

## HOW TO GET CLOSER TO GOD

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Intro//

Good Morning Church! Welcome back for our second week of our series Transformed. This weekend we begin part one as we start looking at seven key transformational areas of your life. If you make changes in these 7 areas, you are most definitely see transformation begin in your life.

Our theme verse for this series is Romans 12:2. Pastor Jackie mentioned it last week in the introduction. Let's read it together.

**Romans 12:2, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."**

The way you think determines the way you feel and the way you feel determines the way you act.

**The key to transformation doesn't start in your actions, behavior, or your body. It doesn't start with your will.**

- It starts with your thoughts.
- And if you can change the way you think that'll change the way you feel.
- And if you change the way you feel that will change the way you act.

We're going to take that principle, Romans 12:2 principle, and apply it to all seven key areas of your life - relational, physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, financial, vocational. Our goal over the next 7 weeks is to dig into how God changes & transforms us in these areas.

**Transformation helps us to become all that God wants us to be.**

Today we are going to look at our Spiritual Health.

**The thing about our Spiritual life is that the further away you get from God the more trouble you're going to have in your life.**

- The more trials, the more difficulties, the more stress, the more things are going to go wrong because you're not cooperating with your Creator.
- You're not following God's plan for your life.

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- And the Bible says the way of the unrighteous is rough. It's full of thorns. It's difficult. It's a rocky, rocky road. The further I get away from God, the more trouble I'm going to have in my life.

On the other hand, the closer I get to God, the more my life is going to be transformed.

We can see this all through Scripture.

#### Paul

- When he had his encounter with God, he was radically transformed.
- He went from killing those who chose to follow Jesus to one of the greatest Christian voices to every walk the planet.
- He wrote a good chunk of the New Testament.
- The words he wrote gives us a guide on how to live & grow as believers of Jesus.

#### Moses

- Moses got so close to God, the Bible says, he was even transformed in his appearance.
- People had to even look away from him. He almost glowed.
- He was literally physically transformed.

We all want to be close to God.

You wouldn't be here this weekend if you didn't want to be close to God in some way.

**But the Bible says, "All we like sheep have gone astray. We each have turned into our own way."**

Which means that we can sometimes get a little off track in our spiritual life.

You don't have to teach sheep to drift off.

- They just do it naturally.
- By their very nature they just kind of wander off and the shepherd has to bring them back in.
- And they'll walk off a cliff. (Sheep aren't really that bright an animal.)
- They'll walk into a den of wolves. And in all kinds of difficult and dangerous situations. Sheep tend to wander.
- Just like sheep... We don't tend to stay close to God. We tend to wander off.

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Earlier, I said the closer you get to God the more you're going to be transformed. Today, we need to talk about....

- How do you get close to God?
- How do you stay close to God?
- And if you've fallen away from God, how do you get back in that close relationship to God?

Some of you can point to a time in your life where you'd say,

- I remember when I really felt God's presence.
- I was close to God. I could sense his friendship.
- I could sense the fellowship.
- There was a joy in my life. But I've lost that.
- How do I get back to God if I've kind of wandered away? Kind of lost the spark. Because if I'm not close to God I don't have the power to make all the other transformations.

Fortunately we have a story in the Bible on how to get back to God and how to get close to the Father.

That story is in Luke 15 (NLT)

**"Jesus told this story: 'A man had two sons. The younger son told his father, 'Give me my share of your estate now, instead of waiting until you die.' So his father divided his wealth between his sons. A few days later the younger son packed all his belongings and left home to live in a distant land. [He's already getting away from the father. He's getting distant from the father] (He got as far away from his father as he could.) [He goes to a distant land] There he squandered the gift he'd been given [and we've all done that.] and wasted his life and money on wild parties and reckless living. About the time all his money ran out, a severe famine hit the land, and he began to starve because he was left with nothing. [Now he's getting hungry] The only job he could find was feeding swine on a farm. He became so desperate and hungry that even the pig slop he was feeding the swine looked good to him. But no one would give him anything for his hunger. When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'This is crazy! At my Father's home even the**

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lowest paid workers eat well, while I'm far away dying of hunger! [So he says, I know what I'm going to do...] I'm going to return home to my Father and humbly say: Father, I have sinned against both God and you, and I am not worthy to be a part of this family or called your son. But please just make me one of your servants who works for you.' [I'm not even a family member. Just hire me out as a servant. Make me one of your servants...] who works for you. With that attitude, he headed back home to his Father. But while the son was still a long distance away [he hadn't got all the way back home], his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran out to his son, threw his arms around him, and kissed him! The son said [he's got his prepared speech.] 'Father, I've sinned against both God and you, and I'm no longer worthy of being called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring me the finest robe in our house and put it on him. Then get my signet ring for his finger and shoes for his feet. Then roast the calf we have been fattening. We're going to celebrate with a feast of eating and drinking. For this child of mine was distant and dead but now he's back and alive! He was lost, but now he's found! So the party began!'"

This is an incredible story of how every one of us tends to wander away from the Father who made us, wander away from the God who loves us.

I know the bible doesn't say the prodigal's son's name.. but for the purposes of me telling the story today... we are going to call him Malcom.

Malcom starts off an attitude of entitlement  
Saying Dad, give me what belongs to me... now.  
I want my money NOW!  
He packs up and heads off for the Sunset Strip in Jerusalem.  
He starts blowing all of his money, just out there living it up..  
Well... that money didn't last long....  
He finds himself broke at the same time his country is in the middle of a famine.  
He doesn't have any money, can't find food... he needs a job like yesterday.  
The only job he can get is tending to some dirty, smelly pigs at a farm.

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Side note: This dude was Jewish (BTW does anyone know a Jewish guy named Malcom? )... Jewish folk don't eat pork, they don't touch pork, they don't have anything to do with pork.

And here he is out there working with, hanging out with, feeding the pigs...

**Because his decisions lead him to a place where he was never supposed to be.**

- He gets so hungry and he gets so desperate he's going, "Man! This pig slop is looking pretty good!"
- Then it says he starts thinking! "wait a minute... The servants (who were poor) that work for my Dad, eat better than this. "What in the world am I doing?"
- He knows he messed up.
  - He doesn't deserve his father's love.
  - He's just wasted half of his dad's inheritance.
  - All his dad earned his entire life, working to earn.

He says, I know what I'm going to do.

- I'm not going to go home and ask the father to just accept me back in the fam.
- I'm just going to go home and say, can I work for you?
- I'd rather be a servant in your house than be here in a distant country starving to death.

And you know the rest of the story as we saw the father's response.

From this story we gain the four things you need to do to get back to God. I don't know where you are today. You may be way, way, way, way far away. Maybe you haven't been to church in years and years. Or maybe you've just been distant for a week. You've had one of those weeks where you thought, I really don't feel God's presence in my life. And yet we all long to be close to God. How do I get back to him? You do these four things.

This is the pathway back to spiritual transformation.

#### **1. I HAVE TO GET FED UP WITH MY LIFE**

I get fed up with my life.

I get fed up with my circumstance.

I get fed up with the way I've been living.

I just get sick and tired of being sick and tired.

I am not going to live this way anymore.

I am too stressed out. I'm too lonely. I'm too depressed.

I am overworked and busy. I don't like the life I'm living right now.

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Transformation is NOT going to happen in your life until you get tired with being where you are.

You've got to get desperate. You've got to get hungry. You've got to get anxious for a change.

#### Nothing happens until you get fed up.

In that passage of Scripture it says this: "He wasted it all... He had nothing left... He got desperate and hungry... And he finally came to his senses." That's where transformation starts.

Are you there yet? If not that's okay. God will just let you stay there. And he'll allow a little rain in your life. And if that doesn't work he'll allow a little bit more in your life. If that doesn't work he'll send a storm.

Why? Because God loves you just the way you are but he loves you too much to let you stay that way. He will not let you waste your life.

When God wants to get our attention he allows life's hurricanes to come and hit our lives.

Some of you have experienced these types of hurricanes. You lost your job. Or you lost your marriage. Or you lost a friend. You lost something.

Why? Because God does everything he does in your life out of love. He does not want you to miss him and he does not want you to waste your life.

The first step in transformation is for you to get disgusted, to get discontent, to get fed up with the way you're living.

**Jeremiah 29:13 says this: GOD: "You'll find me when you get serious about finding me and want it more than anything else."**

God is not going to reveal himself if I just kind of want to do it on the casual, just kind of a part time hobby. I've got to get fed up with the way I'm living. "There's got to be more to life than this. There's got to be a better way to live than this. You have to get fed up.

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#### **2. I HAVE TO OWN UP TO MY SIN**

You own up. First, I get fed up and second I own up. I own up to my own sin. That's the second thing that this young man did. First he got fed up. But then in verses 17-18 it says, *"When he came to his senses he said, 'I have sinned against God and you.'"*

Nothing is going to happen until you come to stage two.  
Stage two is you've just got to own up. That ain't easy, but it's necessary.

#### **I need to face up to the fact that I have not been living God's way.**

I've been living my way. I've been doing it my way.

I've been doing it the way I think is best.

I've been doing it in a way that tries to control everything around me.

So I own up. What do I own up to? I own up to my sin. *"When he came to his senses he said, 'I have sinned.'"*

#### **Isaiah 59:2, "Your sins have separated you from your God, and have hidden his face from you..."**

Have you ever prayed and you felt like God was a million miles away? Have you ever prayed and felt like your prayers were bouncing off the ceiling? Have you ever prayed and felt. I can't see God. I can't hear God. I can't feel God. I feel like I'm just talking to myself.

Where does that come from? Your sins have separated you from your God and he's hidden his face from you.

That's where it comes from. It comes from your sin.

**If you feel far from God, guess who moved...God hasn't moved.** God didn't move. God didn't go on vacation. But if you feel far from God *you're* the one who moved.

We move away by giving your love to something else. When you give anything else your love there's a word for that in the Bible.  
It's called an idol.

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**You are as close to God as you choose to be.** The fact is you haven't been desperate. You haven't been fed up enough to say, I am desperate to know God.

If I were to hold you under water, you would struggle. But when you really started running out of breath, you would really struggle. Because you would be desperate for air.

When you're that desperate you don't just get fed up, you own up. And you say, I've got to know God.

Here's the prayer you should pray. Psalm 51. David prayed this prayer after he committed adultery and killed Uriah, Bathsheba's husband. This is pretty serious sin. Psalm 51:1-4, David says this: **"Be merciful to me, O God, because of your constant love. Because of your great mercy wipe away my sins! Wash away all my evil and make me clean! I recognize my faults and I am conscious that I've sinned against you."**

### **3. I HAVE TO OFFER UP MYSELF**

I offer up my life. I offer up myself. I offer up my total being.

This is the third thing that we find this young man did. He got fed up - he came to his senses. He owned up - he said I've sinned against God. Then he offered up.

**Notice in Luke 15:12, "The son drifted away saying, "GIVE ME MY share..." Then Luke 15:19 he comes back, "He returned to the Father saying, 'MAKE ME a servant.'"**

Do you notice any change in attitude there?

- He leaves saying, "Give me." Give me, give me, give me.
- He comes back saying, "Make me!" That is transformation.
- When your heart moves from self-centeredness to God centeredness. That is transformation.

That transformation doesn't happen overnight.

**2 Corinthians 3:18, "We reflect the Lord's glory and are being transformed [that means a continual process - We are being**

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**transformed. Not just once but an ongoing basis. It's a process] into his likeness. With ever increasing glory which comes from the Lord."**

That word "transformed." The Bible, the New Testament was written in Greek. But you know what the word there in Greek - *metamorphoo*. Does that sound like anything you know? Metamorphosis. What is metamorphosis? It's when a butterfly goes from a caterpillar to a butterfly. That's metamorphosis.

**Romans 12:1 is our theme verse. But let me read you the verse before it. "Because God is merciful to you, offer yourselves." That's it. I offer up myself. That's step one. I get fed up. I own up and now I offer up. "Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship and don't be conformed to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."**

No transformation until you do the offer up.

### **The Father's Response**

It's important to notice the father's response. Luke 15:20, 22, *"Filled with love and compassion, he ran out to his son, threw his arms around him, and kissed him!...Bring the best..."* [Bring the best robe. Bring the best ring. Bring the best shoes. Bring the fatted calf. All these things. The father's response. Notice he didn't wait for the son to come home. While he was still distant he ran out.

The moment you just say, "God, I'm tired of living the way I've been living. I'm tired." He will do more than halfway. He will run out to meet you. God is not waiting for you to come knocking at the door. He runs out to you. He takes the initiative. He throws his arms around you. He kisses you. He says, "I know you blew it. Get the best robe. Get the best clothes in the house. Go get my signet ring [You know why he says that? You know what a signet ring is? In those days a signet ring was your credit card. You take the ring and you press it in wax and that was like the credit card. He says go get my unlimited America Express. And bring it to my son who just blew half of my income.

**God doesn't hold a grudge against all the dumb stuff you've done.** He's ready to lavishly pour this on. Bring out the best. God has a better plan for your life than you can imagine.

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How do I get back to God? I get fed up, I own up. And I offer up. Then there's one more thing I do....

You come back to God in celebration.

### **4. I LIFT UP MY PRAISE**

I just say thank you God. Thank you for your grace. Thank you for your love. Thank you for your goodness. I lift up my praise.

Jesus said... Those who have been forgiven much... love much.

Lifting up your praise can be done by opening up your mouth & worshipping God. You don't have to be a great singer to worship God.

Growing up, when my parents were out of town, we would spend time at both of our grandparents house. When we went to stay with the Martin's we had to go to church. They would start out with prayer, then some songs "Testimony service" every now and then, one of the saints would stand up and say " When I think of the goodness of Jesus, and all he's done for me.. my soul cries out Hallelujah... thank God for saving me"

It's easy to worship when you know you've been redeemed.

The Bible says in Psalms 68:4, "Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him... his name is the Lord!"

**For your own transformation you need to start singing at church.**

But the Bible doesn't say be pretty in your singing. It says make a joyful *noise*. You can do that. Anybody can make a joyful noise. You don't have to be on key. You just have to make a joyful noise. For your own transformation you need to sing.

**The father celebrated. He had a celebration. Not a condemnation - a celebration.** When the son came back home. I'm fed up, I'm owning up and I'm

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going to offer up and now I lift up my praise. And we're going to party and we're going to party and we're going to celebrate and we're going to sing.

Another way to lift up praise is through Thanksgiving.

**1 Corinthians 11:23 says this: "On the night he was betrayed the Lord Jesus took bread and he spoke a prayer of thanksgiving. He broke the bread and he said 'This is my body which is given for you. Do this to remember me.'" He said I never want you to forget how much I love you. So I'm going to give you two symbols to remember my death, my burial and my resurrection. Those two symbols are baptism and the Lord's Supper.**

If you haven't been baptized you should be baptized. It's one of the ways of saying I have come home. I'm getting close to God. I'm coming home. Baptism is one and the Lord's Supper is the other.

The next time we have communion.. make sure that you're here so that you can participate.

It says he prayed a prayer of thanksgiving before he served communion. When we take communion, we are saying thank you God. Thank you for not condemning me when I come home but having a celebration when I come home. Thank you for your grace. Thank you for your mercy. Thank you for what you've done. Thank you for all the things that you've done. I receive it with thanks. .