

Metamorphosis

1. Warm-up Question: Jeff began Sunday's sermon with pictures of a makeover of a kitchen, a shelter dog, and himself. ☺ What's the most amazing makeover of a person, place, or thing you've ever witnessed?

2. On Sunday we talked about spiritual makeovers. II Corinthians 3:18 says, "All of us . . . , seeing the glory of the Lord . . . , are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit."
 - a. Note the phrase "seeing the glory of the Lord" means. What does that mean? How – or in what way – we're the early Christians "seeing the glory of the Lord?"
 - b. What does it mean to be "transformed . . . from one degree of glory to another?"
 - c. Note that the verse says that we "are being transformed," rather than "have been transformed." What's the significance of that?
 - d. The Message Bible renders II Corinthians 3:18 this way: "[We are] gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like God." Does this rendering of the verse trigger any additional thoughts or insights for you?
 - e. Does it feel to you like your life is "being transformed . . . from one degree of glory to another"? Explain why you answer as you do.

3. Jeff invited us to notice the difference in how the Apostle Paul traveled before and after his conversion. In the first century, people didn't have the luxury of traveling at high rates of speed in locked cars. They traveled slowly, on foot or by animal, subject to being ambushed by bandits at any time. But not Paul. Before his conversion, he had so much prestige he could draw on all the resources of the establishment. When Paul (then known as Saul) traveled from Jerusalem to Damascus to arrest Christians, he was accompanied by armed guards. If bandits attacked, he could meet force with force. But then he converted, lost his prestige, and had to travel without soldiers or swords, exposed and vulnerable.
 - a. In II Corinthians 11:25, Paul describes the danger of his post-conversion travels. He says, "Three times I was shipwrecked. For a night and a day I was adrift at sea. On frequent journeys, [I was] in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness. . . ." How do you think this "new way" of traveling felt to Paul? What got him through it? Was he better off before or after – and why?
 - b. When Jesus sent his own disciples on a road trip, he told them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, no bag, no bread, no money – not even an extra tunic." Luke 9:3. Why did Jesus insist they travel that way? What lesson is implicit in this for us?

4. Jeff suggested that the difference between how Paul traveled before and after his conversion is a metaphor for how Jesus calls us to learn to travel through the world in unconventional, counterintuitive ways. As followers of Jesus, we're supposed to be in a process of transformation that makes us different. But different how? At the outset of the Sermon on the Mount in the Beatitudes, Jesus defines the counter-intuitive way he calls us to live. On Sunday, we looked at two examples, starting with Matthew 5:4, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."
 - a. Have you ever watched someone mourn who had little or no faith? Tell us about it. What did they lose? How did they grieve? How did lack of faith affect them?
 - b. Have you ever watched someone with great faith mourn a great loss? What was different about their mourning?
 - c. Paul says, "[We do] not grieve as others who have no hope." II Thessalonians 4:13. Hope is the ingredient that transforms how spiritual people mourn. In your group, retell the "fork story" Jeff shared on Sunday for any who weren't present. Loss can take many forms in life – loss of a loved one, a job, a dream, our hair, figure, health, money, or our own life. Tell us about a recent loss in your life? As you grieve that loss, what does the fork represent for you?
 - d. Jeff said, "Before I met Jesus, all my losses were permanent. Now they're temporary. I shall recover it all!" What do you think he meant? Do you agree or disagree?

5. In Matthew 5:5, Jesus identifies another key difference in how we're called to travel through life. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." The Greek word for "meek" is *praus*, which means "mildness of disposition and gentleness of spirit, meekness." It's the opposite of the way of the world, which is all about entitlement and aggression.
 - a. Life is full of provocations that test our level of meekness by how we respond. Think of a provocation you've experienced recently. What happened? How did you respond? Was your response consistent with "mildness of disposition and gentleness of spirit?"
 - b. Sometimes meekness is confused with weakness. But Jesus suggests meekness is actually quite powerful. "The meek will inherit the earth," not the aggressive and abrasive. To illustrate the power of meekness, Jeff shared the story of John Perkins giving blueberries to his friend's racist Grandma, the example of Dr. King and nonviolent resistance, and the example of responding to someone who yells "faggot!" with, "I pray God will bless you." Jeff said, "When I say, 'I pray God blesses you,' I've just taken charge of the situation and created the potential for miraculous change." Do you buy that? Is meekness powerful? Why or why not?
 - c. Are there exceptions to the meekness principle? If so, when?
 - d. What are some practical ways we can cultivate more meekness in our lives?