

Metamorphosis

1. Warm-up question: Tolstoy once said, “Everybody wants to change the world, but nobody wants to change themselves.” It might be more accurate to say, “Everybody wants to change the world, when we can’t even change ourselves.” What’s a silly little foible or weakness of yours that you’d like to change, but just can’t?

2. Change is hard, really hard. In our current sermon series, we’re studying the Bible’s formula for personal transformation. We’ve already explored what Jesus meant when he said, “You must be born again.” He meant that, to be fully alive, each of us needs to be born twice. First comes our physical birth when our mother’s water broke and we were brought into the world as material creatures filled with all kinds of physical/animal instincts. Those instincts, unguided by something higher, can prompt us to do crazy, destructive things. But our situation is not hopeless. God has implanted an eternal spirit inside each of our physical bodies, but that spirit lies dormant within us until activated. That’s what Jesus meant when he said, “You must be born again.” To be fully alive – not just in body, but in spirit – each of us needs to experience a spiritual awakening that is so transformational, Jesus likens it to a second birth. Once our soul wakes up, our spirit connects with God’s Spirit and we gain access to all the power of heaven. But learning to tap into that power is a process.
 - a. For people recovering from addictions, AA teaches two foundational principles. First, I am helpless to help myself. Second, I need the help of a Higher Power. Why do you think those two steps have proven to be so helpful to people struggling to transform from addiction? And what can those of us looking to make change in our life learn from those two steps?
 - b. Jesus said, “The one who believes in me will do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these.” John 14:12. Why do you think Jesus said that? What was he trying to convey to us?

3. If being born again means the beginning of a process of personal transformation, the question arises: What kind of transformation? How is my life supposed to be different after I experience spiritual awakening? This week’s Scripture passage tells us. Read Galatians 5:16-25, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Galatians 5 draws a distinction between “living in the flesh” and “living in the Spirit.” Living in the flesh can easily result in a life plagued by things like “fornication . . . , enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing. . . .” Galatians 5:19. Each of us sometimes falls into that trap. When you’re operating in the flesh, which of the impulses listed in verse 19 do you most struggle with? Alternatively, feel free to name something not mentioned in verse 19.

Galatians 5:16-25

16 Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to [religious] laws. ¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. ²⁴And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Galatians 5:16-25

Life in the Flesh vs. Life in the Spirit

Life in the Flesh

Guided by: Instinct (visceral/reactive/impulsive)

Focus: Surviving

Goal: Self-Preservation – protecting me and mine

Power Source: Internal (built-in instinct)

How to Feed: Repetition & Imitation (living like everybody around us)

Result: Conflict/Competition/Chaos/Stagnation/Stuckness

Life in the Spirit

Guided by: Holy Spirit (spiritual/reflective/noble)

Focus: Thriving (better to live well than to live long)

Goal: Self-Development – promoting the greater good (kingdom of God)

Power Source: External – tapping into a Higher Power

How to Feed: Repetition & Spiritual Practices

Result: Beauty/Progress/Transcendence