



Series: Ruin to Renovation	Reference: John 14:15-21 & other passages	Title: The Surgeon's Knife	Date: 02.04.18
<p style="text-align: center;">Website Writeup:</p> <p>It's God who changes our hearts. We may deceive ourselves thinking it's just another resolution we make to work on ourselves. We try harder, "I'll do better this time.' We think we just need to 'wait on the Lord'. Or, we mistakenly believe just gathering more information will help. But Jesus promises when we actively place ourselves on his operating table, he does heart surgery & we come away with true change. We don't just act loving, we become loving!</p>			

Color changes in text indicate slide changes

Thanks to Dallas Willard, this series is born out of his book, *Renovation of the Heart*. Many of his thoughts & words make it into these sermons; read the book as you listen or read along.

Dallas Willard claims societies the world over, including America, are desperately trying to produce citizens who can simply cope with life in a nondestructive manner...that spiritually, all societies are third world. It certainly seems that way. But remember, there are rays of light. The Church, being spiritually formed in Christ, is a beacon of hope in an otherwise spiritually impoverished world. Yet, some of us have yet to experience that, never having seen Church at her best we believe it impossible!

Julie Cowen recently said, the problem with speaking about spiritual formation is, we begin to believe it's within our power to change our hearts. She's right, it's not. We're called to make effort in the process, but Jesus changes hearts. He's been in the process of orchestrating change in individuals & whole societies all throughout history in order to bring human hearts into alignment with his.

Confirmation of this is seen in the ever changing forms which people must adopt & use to communicate the Gospel, or in worship styles. Ever wonder why certain ways of thinking work at a certain time in history, but cease to be effective at others? Spiritual tricks cease to be useful, grow dry. They're tools with no power in & of themselves to change hearts. Their purpose is to get us in front of Jesus. If they had power to change hearts, we'd rely on our ability to use them - right back to worship of self.

Tools such as the 4 Spiritual Laws were very powerful in the 1970's in having people understand & embrace the gospel. Many people gave their hearts to Jesus at that time & tracts were produced by the truckload. But now the 4 Spiritual Laws aren't the go-to evangelistic tool. Gospel hasn't changed, 4 Spiritual Laws - still true, they just don't speak to Millennials in the way they did to Baby Boomers. Tools useful only for a time.

God's always moving, but never changing. He's adaptive in communication, but unchanging in character nonetheless. Hebrews 13:8-9a says, "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace...*"

God's effective hand of change can also be seen through people movements in history. In his bringing Israel out of Egypt "*when the time was right.*" In their entry & emergence from the Babylonian Exile. In the emergence of a Christian identity within 1st century Judaism. Then in creating a separate Christian identity outside of Jewish heritage. In the emergence of monasticism with all it's forms, the Protestant Reformation, Pietism, Wesleyan & American revivalism, the Charismatic/Pentecostal movements of the

twentieth century such as the Jesus People who basically birthed the Vineyard Movement! God reached the hippies, and the hippies organized! What history tells us is, modes of dress, organizational preferences & even worship forms aren't the point - God uses different forms to reach people & outward things change when they cease to be effective. New wine needs new wineskins. Content doesn't change, Jesus doesn't change, but the outward forms of communicating him to society do.

There are 33,800 Christian denominations & we're witnessing the dissolution of denominationalism in the Christian Church. We can no longer answer the question, "Are you a Christian?" by "I'm Baptist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian..." or whatever. Our Vineyard Identity must also be held onto lightly - the real question is, "Do I truly know & follow Jesus?" Denominational affiliation isn't the goal, it's Jesus.

So in speaking of spiritual formation, we speak of a distinct process. Allowing the Holy Spirit access to our hearts, participating with Him by ingesting God's Word & communing with Him in prayer. All to be transformed in our inner being with the likeness of Christ. So the outer life reflects Jesus in ways truly transformed by the inner life; not just a mask to look good. Becoming people who don't just say we have integrity, but have integrity. Too long we've been like the the guy who cares more about looking healthy, than being healthy. Surviving on McDonald's & beer enjoying youthful metabolism, unaware there'll be a price to pay.

Spiritual formation focuses itself entirely on Jesus. Its goal is obedience & conformity to Christ arising out of inner transformation by his Spirit & Word through intimate interaction with him under the safety of grace. Whereas the rest of the world cringes at the word obedience, it's the essential fuel, pursuit & outcome of Christian spiritual formation - it's our placing of self on the spiritual operating table.

We see this reflected in John 13:34-35, *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

Jesus loved completely - those who know & follow him love completely. He was kind & gentle hearted, yet also straight forward with those who were sincere & remorseful (the crippled man at the pool [Jhn 5:1-15], the Samaritan woman at the well [Jhn 4:1-26], Peter - "Get behind me Satan" [Mt 16]). Love isn't just mere acceptance, or tolerance of bad behavior & attitude, it calls people higher up into thought, attitude & lifestyle worthy of Christ's name. Love with teeth. Christ's love was sometimes harsh, as in the case of confronting the legalistic Pharisees calling them 'a brood of vipers'. Truthful love confronts the heart which leads to destructive ungodly behaviors.

Jesus always modeled - 'love without truth lies, truth without love kills'. Truth & love walk hand-in-hand, twin sisters you can't tell apart. If I'm loving you, I lead you into truth, and not using truth to beat you with either. True love is graciously truthful & mercifully straight forward. It accepts, but challenges you to be like Jesus - calling you upward to that which you were created to be. It always addresses the heart.

This obedience & the power which enables it is seen in John 14:15-21, *"If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever - the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him,*

because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”

True followers of Jesus grow to obey his commands in the convergence of listening to the Holy Spirit, while being fed by the revealed Word of God. One command we’ve seen in past weeks is the Great Commission, Mt 28:18-20, “...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

Another is to love one another. The result of love is communal outward identification with Jesus. When people see us loving well, they *should* say - “They must be Christians.” The sad thing is, love isn’t the trait others think of when they think of Christians these days - it’s rather judgement, political groups compromising of their own values, nationalism, moralism, or legalism. It’s wastefulness & extravagance. If you listened to David Foster Wallaces commencement speech I mentioned last week you would’ve heard that sentiment expressed.

Issues for Christians have usurped Jesus, be they Family Values, The Pro-Life Movement, Justice, whatever. When that happens the gospel’s polluted & lost - but it’s such an easy mistake to make. Our goal isn’t to make people agree with our issue, or even act in the way we deem correct - it’s Jesus in their hearts, allowing him to change them from the inside out.

Sadly, we’re identified by anything but love which reveals the churches lack of deep spiritual formation. But let’s praise where praise is due - I sat with Joe & Julie’s Community Group last week, as the board members of Linwood Park praised Six:Eight for our commitment, love, lightheartedness, smiles, uplifting attitudes & our many prayers over them. That’s good witness.

This spiritual life of obedience is made possible through God’s Spirit within us - without which we couldn’t begin to truly obey & follow his Word. But in a similar vein, the outward manifestation of Christ-likeness isn’t the main emphasis, although desirable. When it’s made so, we fall into legalism, insularity & provincialism.

We tend to want to look like Jesus on the behavioral level, instead of truly being like Jesus at the heart level. The white-washed tomb, as Jesus called the Pharisees. The person claiming to have integrity, but not really having it. The guy who looks healthy, but is internally cancerous.

Paul’s desire for the Galatians is our hope as well (4:19), that being, *Christ formed IN us*. We don’t want to fall into legalism, leading to judgement & moralism, only seeking to restrain behavior & look good without actually becoming good, because like 2 Corinthians 3:6 says, “...for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

This spiritual life has always been for me an artful act. Meaningful, skillful, moving art, can’t be created by setting out to make a masterpiece. Fame or perfection can’t be the

goal, although artists desire to produce something wonderful. Meaningful art is produced in the crucible of passion & skill coming together, almost by divine chance, guided by timeless principles of whatever medium is used in the creative process. If Vinny or Mary write a song, it must be filled with feeling, yet undergirded by the principles of music theory which work together well. If Maddie Greiner or Chris Nixon create a painting, each stroke comes out of an emotional connection to the subject, but also guided by the indispensable techniques of painting passed down from old masters & contemporary artists alike. Masterpieces seem to almost happen, as if there's a divine movement behind them. Skill concealed in passion - there's a structure undergirding their creation, structure infused with heart. And we know, when art & philosophy are divorced from God's truth, they become degrading & destructive.

Our key's found in the words of Jesus when he says, *Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them (John 14:21)*. It's not just cold obedience, but an act of intimacy in walking with Jesus ingesting who he is. In that intimate formative act more & more of his heart's imparted to us, like a child reared by a loving father, we begin to take on our father's character.

People have concocted ways of ripening a banana quickly from sticking it in a brown paper bag, to baking, or microwaving it. With every method, the banana always looks more ripe on the outside than it tastes on the inside. Cutting corners doesn't work!

The best way isn't fast, but is most effective for an inside-out ripening. Simply put a green banana alongside a ripe banana. After a time the green banana will have become what it had in it to become. It will have ripened gorgeously, yellowed where it was green, sweetened where it was bitter....it rises to the company it keeps.

This is true of people too. The company we keep plays a large part in our ripening, rotting, or staying forever green. Toni Morrison kept company with James Baldwin, Socrates with Plato, Diego Rivera with Frida Kahlo, Lord Byron with Mary Shelley, Louisa May Alcott with Ralph Waldo Emerson, Truman Capote with Harper Lee, and of course...Statler with Waldorf....

We're to keep company with Jesus, placing ourselves next to him, we ripen into his likeness. And he commands us to place ourselves next to others to encourage them towards Christ-likeness - discipleship - being with Jesus, being Jesus to others. If ripening is anything, it's becoming what we have in us to become, then sharing it.

Christians throughout history, and Jews during Christ's time on earth, all have made grave mistakes in what it means to follow God. Last week we said, to shoot for the heart doesn't mean behavior's unimportant. It should change, but truly change, resultant of a divine work in our hearts, not just behavioral restraint - which is merely moralism or legalism. Many of us have been a part of the legalistic hurtful Christian community which focuses itself only on outward behavior. Jesus confronted Pharisees & Scribes in his day who practiced the same attitude.

In Mt 5:17-20 he said, *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until*

heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

This in context of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus refers to many ‘wrong behaviors’; acting in anger, returning evil for evil, heartless divorce, verbal manipulation, lust, etc. Those bad behaviors point to crooked hearts.

He upholds the written Word of Scripture as important, he’s come to fulfill it & we can’t disregard even the smallest Scriptural command. Remembering his reaction to the Scribes & Pharisees in other places concerning their focus on the shallow outward display of self-righteousness (white-washed tombs), you’d think he misspoke here! Does he expect us to live even more perfectly in outward behavior than they?

Anyone familiar with Jesus, spent enough time in the Word & prayer, understands intuitively, to surpass the righteousness of the Pharisees is to pursue something deeper beyond just shallow outward behavior. It’s to pursue Christ-righteousness, killing off Self-righteousness. To have integrity, rather than just talking about it. **It’s the cleaning of the inside of the cup & dish (Mt 23:26). It’s becoming the good tree unable to produce bad fruit (Luke 6:43). It’s allowing God to do heart surgery in only the way he can. The Pharisees didn’t.** They thought they could climb their way to righteousness through living well in the outer circles of life (self-righteousness). Jesus says, the righteousness you need is to surrender your heart to me (Christ-righteousness). The interesting thing is, unlike the path of the Pharisee, Christ’s path isn’t heavy & burdensome (1 John 5:3).

I like how Dallas Willard puts it, “The primary ‘learning’ here isn’t about how to act, just as the primary wrongness or problem in human life isn’t what we do. Often what human beings do is so horrible that we can be excused, perhaps, for thinking that all that matters is stopping it. But this is an evasion of the real horror: the heart from which the terrible actions come. In both cases, it’s who we are in our thoughts, feelings, dispositions & choices - the inner life - that counts. Profound transformation there is the only thing that can definitively conquer outward evil.” This is why we must be cautious about getting on the ‘issue’ bandwagon - it usually only deals at the behavioral level, lacking true compassion & forgiveness, and derails truly deeper spiritual change.

In conclusion: God’s always moving, but never changing. Spiritual formation’s a process of allowing the Holy Spirit access to our hearts, participating by ingesting Truth, communing in prayer, in order to be formed in our inner being with the likeness of Christ - the outer life begins to reflect Jesus in ways truly transformed by the inner life.

We’re participatory in this. We place ourselves on the surgeons table, but Christ as surgeon works on our heart. Without Christ transforming us, we end up merely ‘trying harder’, ‘just waiting’, or merely ‘gathering information’. Spiritual formation isn’t a New Years Resolution where we say, “I’m gonna do better this time.” It’s allowing ourselves to be worked on. Obedience. Not wrestling away from the surgeons knife, but realizing his cut brings healing. I don’t just endeavor to act more loving, when Jesus changes me,

I am loving. If I play act, it'll be shallow & short-lived at best, only adding to frustration & anger! When Jesus does heart surgery, we don't just act loving, we become loving.

So, we're not just going to try harder. But we're not just waiting around letting life happen either. Spiritual formation's a process where we actively put ourselves next to Him; an orderly consistent process of ripening. Not looking for sensational moments, but a methodical sitting at the feet of Jesus; going to the cross daily for him. As Dallas Willard says, "Grace doesn't rule out method, nor method grace. Grace thrives on method & method on grace." Living in grace isn't passive, it's active in relationship with Jesus under his grace.

Lastly, spiritual formation isn't about just getting more information - it's ingesting, chewing slowly, the Word of God as if we were sitting at a leisurely meal with Jesus all through life. No rush. More chatter doesn't make us more like him. We have all we need, if we'll utilize the Scriptures in context of relationship with him, he'll change us.

Spiritual formation's a responsibility & the way of great joy; his burden is light & fulfilling in ways nothing else can be! So although the world may be spiritually impoverished, Jesus is creating citizens of his kingdom who can not only live in a nondestructive manner - but actually become loving truth-filled people! He longs that we go from spiritual third world to spiritual first world - He's building into us, while using us in that process.

Let's end today by meditating on a simple verse (explain)....

Psalm 86:11-13 (the passion translation) - Teach me more about you, how you work & how you move, so that I can walk onward in your truth until everything within me brings honor to your name. With all my heart & passion I will thank you, my God! I will give glory to your name, always & forever! You love me so much & you placed your greatness upon me. You rescued me from the deepest place of darkness, and you have delivered me from a certain death.