyone could boast in his flesh, before he was saved, Paul could. He was circumcised on the eighth day, a child of Israel, from the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee or a keeper of the Law or so he thought, persecuting those that opposed his views – specifically the church, and he saw himself as blameless!

But, Paul continues to say in Philippians, **“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”** Philippians 3:7-14.

Paul is saying everything he thought was important, when the light of Christ shined upon him, he saw it all as worthless, as dung! All his schooling with the famous Gamaliel, all his upbringing, he says is worth absolutely nothing when compared to Christ and what He has given to him. Paul, who saw himself as great before Christ, now sees himself as the chief of sinners. He realized that the Law couldn't save him, it only showed how far short of perfection he really was and it was only through Christ that our sins are cast as far as the east is from the west to be remembered no more. If you live by the Law you will die by the Law! Thus, this is a radical change, a radical transformation of this Pharisee named Saul!

And once again notice that it is Jesus, the Word of God speaking to Saul or Paul and his life is transformed just as our lives are when we read God's Word, when we hear the voice of Jesus speak to us through His Word! And what a transformation this was. He went from persecuting the church to being a part of the church. He went from putting down Christianity to living it, embracing it, teaching about Jesus! God's Word is living and powerful and it can transform the hardest heart as we have seen here with Paul!

And we can go on and show how God's Word truly transformed the people of the Bible but let me give you a little rundown of what we see. And keep in mind, just looking at the Apostles of Jesus, that they were not the bravest group of guys in the world. Only John was at the cross when Jesus died, besides the women. The rest were afraid! But just listen carefully to what they were willing to endure for the faith that they placed their life in, the Gospel of Jesus Christ in which Paul said, "**For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.**" Romans 1:16.

Here is a list of what they went through as researched by historian Schumacher.

Matthew suffered martyrdom in Ethiopia, killed by the sword wound.

Mark died in Alexandria, Egypt, after being dragged by horses through the streets until he was dead.

Luke was hanged in Greece as a result of his tremendous preaching to the lost.

John faced martyrdom when he was boiled in a huge basin of boiling oil during a wave of persecution in Rome. However, he was miraculously delivered from death. John was then sentenced to the mines on the prison island of Patmos. He wrote his prophetic Book of Revelation on Patmos. The apostle John was later freed and returned to serve as Bishop of Edessa in modern Turkey. He died as an old man, the only apostle to die peacefully.

Peter was crucified upside down on an X-shaped cross, according to church tradition because he told his tormentors that he felt unworthy to die in the same way that Jesus Christ had died.

James the Just, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, was thrown over a hundred feet down from the southeast pinnacle of the Temple when he refused to deny his faith in Christ. When they discovered that he survived the fall, his enemies beat James to death with a fuller's club.

James the Greater, a son of Zebedee, was a fisherman by trade when Jesus called him to a lifetime of ministry. As a strong leader of the church, James was ultimately beheaded at Jerusalem. The Roman officer who guarded James watched amazed as James defended his faith at his trial. Later, the officer walked beside James to the place of execution. Overcome by conviction, he declared his new faith to the judge and knelt beside James to accept beheading as a Christian.

Bartholomew, also known as Nathanael, was a missionary to Asia. He witnessed to our Lord in present day Turkey. Bartholomew was martyred for his preaching in Armenia when he was flayed to death by a whip.

Andrew was crucified on an X-shaped cross in Patras, Greece. After being whipped severely by seven soldiers they tied his body to the cross with cords to prolong his agony. His followers reported that, when he was led toward the cross, Andrew saluted it in these words: "I have long desired and expected this happy hour. The cross has been consecrated by the body of Christ hanging on it." He continued to preach to his tormentors for two days until he expired.

The Apostle Thomas was stabbed with a spear in India during one of his missionary trips to establish the church in the subcontinent.

Jude, the brother of Jesus, was killed with arrows when he refused to deny his faith in Christ.

Matthias, the apostle chosen to replace the traitor Judas Iscariot, was stoned and then beheaded. . . .

The apostle Paul was tortured and then beheaded by the evil Emperor Nero at Rome in A. D. 67.

- Grant Jeffrey, *The Signature of God*, pp. 255-256

You see, their lives were transformed by the power of God's Spirit and the Word of God. They were willing to die for what they believed. Now some would argue that many have died for what they believe and that does not make it right. That is very true, but here is the difference. If all they said about Jesus was a lie, they would have known it and thus, they would not all die for a lie!

And think about this. Every book of the Bible contains records of such transformations as well as history! Every child of God has a story of what God has done, is doing and will do in their lives all because of the transforming power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Now let me give to you some recent examples to show you what I mean but before I do, let me share this with you to think about. We are told,

The well-known social critic Dennis Prager, debating the Oxford atheistic philosopher Jonathan Glover, raised his thorny question: If you, Professor Glover, were stranded at the midnight hour in a desolate Los Angeles street, and if, as you stepped out of your car with fear and trembling, you were suddenly to hear the weight of pounding footsteps behind you, and you saw ten burly young men who had just stepped out of a dwelling coming toward you, would it or would it not make a difference to you to know they were coming from a Bible study?

- Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God?* P. 41

Did you ever think about that? How safe would you feel as you saw these big guys coming at you carrying Bibles as they left a Bible study? I would be thanking the Lord that they were coming because I know that if they could they would help me and I knew that they would not harm me or rob me. How do I know that? Because of the transforming power of the Bible upon a person's life and yes, what God did back in Old Testament times and in New Testament times, He is still doing today and I will show you what I mean with just this one powerful example because there are millions that are out there! In fact, each and everyone of you have a story, a testimony of what God has done!

This is the story of Serge LeClerc, who, as you will see, was not a very good man. In fact, he was one of the most dangerous men in Canada as you will see. We are told,

Serge LeClerc had risen to become the co-leader of one of the largest drug crime families in Canada. But today he is working to rescue drug addicts. Here is his story.

He was born in an abandoned building in eastern Canada, a product of rape, to a single, thirteen-year-old Cree girl who had run away from home. They eventually moved into the inner city, Regent Park, Toronto, where Serge literally brought himself up.

At the age of eight, he played truant from school and ended up being admitted to a residential training school, where he was abused. He became a runaway, living in abandoned buildings and garages, eating out of garbage cans. The authorities would catch him and take him back to the residential school, where the level of violence and abuse escalated.

By the age of 15, Serge was leading one of the largest, toughest street gangs in Toronto. He carried a gun, ran alcohol stills and extortion rackets. In 1967, he became one of Canada's earliest drug dealers. For 20 years he was a drug addict, 13 years an intravenous user and he smoked crack cocaine. He began to "do life on the installment plan," as he calls it, in and out of prison. All the while he rose in the power hierarchy of Canada in the criminal underworld.

In 1984, he began a nine-year term for a \$40 million drug bust. One day in prison he encountered a volunteer who told him he had a choice. He could believe either that he was an animal that walked on two legs, with no purpose or that he was a creation and that there was a Creator, that he had a soul, was of great value and had a purpose in life.

Seven months later, when he watched a 19 year-old man commit suicide in the next cell – who had gotten himself there from using drugs from Serge’s own lab and drug dealers – he thought about what the volunteer had said. He was invited to go to the chapel service and there asked for a Bible. He received a small New Testament published by The Gideon’s.

He was impressed by the story of Jesus and his disciples – the ‘gang leader’ and his ‘gang members.’” He could understand why they hid when Jesus was crucified, but not why they came out of hiding. He decided that they did so because of truth. They allowed themselves to be persecuted and slaughtered only because of truth.

So at 2:00 in the morning in 1985, on the cold cement floor of his cell, all by himself, Serge LeClerc received Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior. He had been classified as one of the most violent men in the Canadian penitentiary system, but now here he was following Jesus.

Since this time, Serge completed a university degree while in prison, graduating with honors in sociology and social work from the University of Waterloo. When he got out of prison in 1988, he continued to follow the Lord.

In 2000, he received a full government pardon, which required an act of Parliament. He founded the first chapter of Prison Fellowship in Canada, and today works with Teen Challenge in Saskatchewan as a regional director. The program he supervises has a near 90% success rate. And the icing on the cake is that he has been invited to run as a Member of the Saskatchewan Legislature. As he says,

“Never before in the history of North America has someone gone from lawbreaker to lawmaker.”

The former drug lord, his life radically changed by Jesus Christ, now rescues other drug addicts in the name of Jesus.

- Former Drug Lord story - Thoughts about God,
<http://www.thoughts-about-god.com/stories/leclerc.htm>
January 24, 2012

You see, there is no doubt in my mind that God is working today, He saved me and He saved you and His love is reaching out to all the people of this world to rescue them from the mire of sin that they are in and to get them to place their feet upon the solid Rock, Jesus Christ instead of the shifting sand of this world that is leading them down a path of death and destruction! We have seen the evidence for this transformation, now does the Bible say God's Word will transform our lives when we come to Him and surrender our lives to Him? Absolutely!

Paul, in Romans 12:1-2 tells us, "**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**"

Paul tells us that we are to be a living sacrifice unto God. That is our lives are to be placed on the altar to be offered up as a burnt offering, totally given to God, and it will be a sweet smelling sacrifice unto God as we do. Too often we give God portions of our lives but not our entire being. He wants it all and as we do, He gives it back to us so we may bring Him glory! As we give ourselves to God, Paul tells us that it is our **“reasonable service”** or literally **“spiritual worship”** for the word **“service”** in the Greek is LATREIA (lat-ri'-ah), which speaks of the worship of God! So not only is a life given to God reasonable service but it is also our reasonable or spiritual worship unto God!

And then Paul speaks of being conformed or being transformed. And Paul contrasts the two because they are vastly different. Being **“conformed to this world”** speaks of becoming like this world, influenced by this world, this system of man apart from God whose ruler is the Devil himself as Paul tells us, **“whose minds the god of this age has blinded . . .”** II Corinthians 4:4.

It is easy to just stand there and let the world press you into their mold. But Paul is telling us that we need to resist being put into their mold because, as Paul said in Romans 8:6-8, **“For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”**

As you surrender your life unto God as a living sacrifice, you will not be conformed to this world but you are being **“transformed by the renewing of your mind.”** The word **“transformed”** in the Greek is METAMORPHOO (met-am-or-fo'-o) and it speaks of a metamorphosis that is taking place in our lives. You see, as you spend time with God, as you read His Word, God is working on the inside of you, transforming you into His image and that transformation that is taking place on the inside will overflow to the outside as we see in those that surrender their lives to Jesus!

Think about it like this. I can go and get the best running shoes in the world, spend hundreds of dollars on them. I can buy the best running gear the world can offer. I can look perfect; I can look like an elite runner prepared to run the Olympic Marathon. What is the problem here? It is all outward, it is all superficial, I may look like an Olympic runner by what I am wearing, how I am dressed, but on the inside, I am not. You see, there has been no transformation you might say of my muscles, no training at all. And when will this fakeness be exposed? When I am in the race!

How true that is. You see, people can look good outwardly, they can dress the part of a Christian you might say and they will do fine until they get in the race. In other words, when things heat up, when things don't go the way that they want, you will see what is really on the inside and that will flow outwardly in what they do and what they say!

I like how the J. B. Phillips translation of Romans 12:1-2 is done, it is powerful. He said: “With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give Him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to Him and acceptable by Him. Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the Plan of God for you is good, meets all His demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.” I like that!

And Paul truly sums it up for us as he tells us in I Corinthians 6:9-11, **“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”**

This is important. Paul lists all these sins and tells us that those that commit these things will not inherit the kingdom of God. And then he said, **“such were some of you.”** Then what happened to them? They were transformed by the power of God into the kingdom of God as Paul tells us, **“But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”** Their lives, our lives have been transformed because we have been washed, we have been sanctified, we have been justified in the Lord and as we read God’s Word we are renewing our minds to be like His, our lives will change outwardly because we have been changed inwardly!

Let me close this morning with this story. We are told, Charles Bradlaugh was the outstanding atheist in England. Down in one of the slums of London was a minister by the name of Hugh Price Hughes. All London was aware of miracles of grace accomplished at his mission.

Charles Bradlaugh challenged Mr. Hughes to debate with him the validity of the claims of Christianity. London was greatly interested. What would Mr. Hughes do? He immediately accepted the challenge and in doing so added one of his own.

Hughes said, "I propose to you that we each bring some concrete evidence of the validity of our own beliefs in the form of men and women who have been redeemed from the lives of sin and shame by the influence of our teaching. I will bring 100 such men and women, and I challenge you to do the same.

"If you cannot bring 100, Mr. Bradlaugh, to match my 100, I will be satisfied if you will bring 50 men and women who will stand and testify that they have been lifted up from lives of shame by the influence of your teachings. If you cannot bring 50, then bring 20 people who will say, as my 100 will, that they have a great joy in a life of self-respect as a result of your atheistic teachings. If you cannot bring 20, I will be satisfied if you bring 10.

"Nay, Mr. Bradlaugh, I challenge you to bring one, just one man or woman who will make such a testimony regarding the uplifting of your atheistic teachings."

Again London was stirred. What would Mr. Bradlaugh do? In answer, Charles Bradlaugh, with great discomfiture [humiliation] and chagrin, publicly withdrew his challenge for the debate.

- Morning Glory

Make no mistake about it, God's Word will transform our lives from the inside out and we have seen the evidence. From the Roman coliseum with all the persecution and martyrdom that took place there to the persecutions of the Middle Ages of men and women who turned to Christ and had their lives transformed. To today as we see drug and alcohol addicts, the outcasts of society, thieves, murders, liars, cheats, immoral people come to Jesus and have their lives changed, transformed, they will never be the same.

If you have not done that yet, won't you please come to Jesus and ask Him to be Lord and Savior of your life! He loves you more than you will ever know and He wants to transform you life if you will let Him! And for all of us, such were some of us, but we have been washed, we have been sanctified, we have been justified by the Lord Jesus Christ! May we never forget that and may we never stop thanking Him for the work He has done in us, is doing in us and will do in us! The transformation power of the Word of God, the Bible! What is your story?