



<b>Series:</b> Animate	<b>Reference:</b> 2 Cor 3:14-18/4:3-4 & 6	<b>Title:</b> Contemplate	<b>Date:</b> 10.8 .17
<b>Website Writeup:</b> How are we transformed into the likeness of Christ? Try harder? Wait on God? Get more information? Or can we use our imagination to enter into Christ's presence, meditating on Scriptural Truth, and BE transformed in the process?			

## Color changes in text indicate slide changes

### -SLIDE PERSON: PLEASE RECORD THE SERMON-

#### UPG Prayer of the Day...

(Thanks to Greg Boyd & Woodland Hills Church, we've used many of his words, ideas, and the Animate booklet from their series by the same name - in all the Animate series there are just too many of Greg's words to footnote - thank you Greg! Imitation is flattery brother!)

Today's the first sermon in a series called *Animate*. Along with this series is a booklet, which you should have received on your way in. We've prepared this for you to practice some of these things on your own or in your Community Groups. Notice p3, the first paragraph under 'using this guide' (read aloud).

I want to look at our relationship with Jesus in light of the abundant life where many of us feel we don't live. We still battle old patterns. We still live in hidden sin, we don't want to, but we do. We don't experience the freedom of which Jesus & others speak. We want it, but it's just not there.

We're calling this series *Animate*, because the word means to breath life into something otherwise inanimate or dead; to animate, to make come alive. And that's about the incarnation - God came to us, or was made flesh in Jesus. The plan of salvation was in God's mind & came alive in Jesus - it became concrete reality. Our salvation wouldn't be possible without that, but incarnation & resurrection bring more than just salvation - they bring freedom & transformation. Jesus proclaimed the kingdom come!

Our spiritual life is animated or brought to life, when that resurrection power becomes enfleshed, concrete or experienced as reality. When we can learn to relate to God with all senses. We've been conditioned though, in a very Gnostic or Platonic view of spirituality, where God & spirituality have been moved off to the side & what's real is only what we see before us or what we can experience with the five senses. Francis Schaeffer talked about the line between the divine & nature - we've separated the two & no longer think God or spirituality have any effect on everyday life.

When we speak of animation we'll speak of imagination - and no, I'm not advocating some new sort of strange 'feelings-based' spirituality with no root in Scriptural Truth, or church history. I'm speaking of planting our God-given ability to image Scriptural truth & to see it flourish in us. What we'll explore is scriptural, early church leaders actively used their ability to image truth to bring about a more concrete spirituality.



We have a few visual artists in the crowd, myself, Chris Nixon, Maddie Greiner, Noelle Kristowaty, maybe more. Art's an imaginative act, what we imagine in our head becomes a reality, or animated on canvas. Visual artists illustrate in paint what we're talking about in our spiritual lives. So let's pray first....

Have you ever read the stories of transformation of people in Scripture, and wondered why it doesn't happen to you? Why haven't I changed? Why do I still battle with this or that? You read what is supposed to be true, but it doesn't feel true. Let me tell you a secret, it's not what you know to be true which transforms you. Not that the information isn't important, it's very important, but what you experience to be true transforms you.

That's why we can believe in God, but that fact alone doesn't change us (Satan believes in God). You may believe it to be true, but it's not an active reality for you. You may believe in Easter, but just that information will not change you. What's real to you is your mortgage payment, your school bills, your sick kids, your crumbling house you can't keep up with, etc. But all this Bible stuff just doesn't feel real. How do we rectify this?

There're some normally proposed solutions to this gap between belief & experienced reality, the first is the 'try harder' solution. Have more quiet times, tithe more, share your faith, pray more, do you need to confess something? Etc... The will power solution, just muster up more will power, try harder, and you'll change. But the truth of the matter is, although we can muster up enough will power to do something for a short time, we will not see long lasting transformation by will power alone. There's truth in this solution, it does take some effort on our part, but that, in & of itself, won't change a person.

The second solution is the 'just let go & let God' solution. Occasionally, but rarely, people are changed in a flash. We hear dramatic stories & extrapolate that it's the way it's supposed to happen to everyone. But not to us, and we end up feeling like a loser. What's wrong with me that I can't just let go & let God, and be changed quickly. This is the lay down & let God do all the work mentality. It's not the norm, it's the exception. But there's truth here too, we do have to allow God to work. But there's some interplay between us & God. We're encouraged in Scripture to be about 'doing' - I know that's not a popular thought since many get worried about legalism, but honestly, we're encouraged to be a part of the process of spiritual formation; to do something - just waiting for God to work isn't what God intended. God wants us to be willing & active participants in our spiritual transformation.

Then there's the newer solution which is to just get more information. We're in the information age, more information is available to us now than ever before. Download a sermon, read these books, article or blog, just get more information, you can figure it out. Information, in our mind, equals transformation - but if information transformed us then those who know the most would be the most transformed. But more often than



not, that's not the case - very heady cerebral theologians aren't necessarily more faith filled, spiritually mature people.

So what're we missing? There's a biblical principle which we've missed in modern western culture; it has to do with our imagination - better said, our ability to image or contemplate truth, and the role in spirituality it was meant to have. *Let's go to 2 Cor 3 to explore this. In this passage Paul's talking about Moses coming back down from Mt Sinai with his face glowing after meeting with God. They had to put a veil over his face. And Paul's going to talk about this veil now in a certain way in relation to us as believers, and others as non-believers.*

<sup>14</sup> But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away.

<sup>15</sup> Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts.

Let's remember, the ancient Greeks made a separation between mind & heart which we've carried on today. The mind was the rational self. The heart was the seat of emotion. They liked the rational, but emotion, not so much. Biblically however, there's no separation between mind & heart - Jewish thinking didn't make a distinction between the two. Mind is the thinking part of the heart, and heart is the feeling part of the mind which is reinforced by modern neuroscience. We're holistic creatures. So the veil is both over the mind or the heart of these non-believing Jews Paul refers to here when they read the old covenant. We'll call it the heart-mind.

<sup>16</sup> But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. <sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

So as we turn to the Lord now we're free to see & experience things we couldn't before - we've been given a sixth sense, no not to see dead people like the movie by that title, but to see Jesus. The Spirit of God brings a new freedom to see a new reality in Christ.

<sup>18</sup> And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate (*which means to behold or reflect on an image in our mind*) the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. <sup>1</sup>

How are we transformed? By trying harder, just waiting, or getting more information? No, by beholding - contemplating the Lord's glory in our heart-mind. Today we might refer to this as using our imagination. Imagining God's glory in our minds eye - focusing our imagination on his truth.

*A few verses later in chapter 4 he says...<sup>3</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so*

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<sup>1</sup> *The New International Version*. 2011 (2 Co 3:14-18). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.



*that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*<sup>2</sup>

Then in verse six he says...<sup>6</sup> *For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.*<sup>3</sup>

What this tells us is that before we’re surrendered to Jesus there’s a veil over our heart-mind which keeps us in the dark. But, in Jesus, that veil’s removed. Therefore, now you have the capacity to behold the Lord’s glory! The capacity to see & experience the truth of who God is, and as you do that, you’re transformed into his glory. All that the Lord is by nature becomes yours by grace like Moses reflecting the Lord’s glory after coming down from Mt Sinai. To look upon the Lord, to imagine him, his glory, and truth animates your life - in short this is contemplative worship. The process of transformation is this, you become what you see to be real & true.

As a young Christian I remember sitting on my back porch studying the Scriptures, praying, and journaling. Now, before I sat down I knew some truths; I’m a sinner saved by grace, I knew what the resurrection meant theologically. But that information didn’t necessarily change me beyond my initial regeneration or salvation. It played a part, but in & of itself, it doesn’t. It’s when I sat down & took the time to contemplate that truth, to behold, to listen, to imagine what that meant, that it became real to me. I was transformed, when I actually spent time with Jesus. That’s why Paul says in Romans 12, be transformed by the renewing of your mind!

When I experience the love of Jesus in the cross, not just the information, when I contemplate & imagine the depths & heights of it, I’m changed! I’m made more loving & sacrificial of others myself as I gaze on the love & sacrifice of Jesus. The information doesn’t change you until it becomes reality. When that love becomes enfleshed & concrete to you, because the veil’s removed, and you can now see & experience it, you’re transformed - when your imagination grows out of the fertile soil of truth, you’re changed. Imagination, not just child’s play, the ability to see & experience truth in your heart-mind.

But we’re heirs of the naturalistic world, conditioned to think that only what’s real is the physical world. What I can see taste & touch - the rest of it’s make-believe. We dismiss it, “Oh that’s just your imagination.” Child’s play. But Imagination isn’t just for child’s play. It’s not something just for playgrounds; it’s a creative tool to make truth come into reality, to envision something as reality & make it concrete. For instance, if we look at a painting of a biblical story, we know it’s from Scripture to mind (imagination) to canvas. But you might say, “Oh that’s just art, a picture, it’s not transformative.” Okay, think on this... look around you. Where do you find yourself today? Look at the people around

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<sup>2</sup> *The New International Version*. 2011 (2 Co 4:3–4). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>3</sup> *The New International Version*. 2011 (2 Co 4:5–6). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.



you. Six:Eight's a real church, with real people, with real lasting impact on a real community.

But Six:Eight was imagined through contemplative prayer on a roof in Lampung, Indonesia about 15 years ago. As I contemplated Jesus on my roof, I allowed myself to be led by the Spirit to imagine what God could do if I disregarded my insecurities & took Matthew 28 seriously. I imagined what was possible from the truth of Scripture, Six:Eight was conceived. It was in a gestational period for four years, and in 2009 it was born into reality. It was conceived from a creative prayerful imaginative thought!

Imagination can be used for fantasy & escape, which isn't bad - but it can also be something that doesn't take us away *from* reality, but rather, actually roots us in truth, bringing us closer to certain aspects of spiritual reality!

For instance, think back to coming here the first time. What happened? What did you feel? How do you know it happened the way you think? We remember, right? Yes, true, but in our memory we're re-experiencing something. That's your imagination. We don't have photographic or video-graphic memories which just replay a tape of exactly what happened. It's wrapped up in how we imagined it to be, and the rational & emotional thoughts are all intertwined in there - no two people experience the same situation the same way. The same could be asked for the future, what are you going to be doing tomorrow? You have to imagine it. You're not a robot who follows a digital set of commands with no deviance. You imagine & experience something ahead of time - what you *will* be doing, and it becomes a reality. Maybe that's why we use the word *will* for future events - from our imagination we will something into being.

For a time Lindley was on staff, and part of that time pregnant. We'd be in the office, and inevitably around 9am she'd say, "Is it time for lunch yet?" And then she'd shut her eyes & say something like, "Mmmmm, Elevation Burger, mmmmmm!" She was pre-experiencing it in full color - she can taste it, smell it, feel the sensation of it on her tongue! Then she makes it reality by 11:30. Likewise, if you have plans to have a meeting that'll be uncomfortable later, you imagine it & feel the anxiety. Imagination plays a huge part in what we make to be our reality. You've met people who just always imagine the worst & it seems to happen to them; a self-fulfilling prophecy. Anxiety's just experiencing the future pain of something that hasn't happened yet in the now.

For those of us with anxiety issues, what would it mean to sit & contemplate the truth of Jeremiah 29:11, *For I know the plans I have for you,* declares the Lord, *plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope & a future.* Or Psalms 46:10, *"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."* Imaging truth such as that, contemplating it, reduces anxiety.

Faith & imagination are different. But our God-given imagination, or the ability to contemplate truth, is a tool of faith...faith's confidence in what we hope for & assurance



about what we don't see.<sup>4</sup> We can contemplate or entertain an image of the future which is in line with scriptural truth. A picture which isn't yet seen, but we know as truth. Can we imagine a world where Jesus rules with love & goodness, or I'm set free from bondage. Instead of just knee-jerk reactions to people, we can contemplate Ephesians 4:32 <sup>32</sup> *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.* <sup>5</sup> and we imagine what our response should be in light of his forgiveness of us. We allow ourselves to be transformed, and life changes.

We tend to think imagination is in opposition to reason. But theoreticians working from smaller bits & pieces imagine things to be reality, then work towards theories. We knew of atoms before we could see proof of them! Someone imagined them. Einstein first began devising his theory of relativity on his bike on his way home from school as a kid. He'd ride home & imagine himself racing a photon at the speed of light. As he imagined this, he realized that all the information in the universe comes to him at the speed of light, so if he traveled that fast everything would freeze! Which eventually gave birth to the idea of special relativity. Imagination played a key role.

Imaging truth throughout church history has been understood as the main place we meet God. The Inner Sanctum where we contemplate truth & begin to be transformed. Looking at worship, you notice there're those who seem to just get lost in worship. Set off firecrackers at their feet, they won't be swayed. Others just stand there, can't get into it. They're thinking of all the worries of life, bills, work, what the worship leader's wearing, or how they don't like what the pastor just said. Their thoughts are transfixed on what's right before their eyes. But the other person's lost in rapturous worship of the truth they're experiencing. The difference is imagination; the contemplative spirit. One person imagining themselves singing to Jesus, they see him walking the aisles of the church, or enthroned up front. The other person can't get past how uncomfortable their chair is, or how stupid the guy worshipping in front of them looks.

The same's true in prayer. Some can't get past the room they're in or how the guy next to them is making weird noises. But others are enraptured... they imagine themselves being filled with the Spirit. They allow the visions & thoughts which God brings them to take over. Our culture has wired us to think of only that stuff which we can see & touch, it's naturally what we gravitate to, and get stuck there.

Listen to what AW Tozer says in his book *The Pursuit of God*. *“Like the eye which sees everything in front of it & never sees itself, faith is occupied with the Object upon which it rests & pays no attention to itself at all. While we're looking at God we don't see ourselves - blessed riddance. The man who has struggled to purify himself (the just try harder method) and has had nothing but repeated failures will experience real relief when he stops tinkering with his soul & looks away to the Perfect One. While he looks at Christ, the very things he's so long been trying to do will be getting done within him. It*

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<sup>4</sup> *The New International Version*. 2011 (Heb 11:1). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>5</sup> *The New International Version*. 2011 (Eph 4:32). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.



*will be God working in him to will & to do....Faith looks out instead of in & the whole life falls into line."*

Those who experience transformation contemplate the Lord. Not by trying harder, getting more info, or just waiting on God, but those who can contemplate, imagine, and behold the Lord's glory are transformed by the Spirit. Imagination is a gift of God, but the talk of it may be uncomfortable to us. Because Satan has usurped these things. Imagination has become circumspect. This is old Christian stuff - it's been stolen from us, we want to steal it back. We want to submit our imagination, the ability to behold the glory of the Lord Jesus, to image truth, and allow him to transform us.

Many early church fathers would practice this imaginative prayer, or what St Ignatius of Loyola called cataphatic spirituality. They'd find a place to meet with God, their Inner Sanctum. An inner place easy to meet with the Lord. It can be an imaginary place. An open field with wildflowers. The top of a mountain with mist in the valley below. The rooftop of a building overlooking a city. Beside a tree next to a brook. Or maybe it's right where you are. What's your place, your secret cataphatic place?

Find it, go often & contemplate Scripture there. Ask Jesus to reveal himself in that inner sanctum. As long as you're contemplating Scriptural Truth, it's a great way to experience & bring Truth into concrete reality - by contemplating Jesus & His Word we're transformed.

In John 21 Jesus reinstates Peter because of his denial. You remember Jesus showed up on the beach while they were fishing. Peter dived in & swam to Jesus. He'd made a fire & was cooking fish for breakfast for them. And that's when Jesus asked Peter 3 times, 'Peter do you love me?' Each time Peter answered yes, and each time Jesus said, 'Then feed my sheep'.

We want to practice this imaginative prayer today for a few minutes. And I'd love for us to start on that beach. So, let's close our eyes & inject ourselves into Peter's place... (Explain farther).

**John 21:15- 19** - *When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."*

*16Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."*

*17The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."*

*18Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." 19Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"*

## Community Group Questions

**Ice Breaker:** If Jesus walked into this room, what's the first thing you'd do, say or ask him?

**Describe** your interactions with the ANIMATE booklet: Did you find a space both physical & mental? What is it like? What came out of your prayer times in that place this week?

**In this sermon** we addressed the idea that we want transformation into the likeness of Christ, but don't always know how to be transformed. We said there were usually three popular solutions to this (all outlined on p2 through the top of p3 of the sermon);

- (1) *Try Harder*
- (2) *Let Go & Let God*
- (3) *Get More Information*

All fall short. We're transformed by *beholding* - *contemplating* the Lord's glory in our heart-mind. We may refer to this as using our *imagination*. Imagining God's glory in our minds eye - focusing our imagination on his truth. You become what you see to be real & true.

We used 2 Corinthians 3...

*<sup>14</sup> But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. <sup>15</sup> Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. <sup>16</sup> But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. <sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup> And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate (which means to behold or reflect on an image in our mind) the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

**Questions:** What are your feelings when reading these verses - do you feel dull, or as if there's a veil remaining? Or do you feel free & experience transformation in Jesus? How much time do you give to the Lord to contemplate Him & His truth? Describe a time when you've been transformed by contemplating God's Word.

**John 20:24-29** - Have everyone close their eyes as you read aloud the account of Thomas & Jesus from John 20...read it twice slowly... instruct them to take a few moments & imagine they were Thomas. What would they have thought & felt. What would this encounter mean to them? What significance is this to us & the rest of the world?

*<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."*

*<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."*

*<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"*

*<sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

**Divinity/Nature:** Francis Schaeffer talked about the line between divinity & nature - Divine spiritual things above the line, earthly material things below. We've separated the two & no longer think God or spirituality have any effect on everyday life. Everything below the line is rational provable touchable. Everything above is ethereal evasive, and therefore, unreal to





modern humans. But the Bible says the two commingle and interact. God interacts with his people and creation.

Have everyone read the Genesis account of God's creation of Adam (Genesis 1:26-27 & 2:7) slowly a few times to themselves asking the Holy Spirit to speak to them. Have everyone journal their thoughts.

*Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

*2:7 - Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*

**Questions:** What does this say about you? About God? About you together? What came out of journaling your thoughts on these verses?