

Series: Ruin to Renovation	Reference: 2 Cor 3:18	Title: V.I.M.	Date: 04.15.18
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Today we look at the three key things we need to begin our journey into spiritual formation; Vision, Intention, Means.			

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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 follow along.

(TITLE SLIDE UP FOR INTRODUCTIONS)

Last week we began to look at our signature verse for this part of the series, 2 Corinthians 3:18, which says, *18 And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

We said it was a seemingly simple verse, which reveals a great deal...

- (1) *Unveiled faces*, referring to that divine movement which had to happen in us in order that we we'd be woken up from spiritual death & have the means to grasp Scriptural Truth. We mentioned Ephesians 2:4-5 & Jesus with Nicodemus in John 3 & Easter when the curtain was ripped in two, opening the way to God's presence through Christ's redemptive work on the cross.
- (2) *Contemplate*, referring to our active role in spiritual formation, informed & led by the Word of God. Walking through the open curtain basking in the Presence of God through the Living Word revealed to us.
- (3) *Transformed into his image*, referring to the result of the Spirits work in our lives in conjunction with these two things; with the direction, goal & standard of spiritual formation into Christ-likeness.

We spoke of how doubt & distrust can keep us in a state of disbelief that spiritual transformation in Christ can even really happen...I'm here to tell you it can, and has in the lives of believers through the centuries. And that there's a basic general pattern of personal growth available to all peoples; Christian & nonChristian alike, as seen in three words: **Vision, Intention & Means.**

Firstly, if you want to do anything like learn to fly, learn a new language, quit drinking, or, like Jack Nicoletti, learn to drive your new Mustang Convertible at 16 years old, you have to gain a **Vision** for it. You have to think first of how life might be different if you were to be able to do that thing. Imagining our lives as if we had already arrived. Maybe I imagine myself speaking Arabic. Or, flying my plane to Key West for the weekend. Or, in Jack's case, rollin with my homies down route 30, top down turning the heads of all the ladies within eyeshot! You'd have to weigh how this new thing may benefit, or better your life. Then you have to have an idea of what it would take to do it. And with all of that before our thoughts we then experience a *desire* to move forward with it.

Secondly, Vision must then be met with **Intention**. Imaging & visioning something helps, but without intention it won't go anywhere - that vision must be subjected to

order, planning, subordination & progression, or it's only a pipe-dream! Some things will happen by accident or natural drift in life, but for the most part intention must move us forward in any endeavor - intention is the plan come together & laid out by & for us. Something must begin inside us & come out as a matter of meaning & will.

Intention translates Imagination/Vision into action - choice matters. Imagine Jack sitting around all day long just imagining driving his Mustang Convertible. It'd never happen. But if he gets up & says, "If I want to drive that car, here are things I have to do..." Then he makes a list & decides upon those actions - choosing to pursue them. His Vision, moved him to choices to make the imagined become reality.

Which brings us to the **Means** - or ways to get where we vision & intend to go. Means we must grab hold of & use. Jack would have to ask his dad to show him how to drive, study the permit test, and practice until he could pass both permit & driving test. If you're an alcoholic who's sick & tired of being sick & tired, then you imagine what life would be like sober, which births an intention in you to make that reality, and then you would utilize the means; don't drink for just today, make an AA meeting, practice the 12 steps, get a sponsor...etc.

As a matter of fact the AA program was started & built on Christian Spiritual Formation principles. Those principles are solid to follow for any formative change we'd like to see happen. They include surrender to something greater than yourself (Higher Power), confession, good/wise counsel, self-denial, self-control, and day-in-day-out reliance on their Higher Power. An alcoholic doesn't just quit drinking by accident, or cognitive drift, it must be by vision, intention & means. In the Christian life, spiritual formation is the same; surrender to Jesus, confession to God & others, good/wise counsel, self-denial, self-control (which is a fruit of the Spirit), and day-in-day-out reliance on God's grace. As a matter of fact we eat up more of God's grace living well in spiritual formation rather than in constantly asking forgiveness. God provides for us as we pursue this...

Ephesians 6:10 says, ¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. A passage which continues along urging us to put on the full armor of God in order to withstand the onslaught of spiritual attack which includes reliance on his Word & walking in healthy self-denial, among other things. Paul also prays for the Ephesians in chapter 3 the same, ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being... The Vision & Intention is a change of our inner being & the means is by the work of the Spirit in conjunction with the Word of God as outlined in chapter 6 of Ephesians.

*So...Vision, Intention & Means are the steps anyone would take towards personal growth for anything in life. But as we talk about Christian spiritual formation, we first must ask, what's our **Vision**? What is the Spiritual Vision which Christ calls us to & we must have for ourselves? We look to no other than Jesus himself & to what he drove towards, and that is the Kingdom reign of God the Father. As he states in Luke 4:43, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." If that was the point on Jesus' arrow, it's ours as well -*

proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God to all people groups (nations as he adds in other places).

The kingdom of God means the kingdom reign of God. So, let's envision & imagine what that means...to do so, we must begin with a definition, *the kingdom reign of God is the full range of God's effective will, where what God wants done is done.* Jesus even directs us to pray towards this end in the Lord's prayer as seen in Matthew 6:10 - *10 your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

These often rote prayers shouldn't be so rote, since the kingdom of God seems to be at the center of Jesus' life. There's reason & purpose behind Jesus' command to pray to this end. We want God's kingdom reign here on earth since it means peace, health & life. But we also know, it begins within us! I can only control my response to the world, and if I'm changed by God, I become part of the solution & not the problem.

And although the Kingdom of God isn't fully established on earth as of yet, it's in our midst, as Jesus said in Luke 17:21. And available to anyone who'd participate in it. In Kingdom life all things work together for our good (Romans 8:28) - so, kingdom people are unflappable, confident people. People who can see through the chaos & aren't governed by fear. They know nothing can cut them off from God's love in Christ - even physical death, which is something our Syrian sisters Kathleen & Jen are going to minister to face this very moment.

Kingdom people ingest, believe & operate out of truths like Romans 8:35-39, ³⁵ *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?* ³⁶ *As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*

³⁷ *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* ³⁸ *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

It isn't that we just know the Word of God, but we allow it to infiltrate & marinate into the very fiber of our being; from root to branch of our tree. That's life in the Kingdom of God, not only far off into the future when Jesus returns, but now. Therefore, a healthy vision of the Kingdom of God in my life is one where God reigns in me. I get to partake of the divine nature as it states in 2 Peter 1:3-4, ³ *His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory & goodness.* ⁴ *Through these he has given us his very great & precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*

And as we envision this we **intend** that, *whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col 3:17).* So my vision entails a life where everything I am, think & do is directed towards

Christ & his purposes for me & the world. This is a vision from God, and by God, to us. It's not something we come to naturally, it's revealed to us & one in which we need growth. God's reign among all nations - Matthew 24:14, ¹⁴And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (also Mt 28:18-20).

This vision of the kingdom of God leaves us only with the concrete decision to follow Jesus in trust & obedience - not just to know about him, but know him. Therefore, we become devoted followers of his teaching, knowing with a faith-filled confidence - he's the way, the truth & the life, no one comes to the Father except through him (Jhn 14:6). Which means we're devoted to seeing this gospel go out to all people groups establishing God's kingdom reign among them. Ghandi himself said if only Christians would live in accordance with the teachings of Jesus that everyone would become followers of Jesus - strange he saw that, yet chose not to make the decision to follow himself. The sad thing is that the 'followers' Ghandi observed were following their belief in Jesus - revealing they didn't truly believe in him. Knowing about Jesus, isn't the same as knowing Him.

True belief translates into intention to follow. Our culture of disbelief & distrust does us no good when we apply it to faith-life. Dallas Willard's quoted as saying, *"the idea that you can trust Christ & not intend to obey him is an illusion generated by the prevalence of an unbelieving Christian culture."* You can't believe your doctor & not intend to follow his advice, that would be detrimental. The same goes with Jesus.

My father had a framed Farside cartoon in his office of two polar bears. One's lifting an igloo while the other's standing there, as you see an eskimo running off in the distance. The caption reads, "I lift, you grab! Was that concept just a little too complex, Carl?" And under it my father had written, AN IDEA WITHOUT EXECUTION IS JUST AN IDEA. Intention is brought to fruition by decision or choice to carry it out. I like the idea of jogging, and may say, "I intended to jog yesterday." But I've never really intended it, since by definition of the word, I never actually decided to do it. Our intentions are usually aborted & never given the power of life through solid choice & decision.

Intentional promises are often made in life for the sheer sake of getting what we want without the actual intention ever being there - our word doesn't mean much anymore. We say we're going to do something, but leave the backdoor open. If I intend to be married to Kim until the day I die, I shouldn't have in mind an escape plan. I should from day one do all I can to make my marriage work. Integrity's a serious issue in culture today - if true intention is there, deed will follow with promise carried out. If not, it wasn't truly intended.

This is why Scripture takes seriously the vows we make. A powerful intention's fueled by strong vision. So we say of certain people their word's their bond, or their word's as good as gold. People who have a strong vision of integrity. People who see themselves standing before God, not just people, when making promises. They mean what they say, since they have a strong vision which comes out in solid intention & decisions to follow through. As it says in Psalm 15:4 God honors those who keep an oath even when it hurts, and who don't change their mind.

All of these three, Vision, Intention & Means mutually strengthen one another. So, we have the Vision of the Kingdom reign of God. The Intention, which includes the unswerving decision & choice to follow Jesus in what he says. Which brings us to the **Means** of spiritual formation - the seeking out & application with tools available to us to be obedient to the vision & intention of following Jesus in the pursuit of God's kingdom reign in life.

Our purpose is to replace the characteristics of the Old Sinful Self, with the character of Christ living out of the New Self he proclaims us to be. To give the Holy Spirit free reign through the power of God's word to change us internally - bleeding out into all aspects of our being including our outward behavior seen by others. We want to pursue a Christ-centered worldview. Understanding of his purposes & intentions. His feelings towards the world, ourselves & others. Deciding, as Jesus would, how to live. Taking on his character in all things.

The means to this begins with the *identification* of the things within us which stand in the way. The thoughts, feelings, habits, social relationships & bodily inclinations which prevent us from growing in Christ. Sometimes, the means to changing these things in us aren't directly under our control, we need *divine intervention*. And honestly, we need this at all times, since even the intake of God's Word is itself divine intervention, although to us it may just seem like study & application.

We must remember, God's written word is powerful & effective. Hebrews 4:12 says, *¹² For the word of God is alive & active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul & spirit, joints & marrow; it judges the thoughts & attitudes of the heart.*

Isaiah 55:10-11 states, *¹⁰ As the rain & the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth & making it bud & flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower & bread for the eater, ¹¹ so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire & achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*

And Philippians 1:6 states, *he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

However, we also know, we have good methodical work to do in partnership with God in the area of spiritual formation. Where there's a will there's a way, and likewise, where there's no will, there's no way too! We don't earn our salvation, that's by grace through faith alone (Ephesians 2), but we're called to partner with God in the work of our spiritual formation (sanctification). My dad for instance said to me the other day that he'd like to talk more. We get busy & live in the same house & walk right by each other, and we must decide to stop, sit & talk. It's the same with Jesus (*My Heart, Christ's Home* booklet).

David cries out to God in Psalm 51, *¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.* As a matter of fact the whole Psalm is something worth

meditating on, in order to understand David's own spiritually formative practices. David was asking for divine movement in his heart, but his participation was to stop & ask.

So, let's land this plane with an illustration...say we have someone in our lives who's wronged us in the past. They've said hurtful things. We've grown bitter & angry towards them - relationship has broken down. They're now in need of a Christian friend, good counsel & prayer, and have come to you. Your Old Self says, "*Forget it, they treated me like garbage before!*" But your vision of the kingdom reign of God in the New Self speaks of reconciliation & restoration of relationship. Of peace between peoples. So, instead of acting 'out of the flesh' & intending to return evil with evil, you instead intend (decide/choose) to react to them in Christlike love. What are your means? Firstly, you may remember Jesus hanging on the cross saying, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing,*" (Lk 23:34) about the very people who nailed him there. That challenging. Someone said to me this week as they were feeling attacked by someone else & had decided not to retaliate, "*At least no one's nailing me to a cross!*" That's perspective!

Also, you know Scripture urges us to forgive one another as you do a study on the word coming across Ephesians 4:32, ³² *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.* And also Colossians 3:13-14, ¹³ *Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.* ¹⁴ *And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

You hear these words, coupled with Christ's example on the cross, understanding that his forgiveness went as far as going to death for you. And your sin nailed him there. So, for all the anger you hold towards that person, you find you've done the same to Jesus.

Suddenly your window of choice has narrowed a great deal as to your response to them. But your feelings, conditioned by years of not responding to the leading of God's Word & his Holy Spirit, are just not there yet; hovering at the precipice of this being cognitive information, but flirting at the edge of self-denial & sacrificial love. You need help.

This is where you become like David meeting God in prayer to ask he'd create in you a pure heart, a heart which would want to love & sacrifice for someone who has been your oppressor in the past. So you pray. And you may feel a tiny bit better about it, but your not there yet. So, someone turns you on to the story of Elizabeth Elliot who went in & lovingly brought Christ to a jungle tribe after they killed her own husband. And, you've lost all excuse. And hear the Spirit say, "Go. Do one kind thing for them." And you do. And no matter their response, you've stepped well into the realm of spiritual formation. You're becoming sacrificial. Loving. Kindness is forming in you. And as you look upon that person, the bitterness starts to melt given you start to get a spiritual insight into their heart as to why they've acted the way they have in the past. You begin to understand their prison, and bitterness gives way to compassion.

And 2 Corinthians 3:18 starts to become real, ¹⁸ *And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*