

CHAPTER 8, SESSION 8: GOD TRANSFORMS

CHAPTER CHALLENGE

“God Transforms” explains an aspect of Christianity that is often forgotten, overlooked or misunderstood. For this reason, many people may be challenged by the ideas in this chapter, but they will most likely understand the stories and the struggles. Allow the group to accept and understand what they can. Encourage the group to keep returning to this chapter as it will be very helpful as they begin working on book two of the series, *The Good and Beautiful Life*.

SUPPLIES

- 🕯️ Candles for each participant
- 🕯️ One Christ candle and a large box that is already torn, punctured and deformed
- 🎧 A CD player
- 🎧 Meditative music

In addition to the above supplies, this week it would be great to add a simple, framed document to your room. The document could say something along these lines:

Apprentices:

YOU ARE ONE IN WHOM CHRIST DWELLS.

Being “one in whom Christ dwells” is a sign of sacredness, a reminder of how special we are. It is not a threat to do better, or a heavy obligation. We can rest in this beautiful phrase because we did nothing to earn it and therefore we can’t lose it. We just receive it and rejoice in it! It is WHO we are and it tells us WHOSE we are!

If your space allows, you could leave this document up for the rest of the sessions. It is a very helpful reminder and word of encouragement.

WELCOME

As a group you are nearing the completion of book one of The Apprentice Series! Work out your plans for the celebration at the end of book one as well as your scheduled time to watch *The Nativity* as a group, and engage in conversation about the movie and how it reveals the good and beautiful God.

If participants are getting their own copies of the second book in The Apprentice Series, *The Good and Beautiful Life*, they should begin that process if they have not done so already.

Recite Colossians 3:1-16 together, then enter into 5 minutes of silence.

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

An Invitation to Christ

Come, my Light, and illumine my darkness.

Come, my Life, and revive me from death.

Come, my Physician, and heal my wounds.

*Come, Flame of divine love, and burn up the thorns of my sins,
kindling my heart with the flame of your love.*

*Come, my King, sit upon the throne of my heart and reign there.
For you alone are my King and my Lord. Amen.*

—Dimitri of Rostov, Russia, Seventeenth century, *The United Methodist Hymnal*, No.466

SOUL-TRAINING [10-15 minutes]

Divide into small groups of three or four and spend 10 to 15 minutes discussing your experience of solitude. Use these reflection questions to get your conversation started.

1. Begin by sharing how your time of solitude went. Remember that for some people this discipline can be very difficult and even frustrating, while for others this exercise is very energizing.
2. One of the aims of the time of solitude is the ability to “take off your masks” and simply be who you truly are in the presence of God. This is a powerful and complex idea, so it may be helpful to refer to page 167. Would that describe your experience with this exercise? Explain.
3. What, if anything, did you learn about God or yourself through the exercise?
4. While participants are in groups of three to four, have them discuss these two questions:
 - ☞ How has this series been challenging you?
 - ☞ How do the teachings and practices in The Apprentice Series fit into your daily life?

ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [25-45 minutes]

THE BIG IDEA IN THIS CHAPTER: The resurrected Jesus indwells us and transforms us into new beings, which guides us and empowers us to live a good and beautiful life.

MAIN POINTS

- ☞ A dominant narrative, even among Christians, is “I am a sinner.”
- ☞ The New Testament narrative is that Christians are in Christ and are new creations.
- ☞ Many metaphors describe our relationship to Christ: vine and branches, temple the Spirit dwells in, butterflies and country dogs.
- ☞ Though Christ dwells in Christians, sin remains, but its power has been broken and it must not reign.
- ☞ The secret to living the Christian life is to “abide” in Christ.
- ☞ Our weakness and vulnerability allow Christ to shine most clearly through us.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The author opens the chapter with a story about a friend of his named Carey who continued to sin although he did not want to. Can you relate to Carey’s struggle to overcome sin? What have you done in the past to address areas of sin in your life? How effective were those efforts?
2. Read this out loud: “In Christ I am no longer to be defined by sin. I have been reconciled. Sin has been defeated” (p. 153). What is the implication of this statement in your daily life?
3. “Christians are people Christ dwells in” (p. 154). Spend a few minutes in silence and imagine Jesus “dwelling” within you. After the silence if you are comfortable, share what this reality means to you.
4. As ones “indwelt by Christ,” we are not under the law; however, not everything is “beneficial” for us. Our choices no longer define who we are, instead our choices are made in light of who we are. Reflect on the last twenty-four hours of your life. Call to mind the choices that you made. What choices did you make to “determine who you are”? What choices did you make “in light of who you are”? How would your day have been different if you made more decisions in light of who you are?

ENGAGING THE WORD [15-20 minutes]

Read John 15:1-5 aloud.

1. *The author gives us this definition for “abide”: “To abide means to rest in and rely on Jesus, who is not outside of us, judging us, but is inside of us, empowering us. The more deeply we are aware of our identity in Christ, and his presence and power with us, the more naturally we’ll do this. We must get our narratives right, and practice spiritual exercises to deepen our awareness of truth. In the end, Jesus’ way is easy. He said that his yoke was easy and his burden was light (Matthew 11:30). Typically, we try to do what we think Jesus wants us to do . . . by [our] own strength. We can’t do that. But we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13)” (p. 159). Write your own definition for what it means to “abide” in Christ, based on the author’s definition. If you are comfortable, share your definition with the group.*
2. Read John 15:4-5 again. *What, if any, practices do you have in your life that help you “abide” in Christ?*

BREAK [5 minutes]

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [20 minutes]

Few messages are as powerful and liberating as this: “You are one in whom Christ dwells.” What good news! This week’s transforming experience is a chance to ponder and realize more deeply that Christ does indeed dwell within us.

Move to a quiet, relatively dark, worship space. At the front of the space on an altar, have an unlit candle inside a torn, punctured, and deformed box. (WARNING! The box should be open on top and the candle set inside with sufficient space for the box not to catch on fire.) Have enough chairs for everyone in a semi-circle facing the candle and box.

Read these instructions:

As we look at this broken box, consider your own “brokenness”; those ways you feel like a failure, a spiritual zero, or unworthy to receive God’s grace. If you are comfortable doing so, you may say a word or short phrase that describes that feeling of brokenness.

Give everyone about 5 minutes for this reflection.

After 5 minutes, go forward and light the candle inside the box. Then say:

My friends, we are no longer defined by our brokenness or our sinfulness. We were created to house the fullness of God, and Christ was born, lived, crucified and raised from the dead that he might live within us and bring us into fullness of life—not through our own strength, but by his divine mercy and grace.

Tonight I invite you to come forward one at a time, take a candle and light it from the Christ candle inside the box. After your candle is lit, I will pray over you the blessing, “You are one in whom Christ dwells.” As each person comes forward to receive the light, I invite the rest of you to pray for that person; that they would discover in a powerful way that they are one in whom Christ dwells.

If you are going to play soft meditative music, you could start it now. Once you are ready, say:

When you are ready, you may come forward.

As each person comes forward, say their name with the blessing, “[Insert name], you are one in whom Christ dwells. Amen.” If you are comfortable, place one hand on their shoulder as you say the blessing. Do not rush through this experience.

When everyone has received their light, you could sing the below chorus two or three times. If singing isn't an option, then read it to the group:

*Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place
I can feel his mighty power and grace
I can hear the brush of angel's wings, I see glory on each face
Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place*

GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Close with this amazing quote:

"We minister out of our brokenness. We heal others through our vulnerability because that is where Christ shines most brightly"
(p. 163).

May the light of Christ shine through our wounds.

FOR THE COMING WEEK

- ☞ Read chapter 9, "How to Make a Pickle."
- ☞ The soul-shaping practice for the week is slowing down.
- ☞ AND we complete our memorization project by memorizing Colossians 3:17!!!