

from the Inside Out

Discovering a deeper
+
more transformative life
with God



Trinity Small Groups
2023-2024

Trinity Lutheran Church (ELCA)
2060 County Road 6
Long Lake, MN 55356

FOREWARD by Pastor Ann

Christ came to bring us abundant life—both now and after we die. Yet even faithful followers sometimes have a hard time remembering the “right now” of his promise of abundant life. Now more than ever, there seems to be an abundance of anger and fear, emptiness and hopelessness, anxiety and sadness. While we have learned in church that God is alive and at work in the world, sometimes it feels too good to be true.

And so we try—seeking happiness where we can, or looking in the wrong places for ways to fill the emptiness. But therein lies the problem: We become discouraged when what we try doesn't work—and then it turns us away from the truth. For example, in my 30s, every time I went into a bookstore, I headed for the Self-Help section; I was always on the lookout for the latest book that might hold the key to making me feel: happier...more fulfilled...more at peace. Though I bought many books, I never made it all the way through any of them because none of them gave me what I truly needed. Brought up in the faith, I'd veered off that path for a time, and I was so grateful when, finally, I found myself back on it again.

Many of us spend a lot of time, energy, and money on things of this world while neglecting to care for our spiritual natures. When we are feeling detached from God or our faith, it can be an indication that we've curved inward on ourselves. Becoming mindful about our spiritual formation helps us reclaim our relationship with God as God intended it to be. As the apostle Paul wrote: “Let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.” (Eph 4:23-24). May this study renew and deepen the connection you already have with God!

Welcome to Trinity Small Groups

A small group is a great place to practice listening as well as to discover where and how God is present and working in your life and in the world around you. Hearing stories from other group members often helps small group participants see their faith in new ways.

Consider your small group as a tiny community you've moved into: You may start out not knowing anyone but soon find that as you work together, relationships are formed. Ideally, your small group is a safe place to share stories and experiences; what you share and what is shared by others can be quite sacred; the stories shared in your group are meant only for your group.

Advance preparation for each session is up to you. All you need for each session are the materials you were given at the beginning. You may wish to bring your Bible and a notebook to write in. It may be helpful for you to read the video transcript ahead of your session time.

Thank you, again, for choosing to be part of Trinity Small Groups; we are confident the Holy Spirit will use your time together to bring new insight and to grow your awareness of the presence of the living God in your daily life.

For Small Group Leaders

Thank you for leading your small group! Here are a few guidelines that will help you facilitate your small group time:

- Together with your group agree on how long each session should go and then honor that time frame. The recommended time for each session is 60 to 75 minutes.
- Look over the Opening and Closing Prayers to familiarize yourself with them ahead of time. You do not have to use these prayers to open or close your time together—the important thing is to open and close with prayer.
- Set the meeting space up for the group; any refreshments are optional. If there is a video component, make sure it is set up and ready to go.
- Optional: Light a candle to serve as a reminder of the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- If your group is new, nametags may be helpful; the office can provide these for you.
- Have a Bible handy; encourage participants to bring a Bible.
- As host, plan to lead the Welcome and Opening. Play any videos, guide discussions, ask the questions, invite questions, and keep an eye on the clock so things finish on time. Invite participants to take turns leading opening/closing prayers, or a session.
- Follow-up with members as needed and send reminders for the next meeting date and topic. Questions or insights? Connect with Pastor Ann.

How to lead a session of “From the Inside Out”

At least a day before your group meets:

Make sure you’ve got the video working; you can access the materials through Renovaré, who is making this course available for free. This web address will take you to the place where you can sign up for free access. It is strongly suggested you download the video ahead of time so that internet access/buffering/wi-fi won’t be a concern. Make sure the sound will be easily heard by your group (i.e. If played on a laptop, it may help to have an external speaker plugged in). Your group should each have their supplement books with the transcripts of the videos, so audio issues should be of minimal concern. <https://renovare.org/courses/io>

Welcome and Opening

Always welcome participants by name and/or introduce yourself to them and to others as they arrive. Not everyone will remember everyone else’s names, even after a few sessions.

Opening Prayer (page 4)

Review ahead of time to be familiar with it and decide how you would like to pray it (A-D or C-D). For some sessions, a different prayer is written. Or you may use a prayer of your own.

Opening Question

These are questions intended to get the group started. You’ll want to be aware of the time you spend discussing this opening question as each video runs close to 15 minutes and may produce a lot of discussion.

More on...

These short articles come from Renovaré’s weekly newsletter, and are related to the session topic.

Video

Check ahead of time that your video plays and sound works. Encourage participants to follow along with transcript (supplemental booklet) and take notes if they wish. Have pens/pencils available.

Questions

Provided to help get discussion going after the video. You are not limited to these questions.

Focus| Discussion

Thoughts pulled from materials related to the study, as well as some from Pastor Ann. Read this section aloud and follow up with discussion. As leader, take notes, especially if participants seek clarity on something—sometimes the answer comes later or in a future session.

Closing Prayer (page 4) You are free to use this or any other means of prayer to close.

Thank you for leading your small group!

OPENING PRAYER

If desired, light a candle to remind participants of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Have participants sit comfortably, close their eyes if they wish, and focus on their breath. Remind them that distracting thoughts will come, and to just gently set them aside.

Leader guides participants with prompts **A thru D** or **C and D only**, allowing a pause before moving on to the next prompt:

- A)** As you think about the past day or week, what was life-giving for you? *[pause]*
- B)** As you think about the past day or week, what was energy depleting? *[pause]*
- C)** Center yourself in the moment, breathing in and thinking to yourself, "God's presence" and breathing out, thinking "God's peace." *[Allow time for three or four breaths.]*
- D)** Close prayer with "Amen."

CLOSING PRAYER

From Psd1m 46:10 ~ "Be still and know that I am God"

Leader: (may be a different leader each session)

Be still and know that I am God. *[pause]*

Be still and know that I am. *[pause]*

Be still and know. *[pause]*

Be still. *[pause]*

Be. *[pause]*

Amen. *[If candle was lit, extinguish.]*

Session Topics for “From the Inside Out”

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Separate booklet – Video Supplement – Transcriptions of the Video Segments

Session 1 – What is Spiritual Formation?

Welcome and Opening

Opening Prayer – page 4

Opening Question

- What do you think and/or feel when you hear the phrase “spiritual formation”?

Video – For transcription, see Video Supplement booklet.

Questions

- What were some major shaping forces on the way you think and live?
- What situations and seasons of life have most changed you and the way you respond to things?

More...on Spiritual Formation *from Renovaré’s Brian Morykon*

I had just dropped off my son at school and was talking with Park, a professional musician and fellow fifth-grade parent. “My son has good rhythm,” I explained, “but he doesn’t have the discipline to play drums.” “Oh, I didn’t have any discipline when I started playing guitar,” Park replied. “I just fell in love with it; the discipline came later.”

- *I have a few thoughts about spiritual formation: Everyone is spiritually formed, intentionally or not, from murderers to Mother Teresa.*
- *Your spirit—your inner self, your will, your character, your “default chooser”—is deeply shaped by your experiences and teachers (who may be actual instructors or parents, peers, “influencers,” etc.)*
- *Early in life, these experiences and teachers are largely chosen for you; as you get older, you have more choices about who and what shapes you.*

- *Christian spiritual formation is what happens when you center your life on Jesus. It isn't primarily about practices—it's about falling in love with and following Jesus. This love sparks and sustains spiritual disciplines, even when they are hard.*

It's true that you can't become a great drummer merely by loving music. Many people appreciate and analyze drum solos but can't play a basic beat. Becoming a drummer requires practice. But Park is right: the process of becoming one begins with—and is sustained by—love for the music and the craft.

All analogies break down at some point, and I can feel this one buckling. Being spiritually formed in Jesus is more than gaining a skill. It is receiving a new heart. And while we are active receivers—there's stuff we can do to cooperate with God—a renewed heart is always a gift.

Thankfully there are countless helps in this process of becoming more like Jesus, like friends who remind you that sustained practice and growth begins with love.*

* To read an excerpt on this topic from a new book by Rich Villodas, go to Renovare.org and type in the search bar: My Story of Being Formed.

Focus | Discussion

We are constantly being shaped whether we realize it or not. The shaping of our faith is also known as spiritual formation and, when it comes to this important part of our lives, when done with intentionality, we are guided by the Holy Spirit, who tunes our lives in such a way as to grow and nourish our faith. Through this process, the Spirit transforms us to become more and more like Christ, which is what God intends as the goal for our lives—as found in various places in the New Testament. Here are a few:

Philippians 2:5 – Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.

1 John 2:6 – Whoever says, “I abide in him,” ought to walk in the same way as he walked.

1 Corinthians 11:1 – Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Ephesians 5:1 – Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.

John 15:12 – This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Another way to think of spiritual formation is that it happens as we live in a way that centers our lives around being faithful to and aware of God in our daily lives—at work and at play, at home and in our communities and congregations. None of this happens by accident. It requires discipline and grace and perseverance—but with it come joy and a deeper connection and relationship with God. Oh, and it also takes time—a lifetime, in fact. Because living this side of heaven means our spiritual formation is never complete.

What is Spiritual Formation?

Who you are on the inside is gradually shaped for better or worse by who you spend time with, by what you do, and by what happens to you. Some things that have a huge impact on your spiritual formation are outside your control, for example, how and where you were raised. Other things—like what you watch, listen to, and read, or how you spend your time

and money—are largely up to you. *All* of these influences mold your deepest desires and perspectives, which in turn impact your outward actions.

Once something harmful forms within us, like anger, pride, or insecurity, its ill effects spill out in our words and behaviors—especially in stressful situations. Simply *trying* to be different won't work. But there is hope: This is why Jesus sent us the Holy Spirit! God intends for us to live as people transformed by the righteousness of Christ and the grace of God. Remember that *what* and *who* you allow to shape you is a vital part of your ongoing spiritual formation; the job of the Holy Spirit is to do this work in you but you have a part in this, too. Jesus said, "I came that [you] may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10) This life and abundance is what Jesus intends us to have now. Through the Spirit, Christ continues to shape us—to influence us—from the inside out.

Questions

- The video presenter stated that spiritual formation happens when you intentionally center your life in Christ. From the video, or drawing from your own experience, what are some ways this happens?
- Was there anything about this unit or the video that got your attention—whether it affirmed something you already knew or made you feel uncomfortable or uncertain?

Closing Thoughts from Pastor Ann:

Was there something in this session that caused you to feel resistance or uncomfortable about making Jesus the primary shaping influence in your life? From my own experience, when something (whether a Bible passage or a new spiritual practice) makes me feel uncomfortable, it tells me I need to pay a little more attention to it. I will think about it, talk about it with a trusted friend, or ask the Spirit's help in revealing something to me that maybe I'm not willing to see.

From now until your group meets again, find time each day to ask God to show you what God wants you to see, hear, or be aware of that day, i.e. before you get out of bed, as you drive somewhere, as you go into the store, etc. At the end of the day, ask the Spirit to help you reflect on where you encountered God that day. Jot down what comes to mind, remembering that God is present even in something you thought was totally insignificant.

Closing Prayer – page 4

NOTES

Session 2 – What is My Picture of God?

Welcome and Opening

Opening Prayer – page 4

Opening Question

- What can you remember about your childhood picture of God. Does it still shape the way you see God now?

Video – For transcription, see Video Supplement booklet.

Questions

- What is your default picture of God? Is it a picture of a good and loving God, or a God who is distant and indifferent? Is it a picture of a God who is chronically disappointed in you? A God who is well-meaning but ineffective?
- How might your default picture of God have affected you during a challenging time in your life?
- Why is our picture of God so important?

More on... How We See God *from Renovaré's Brian Morykon*

As a kid, Jesus' parable of the talents bothered me.

In the familiar story, a rich man goes on a trip and gives three servants a chunk of change to manage—each a different amount but all significant. When the master returns, two servants have doubled the money. He's pleased. "Well done! Let's work together more." Then it gets uncomfortable.

The other servant stammers, "Master, I know you have high standards...that you demand the best and make no allowances for error. I was afraid I might disappoint you, so I found a good hiding place and secured your money" (Matthew 25:24 The Message). The master is furious, has the servant thrown into "outer darkness," and gives his money to the servant with the most. Being an insecure child, I related to the servant who buried the money. The story raised lots of questions... Why was the master so harsh with him? Is God that harsh with us? If we are commanded to fear God, why is the servant punished for having an abundance of fear for the master?

Many years later, as my own distorted picture of God came into view, the parable made more sense. The story became a source of hope rather than dread. I see now that the last servant operated from a set of assumptions about the master: he's harsh, exacting, unforgiving. The master doesn't correct these assumptions; he even seems to live up to them in the end. But that doesn't mean the servant had a clear picture of his master's heart.

One might conclude that only the last servant feared the master. But all the servants did. It was the substance of their fear that differed. The last servant feared failure, punishment, and being a

disappointment. Paralyzed by a distorted picture of his master, he played the victim and missed out on the joy partnership. The other two held the master in high esteem and with utmost respect. They believed he had good intentions for them. Their picture of him didn't shut them down; it empowered them to take risks and know his delight.

With the help of people like Trevor Hudson (go to Renovare.org and type in the search bar: Drawing a Picture of God for an excerpt from Hudson's book), I've been gradually redrawing an accurate picture of God. One that affirms:

God delights to partner with us.

God is better than we hoped.

God looks like Jesus.

God is with us.

God is for us.

God is good.

God is love.

Question

- Take a few moments in silence to dwell on why the picture we hold of God is important.

Focus | Discussion

The lecturer in the video recalls the story from Genesis 3 of Adam and Eve in the garden. When they disobeyed God, it changed *them*. God didn't change—it was their sin and shame that distorted *their* perception of who God was. God has *never* changed. But the sin and brokenness that came out of the fall from the Garden of Eden *still* plagues humanity to this day—and it continues to distort *our* perception of God.

Here are some truths about who God is: It is through Jesus that we are shown who God is. Jesus shows us that God is love and God is light. God is always greater than we can imagine. God is so close to us that God *abides in us* and *we abide in God*.

As the apostle Paul preached to the pagan god worshipers at the Areopagus (Mars Hill) in Athens, "...indeed he [God] is not far from each one of us. For in him, we live and move and have our being..." (Acts 17:27-28) God *created* us to be in relationship with God!

- Have you ever felt a longing to "be" in God's presence? If so, what did that feel like and how did you respond? Did you know what or who it came from? If you are comfortable, share your story with your group.

God is Closer Than We Can Imagine

God is close. Closer than breath. Sometimes God makes that nearness palpable—we see evidence of this in the Old Testament: through vivid dreams, a burning bush, a pillar of cloud. God's arrival in human history as Jesus of Nazareth was a unique form of nearness. His physical form could be heard, seen, embraced, befriended. This kind of proximity in the flesh

might seem like the ultimate closeness. But before his ascension, Jesus told his friends, “It is to your advantage that I go away” (John 16:7).

How could Jesus leaving be to their advantage? Because the earthly body of Jesus could only be in one place at one time—and Jesus wanted to be personally and fully present to all his followers *all* the time—not just walking beside, but dwelling—*abiding*—within. So, the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Jesus (and of God)—comes to live in anyone who believes in him. And this means you are never on your own. It means you are never alone!

Questions

- Do you ever envy those who got to hear, see, and touch the physical Jesus?
- What would you say to Jesus if he were here in the flesh?
- One last time: Why *is* our picture of God so important?

Closing Thoughts from Pastor Ann

It can be a stretch for many to believe that God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit are truly abiding within us. When I teach about this truth, I say that, when we eat and drink the bread and wine at Holy Communion, we are taking Christ himself into our very bodies—which means he literally becomes part of our cellular structure. He is abiding with us, and is “closer than breath,” as the section above put it. This is not something science can explain, nor is it something we can explain, either. Simply put, it is a mystery of the divine; and we can trust (have faith) that it is true because Christ tells us it is so, “This is my body...this is my blood.”

Until the next time your group meets, I invite you to think about just how very near Jesus is to you—with each breath, he abides in you and you in him—always. Jot down any thoughts that come to you as you continue to remind yourself of his abiding presence.

Closing Prayer – page 4

NOTES

Session 3 – What is My Picture of Myself?



Welcome and Opening

Opening Prayer – page 4

Opening Question

- Ask God to bring to your mind a recent memory in which you felt accepted for who you are. What made this moment so special?

Video – For transcription, see Video Supplement booklet

Questions

- Was there anything in this video that got your attention, or you found confusing? Why?

More on...My Picture of Myself *from Renovaré's Brian Morykon*

The modern cultural consensus is that people fail to flourish because they have low self-esteem. But the opposite belief prevailed for much of human history: people don't flourish because they think too highly of themselves. Which is it? Do we need more self-esteem or less? Neither, says Tim Keller, who recently graduated into glory. In his tiny book (my favorite kind), The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness, Keller offers a brilliant exposition of 1 Corinthians 3 and 4.

*He points out that most of us derive our self-worth from others or ourselves, from how well we measure up to their standard or to our own. But the gospel of Jesus offers us something altogether different: your worth and identity come from God. You are who God says you are. And because of the work of Jesus—because we are adopted into God's family and share in Jesus' inheritance—you are, incredibly, who God says Jesus is: the beloved in whom he is well pleased. (I can't do Keller justice here, so I highly recommend getting the book. *)*

Our identity and worth is in Jesus. That's fantastic news. So why is it so hard to live from this new-life-in-Christ? Because of ingrained habits of thought and action. Because of little and big "T" traumas. Because of any number of other things that actively fight against who God says we are. But it is possible, with God's help, to grow into an accurate picture of self that leads to the freedom and joy of self-forgetfulness. Another word for this healthy self-identity? Humility. James Bryan Smith suggests a simple practice to help move us in this direction. You might try memorizing this phrase and saying it aloud, perhaps with your hand on your chest: "I am one in whom Christ dwells and delights. And I live in the strong and unshakeable Kingdom of God."

**The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness: The Path to True Christian Joy, by Tim Keller*

Focus | Discussion

Remember the question from the previous session asking about your default picture of God? Well, this session's topic is a little more personal: What is your default picture of *yourself*? How has your default picture of yourself changed over the course of your life?

Many of us struggle with the default pictures of ourselves, especially during our younger years as we try to figure out who we are, how others see us, and how we can feel accepted. But

what about when it comes to our lives of faith? How do we see ourselves when it is God who is looking at us? Have you ever felt as though you have failed God and that you now have to do something good to win back God's favor or get back on God's good side?

Feeling like we must do something to be accepted—whether it's to fit in with the popular crowd or be in right relationship with God—is a waste of time and energy. However, just as the picture we have of God is important to our relationship with God, how we see ourselves is important to understanding our immeasurable value and worth apart from anything the world would have us believe. In the previous session we listed some truths about God. Now, let's get to what is true about you!

You were made in the image of God and because of this, you are of immeasurable value to God. You are beyond precious to our Creator. The message God gives to Jesus at his baptism, (heard again at his transfiguration): "You are my Son, the beloved; with you, I am well pleased," is the exact same message God has for you, too. "Insert your name here, my beloved child; I am pleased with you."

In this session's video, the lecturer remarked: "Jesus came to show us that image bearers are God's beloved...before they've done anything to earn that love. Think of John 3:16, 'God so loved the world that he sent his only beloved son,' not 'God sent his son so that the world could become lovable.' God's love always comes first. So this is your baseline identity. You are God's little image bearer. You are wanted into being. You are God's beloved."

She also says that we are deeply bent (broken/sinful/flawed). That while God made us to flourish by giving ourselves away (to God and to others) God's agape love doesn't come naturally to us because we are curved in on ourselves (in Latin: *Incurvatus in se*).

Martin Luther was the one who pointed this out. Even though we have an impulse to love, we will always put ourselves first, which obstructs that others-centered (agape) love, because when it comes right down to it, there always has to be something in it for us.

Here is how Luther put it: *The Bible describes man as curved in upon himself to such an extent that he bends not only physical, but also spiritual goods toward himself, seeking himself in all things.*

I Am Made in the Image of God

Human beings have a unique place in creation. We are the only creatures made in the image of God, breathed into life from God's own Spirit. The way we were created brings us into a special relationship with God. As image-bearers of the living God, how we treat ourselves and others matters beyond measure.

Questions

- If you could live today fully aware of your unique value as a person who bears the image of God, how would that awareness change your perspective and your actions?

- If you could see each person you encounter for the next week as God’s beloved image-bearer, how might that change your interactions?

Deeper Questions (to discuss or to ponder in the week ahead)

- Growing up, did you sense that you were fully accepted and loved as you were, or was your acceptance based on your behavior? What effect did this have on how you see yourself? Did it rub off on how you see and treat others?
- Christians often revert back to working *for* God’s acceptance rather than living *from* God’s acceptance. Have you found that to be true in your life? Why do we do that?
- If God loves us no matter what, and we are already accepted, why does God care so much how we think and how we treat each other?

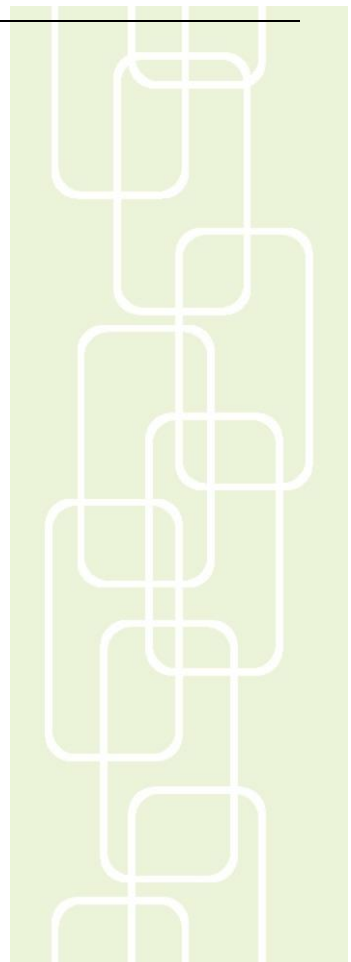
Closing Thoughts from Pastor Ann

The truth about you that will never change is that you are deeply loved and made holy because of Jesus while at the same time deeply bent (broken)—as Martin Luther said, 100% saint and 100% sinner. There are times we let our brokenness (our sin) get in the way of remembering | knowing | living into this profound love God has for us.

For this important part of the spiritual formation journey, you are encouraged to ask God each morning when you wake up, to give you an awareness of God’s profoundly personal love for you. And keep asking, even if you never “feel” anything. Also, always be on the lookout for how God answers your prayers. Use the space below for notes.

Closing Prayer – page 4

NOTES



Session 4 – What is My Picture of the Gospel?

Welcome and Opening

Opening Prayer *(take turns, each person reading one line until ALL)*

Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

Jesus, I belong to you.

I lift up my heart to you.

I set my mind on you.

I fix my eyes on you.

I offer my body to you as a living sacrifice.

ALL: Jesus, we belong to you.

ALL: In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Opening Question

- What do you think and feel when you hear the phrase, “the Gospel?” Did that term have a different meaning for you growing up than it does for you now as an adult?

Video – For transcription, see Video Supplement booklet.

A note from Pastor Ann: *In Sessions 1 through 3, I included a short article related to that session’s focus, written by Renovaré’s Brian Morykon. When this study was printed, the articles for the final three sessions had not yet been released. If you are interested in receiving those articles, contact me, or go to <https://renovare.org/> and subscribe to the Friday newsletter (Renovaré Weekly).*

Focus | Discussion

What, if anything, in this video surprised you?

For me [Pastor Ann], what surprised me was the talk in this session’s video about making a personal decision to say yes to Jesus. As a Lutheran, hearing this term always gets my attention. So instead of glossing over it, it is worth taking some time with the transcript to see what the lecturer is talking about here. The Lutheran standpoint on saying “yes” to Jesus is that Jesus has already said “yes” to us *first*. His “yes” happened on the cross when he died to take the sins of the world (*our sins*) onto himself. It is our *response* to what Jesus has done for us that is our “yes.” We are invited to say yes to the good news Jesus proclaimed; that is, we are invited to respond to this good news—this invitation is for us to step into the kingdom of God right now, in this life, to live and love as Christ did, and to be Christ to others.

How did Jesus define his Gospel (his Good News)? (Matt 4:17) (Mark 1:14-15) (Luke 4:42-43)

Helps:

- With his arrival, the kingdom of heaven/God is at hand (i.e., the kingdom is HERE).
- This kingdom of God breaks more and more fully into the world.
- With his arrival on the human scene, the kingdom of God has broken into earthly reality in a way like never before.
- Life that changes us from the inside out starts now—it is available *now—for us*.

What does this mean?

Helps:

- The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 14:17: “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” This means that the invitation of the gospel is for us to take our own little kingdoms (our lives and spheres of influence) and to align them with the kingdom of God, so that we can help bring in God’s kingdom where we live.
- The kingdom of God is wherever you are and with whomever you happen to be.

How might the kingdom be breaking out through you in how you live each day?

Helps:

- If Jesus came to bring the kingdom of God/heaven, and we are called to be Christ to others, then it follows that the kingdom breaks out as we become more like Christ.

What are some of the implications of Jesus’ Gospel (the Good News of Jesus Christ)?

Helps:

- You’ve become part of something much bigger than yourself; Jesus’ Gospel changes everything.
- Jesus’ Gospel means eternal life starts in the here and now.
- Jesus calls us to respond to his Gospel.
 - **What will you do differently?**
 - **How will you think differently?**
 - **How will living out the Gospel affect or change your life?**

Closing Thoughts from Pastor Ann

The prophet Isaiah said, “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of one who announces, “Your God reigns!” No one has ever fit the description better than Jesus, who talked more about the reign/kingdom of God than he did about anything else. **What would it mean for God to be in charge of our lives? And why would that be good news? How might a kingdom-centered Gospel affect your day-to-day life than other pictures of the Gospel?**

Most of the time when Jesus talks about the kingdom of God or eternal life, he is referring to something we experience here and now, not later in heaven. But sometimes, he *does* talk about that future life. **Do you have any thoughts about what it will be like to be perfect people in a perfect world, living forever with God and one another?**

Closing Prayer – page 4

NOTES

Session 5 – How Do People Change?

Welcome and Opening

Opening Prayer *(take turns, each person reading one line until ALL)*

Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

Jesus, I belong to you.

I lift up my heart to you.

I set my mind on you.

I fix my eyes on you.

I offer my body to you as a living sacrifice.

ALL: Jesus, we belong to you.

ALL: In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.



Opening Question

- Think about a time in your life when you made a change (or were changed) for the better. What things or people do you believe contributed to that change?

Video – For transcription, see Video Supplement booklet.

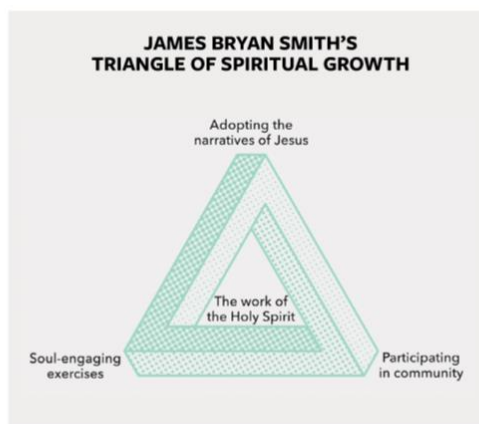
Focus | Discussion

Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2)

There is a lot to take in regarding this session’s video on transformation. (Keep in mind it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that we are transformed and renewed.)

Presented are three different theories (triangles) about transformation by three scholars/ministers. They each are slightly different, each making valuable points; you may find yourself resonating more with one than the others. But take note that each triangle includes spiritual disciplines or practices as part of the process of transformation. Spiritual practices (or disciplines—use whichever term you are comfortable with) have been used for centuries to help followers of Christ deepen their relationship with God.

Models of Transformation



The video lecturer tells a story about how, without even realizing it, she used a spiritual discipline in high school as a way to help her get over a breakup with her first serious boyfriend. She read a devotional by Brother Lawrence (a 17th-century monk) called *Practicing the Presence of God*, practiced its principles and found that she began to delight in God, no longer wanted her boyfriend back, and learned to want the things God wanted for her. She experienced a transformation in her faith and in her relationship with God.

Under pressure, what's inside of us comes out. Think of Peter's denial. He thought he was willing to die for Jesus, but in a high-pressure moment he repeatedly denied that he even knew Jesus. Jesus knew all along what was in Peter, but Peter didn't know until he was tested by fire.

All of us have automatic responses when we're under pressure. Usually when we're hurt, we hurt back. Jesus wants to give us a "new automatic"—to make us the kind of people who are naturally inclined to bless those who hate us and to pray for those who spitefully use us. This new way of being is something we cannot do on our own; however, through engaging in spiritual disciplines, we open ourselves to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

The accounts of Jesus' days in the Gospels suggest that he cultivated private habits—prayer, solitude, silence, fasting, and memorization of Scripture—that empowered him for a public life of healing, teaching, and preaching. (Luke 5:15–16; Mark 1:32–39) If Jesus felt it was important to make spiritual disciplines a priority, we can be sure they are a good idea for us as well.

A world-class violinist was once asked how she came to master her instrument. "Planned neglect," she responded. When she began violin, she explained, other necessary work came before practicing violin. It wasn't until she decided to neglect everything else each day until *after* violin practice that she started becoming a virtuoso.

In Mark 1:32-39, Jesus withdrew for prayer when his disciples thought he should be out ministering. You could say he was practicing "planned neglect" in order to make his relationship with his Father first in his life.

The obligations we have to family, work, and society are secondary to—and dependent upon—connecting with God as our first priority. "Seek first the kingdom of God," Jesus tells us, "and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33 ESV). So how do we see what we are "seeking first"? We pay attention to how we structure our days and order our thoughts. The spiritual disciplines are wonderful gifts for helping us neglect all else until we seek first the kingdom.

God has given us the disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving God's grace. The disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that God can transform us. Richard Foster

Questions

- Is transformation possible? How does transformation happen/how do people change?
- In what part of your life (at work or home, in situations or with others) would you like to automatically respond with more love?
- Since Jesus was divine, why did he still need to practice disciplines, like withdrawing alone for prayer?

Closing Thoughts from Pastor Ann

Adele Calhoun in her *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook – Practices That Transform Us* writes: “From its beginning the church linked the desire for more of God to intentional practices, relationships and experiences that gave people space in their lives to ‘keep company’ with Jesus. These intentional practices, relationships, and experiences are known as *spiritual disciplines*. The basic rhythm of disciplines for the first believers is found in Acts 2:42: ‘They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching [*a practice*] and to the fellowship [*relationships*], to the breaking of bread [*an experience*] and to prayer [*another practice*].’

“Spiritual practices don’t give us “spiritual brownie points” ... they simply put us in a place where we can *begin to notice* God and respond to God’s word to us.”

There are countless ways to engage in spiritual practices. Not everyone connects to God in the same way, however prayer is a good starting place for everyone—it might go something like this: “*God, open my eyes to your presence in my life, in all the ways that you come to me, even through unlikely people and unlikely events in unlikely places.*” And then be on the lookout for God’s presence!

Before your next session: For Jesus, there were moments of tremendous **output** (healing, teaching, preaching) balanced with moments of intentional **input** (solitude, silence, prayer). From now until next time, pay attention to the balance between your **output** (work) and your **input**. If you like, jot down what you learn using the space below.

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Session 6 – How Do I Follow Jesus?

Welcome and Opening

Opening Prayer *(take turns, each person reading one line until ALL)*

Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

Jesus, I belong to you.

I lift up my heart to you.

I set my mind on you.

I fix my eyes on you.

I offer my body to you as a living sacrifice.

ALL: Jesus, we belong to you.

ALL: In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Opening Question

Practically speaking, what does following Jesus involve?

Below, jot down ideas generated through your group's discussion:



Video – For transcription, see Video Supplement booklet.

Questions

The lecturer suggests five components involved in learning to follow Jesus:

Learning his story (reading the gospels)

Learning his lifestyle (asking questions, observing who Jesus is, what he does, etc.)

Learning to love what he loves (loving the poor, marginalized, the suffering)

Learning to lay down your life (willingness to organize your life around a new center)

Learning to practice his presence (cultivating habits of remembering Jesus)

- Do you feel a particular invitation to one of those components?
- Is there one you resist? Or one you would add to the list?

Focus | Discussion

God creates out of nothing. Wonderful you say. Yes, to be sure, but [God] does what is still more wonderful: [God] makes saints out of sinners. — Søren Kierkegaard

Why do we need a Savior? Simply put, we cannot save ourselves. Even the apostle Paul, a faithful servant of Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, found his human nature interfering with his pursuit of godliness. “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (Romans 7:19 NRSV). Paul knew that the law could convict him of his sin, but only the grace of Christ could save him from it. The idea of God’s provision of a Savior for his people—one who would crush the serpent’s head and restore right relationships—goes back to Genesis 3:14–15.

- Thinking about your own life, when do you most recognize your need for a Savior?
 - Do you recognize it in the moment, or do you need time and reflection to see it?
- Can you empathize with what Paul said in Romans 7:19 (above)? How?

Take a moment for the group to read out loud the story of the Gerasene Demoniac from Mark 5:1-20. Put yourself in the man's place and imagine what his life had been like. Then read the story again, this time, putting yourself in the place of one of the townspeople. Then wonder out loud as a group about these things and others that come up. Why did the man beg Jesus to let him go with him after he had been healed of the demons? Why wouldn't Jesus let him?

Share a gospel story about Jesus with the group that affected or touched you in some way and tell why. Or is there a question in a gospel story where Jesus asks someone he meets that hits you strongly or feels personal to you—such as an invitation to follow or a command?

Read Matthew 16:13-27

Peter has just declared Jesus as the Messiah and then rebukes him, calling him, "Lord."

- Is it possible to accept Jesus as Savior but *not* accept him as Lord? In other words, when you follow Jesus, can you just carry on with your life as you did before?
- If that is the case, are you missing out on anything? If so, what are you missing out on?
- What does it mean, in practical terms, to "lose your life" for Jesus?

Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. (Isaiah 55:3)

Just like needing to be mindful when it comes to tending our spiritual lives, following Jesus requires the same kind of intentionality. This journey of faith we are walking lasts a lifetime and will always have its hills and valleys, its straight and crooked paths, which is why it is so important to walk alongside others who are also on this faith journey. At Trinity, we have a wonderful community with whom we can share our journeys of faith, people with whom we can engage in opportunities to deepen our relationship with God, people we can console and lift up when needed, and vice versa. God has created us to live, becoming more and more like Jesus. What a great thing, right? Yet when it comes to following Jesus, giving to him our whole selves—while a wonderful, God-centered way to live, is frightening because, doing so means we have to relinquish control of the person we've come to know ourselves to be *apart* from Jesus Christ.

As the apostle Paul wrote in 2nd Corinthians 5:17: *So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!* He goes on to say that God has entrusted the message of God's reconciliation of the world (bringing the world to God's self and making the world righteous through Christ—the Good News!) to us. This makes us ambassadors for Christ!

In a nutshell, how we follow Jesus is by obeying his commands to love God and love the neighbor, and by becoming more and more like Jesus, as God intended for us to become. It sounds incredibly simple, yet it is anything but. It is, as Martin Luther once said, the "daily

dying and rising in Christ.” It means an intentional daily renewal of our commitment. There will be successes and failures, forgiveness will be sought *and* extended, and God will never stop loving us. We are never alone: We will have with us our community and—through the power of the Holy Spirit—the presence of the living God.

Words from the hymn “Will You Come and Follow Me” ask the questions: *Will you come and follow me if I but call your name? Will you go where you don’t know and never be the same?* And in the final verse, include our answer: *In your company I’ll go where your love and footsteps show. Thus, I’ll move and live and grow in you and you in me.* (Text, John L. Bell, b. 1949)

Closing Thoughts from Pastor Ann

The thing about following Jesus is that we will never stop learning and growing in our followership; there will always be something new for us to experience. Jesus knew we were going to need help, which is why he sent us the Holy Spirit to be our Advocate, helper, comforter, intercessor (John 14:26).

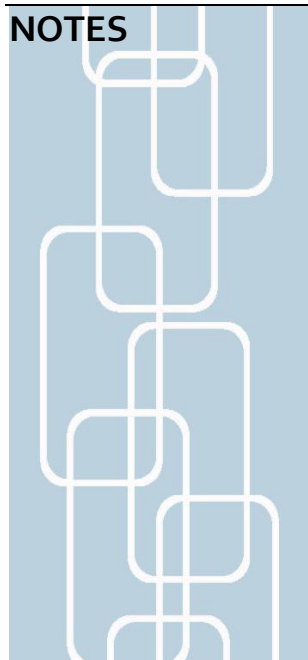
As Paul wrote in Romans 8:26, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.” So, even when we don’t know how to pray—or what to say, do, or even how to follow Jesus, the Spirit is already there, working on our behalf, whether we realize it or not.

Prayer has always been at the heart of relationship with God, and is the starting point for every spiritual discipline. On the days when you have no words for your prayers, practice Psalm 46: “Be still and know that I am God,” using a simple, silent breath prayer for several minutes. Set a timer for 5, 10, 15 or 20 minutes and slowly breathe in while thinking, “God’s presence,” then slowly breathe out while thinking, “God’s peace.” Or find your own word or phrase. Let any extraneous thoughts come and go without judgment (because we always get distracted) and return to your words and breathing until time is up.

Thank you for taking the time with this study; I am praying for you.

Closing Prayer – page 4

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Resources

We hope this study has sparked a greater intentionality about your own spiritual growth and led you to a deeper awareness of the presence of the living God in your daily life. Included are the resources Renovaré developed for this course, as well as some other resources you may find useful.



Online:

Renovaré.org

Renovaré is a multi-mainline denominational non-profit that promotes living the “with-God life.” They have offered—for free—this study, *From the Inside Out*, including links to their videos and supplementary materials (as well as links to daily devotions and podcasts related to this study that Trinity did not include in this book). To access all of these materials, go to Renovare.org and sign up for the course.

Spiritual Formation is a process, but it is also a journey through which we open our hearts to a deeper connection with God. We are not bystanders in our spiritual lives, we are active participants with God, who is ever inviting us into relationship with him.

View + download resources for this class
[renovare.org /io](http://renovare.org/io)



Wake-Up Call – JD Walt (United Methodist)

Short written or audio devotions narrated by JD Walt; archive available.

“Wake-Up Call is a daily encouragement to shake off the slumber of our busy lives and turn our eyes toward Jesus. Each morning our community gathers around a Scripture, a reflection, a prayer, and a few short questions, inviting us to reorient our lives around the love of Jesus that transforms our hearts, homes, churches, and cities.” Seedbed.com: Find the pulldown menu for Resources, then click on: Wake-Up Call

In Print:

Daily Readings from Spiritual Classics published 1990, Augsburg (currently out of print)
Excellent selection of devotions based on texts by Augustine, CS Lewis and other writers.
This book can still be found on used book sites online for a reasonable price.

Jesus Calling – Enjoying Peace in His Presence by Sarah Young, published 2004, Thomas Nelson

Pastor Ann would love to know how you felt about this study. What you liked, didn't like. What worked, didn't work. What you would add or subtract from this study when it is printed again, etc.

You may e-mail her at: annf@trinitylonglake.org

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