

# *Forming*

*Change by Grace*

Workbook

by

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This workbook has been designed as a companion to the  
*Forming* video course

*Forming: Change by Grace* Workbook  
ISBN: 978-0-9968912-4-0

Published by Kingdom Formation Ministries  
[www.KingdomFormation.org](http://www.KingdomFormation.org)  
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# *Forming: Change by Grace*

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## Acknowledgments

In many ways, *Forming* is the result of a lifetime of seeking God and learning how to balance my part and His part so that I can be formed more and more into the image of Christ. For that reason there are far too many people and experiences involved to list all of them here. At the same time, there are a number of people who have been very directly involved in the development of this course whom I wish to thank publicly for their contributions to this work.

Throughout my seminary training, Dr. Julie Gorman at Fuller Theological Seminary did much to reshape my whole understanding of teaching as a process that goes beyond the transmission of information. If it were not for her teaching and encouragement, I might never have attempted a project such as this.

As the director of Shepherd's House, Dr. Jim Wilder provided me with the opportunity of a lifetime when he encouraged me to develop *Forming*. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that I would be able to develop a course like this, and especially one to be distributed by such a well-respected organization. I would also like to thank Ed Khouri for his vision and persistence in bringing this series to life.

I could not have asked for a better professional team to film and edit the *Forming* video than Desert Rock Productions, with Keith, Tim, Nathan and Jeff. Their technical expertise, artistic eye, and raw talent have contributed to this course far more than I would have thought possible. Even more, their heart for this project was a constant encouragement to me on those long days of filming.

I wish to express my deep appreciation for those at the Nazarene District Office in Arcadia, CA, who gave us time and space to film this work, especially Ed, Shay, and Jerry. I am also grateful for those who read the manuscript and helped to clean up my typos and inconsistencies. And to Jim Martini, thank you for our day on your sailboat so we could capture the sailing videos.

I would also like to thank the leadership and members of the various organizations that tested this material and provided valuable feedback that helped me to shape the course to be more helpful:

Wendell Nelson, Sue Sather, and Mark Newhouse at Christ Community Church in Omaha, NE.

Wilma Frederick and Barbara LaBate at River of Hope Fellowship in Clifton Park, NY.

Ed Khouri and Steve Watson at New Life Christian Fellowship in Taylorsville, NC.

Al Johnson at Christian Mind Renovation in Tucson, AZ.

I want to thank my wife Jan for all your encouragement and support over the years, as well as for your many contributions to the content, format, and style of this course. I am truly grateful that we have been able to share so much of this journey together. Most of all, I treasure your love and the heart you have to see what our Father is doing and to join Him in His mission to bring abundant life to us all.

Finally, my eternal gratitude to God who has woven together so many hundreds of people, events, books, and experiences to make all of this possible. It is my greatest joy to join You in making *Forming* a reality and a gift to Your people.

## What is *Forming*?

*Forming* is a fresh, life-giving approach to Christian growth and restoration that may be very different from what you have tried before. *Forming* is unique because instead of relying on your willpower and self-effort to bring about change in your life, you build a relationship with God that has enough substance to change you from the inside out.

Many Christians experience significant growth and change immediately following their conversion. They may discover new insights, make new friends, perhaps end a few behaviors, and learn about the Christian lifestyle. After a few years down the road, however, most Christians find themselves in a place where their growth is slowing down and discontent is setting in. They may have outgrown the resources of their church, wondered if there is more to the Christian life than they have seen, or even burned out from too much volunteer work.

What may come as a surprise to some is that *the greatest cause for this disillusionment comes from what we have been taught about living the Christian life!* For the last few hundred years, the Western Christian world has been stressing an approach to spiritual development that is heavily based on setting a high standard of behavior and then attempting to motivate people to try hard to live up to that standard. But this approach has a short life span, because it is not how true spiritual development occurs. While people are certainly capable of some levels of restraint over their inner impulses and are able to commit to doing good things they may not feel like doing, this kind of effort is a far cry from the abundant life we read about in the New Testament.

What God wants to do in His people is change them from the inside out. Instead of trying hard to do the right things and hoping our inner being will somehow catch up, God wants to first grow and change our heart so we are naturally inclined to live better. That is what we call "being **formed** into the image of Christ" (Gal.4:19). The process of deliberately engaging with God for this kind of inner transformation is called Christian Formation.

*Forming* re-introduces Christians to the means of Christian Formation so they can become the people God created them to be. *This approach to spiritual development is deeply rooted in building a relationship with God that has enough substance to actually change who we are from the inside out.* Each session has a particular focus designed to jump-start your spiritual life and help you develop greater intimacy with God. The course includes fresh, insightful teaching on how God works in us to bring about change, as well as real-time training and opportunities for participants to engage with the Spirit of God to begin the changes they need in their heart and mind.

The feedback we have received from those who have been through this course is nothing short of amazing. Many people say it is the most significant step they have ever taken in regard to their spiritual journey. We hope this will be true for you as well. As a way of introducing how incredibly different this approach really is from traditional discipleship models, we have provided a little metaphor of Rowing and Sailing.

## Rowing or Sailing?

For many Christians, the spiritual life is a lot like rowing a boat. Although it may become tiring or even wearisome at times, they do their best to persist and remain as consistent as possible, often in the face of considerable difficulty. Not that they try to do this all on their own. Having attended many seminars on the value of rowing and the dangers of slacking off, they keep up their energy by attending weekly meetings and praying for the Holy Spirit to give them the strength and endurance to row well.

Of course there are setbacks. Some find themselves in an opposing current and no matter how hard they row, the boat seems to go more backward than forward. Still others could swear they were never issued both oars, and spend much of the time going in circles or switching sides to keep from getting too far off course. Most distressing of all are those who can never row for more than a few minutes at a time before becoming exhausted. No matter how much they pray, they never seem to have enough energy and may privately wonder if the Holy Spirit is holding out on them.

Sometimes those who are stronger and pulling well will call out advice on how to steer or how to hold the oars. The advice usually lands on the strugglers like an anchor, but they take a deep breath and try harder. From time to time the leaders just shake their heads and wonder why it is that so much effort is spent making so little progress.

### **Another Way**

Imagine now a sail, full and bright, pulling each boat with all the power of the wind. The oars are gone, along with sore arms and aching backs. Instead, the travelers are learning how to catch the wind and give up the work of forward movement to something much more powerful than they could ever be. And movement it is! Waves pour off each bow, and the wakes they leave behind churn with foamy water. It's actually fun!

Oh, there are things to do, and lots more to learn. But this is so far removed from rowing, it's hard to compare the two. Even more exciting is the discovery that the wind in the sail is none other than the Holy Spirit Himself, which means the apprentice sailors are in truth witnessing the power of God and learning to engage with Him in tangible ways they never experienced as rowers. Clearly they still need to learn how to sail and align with the wind. But that is light-years from asking God to give them the strength to do all the work of rowing.

### **Enter Christian Formation**

*Forming* is every bit as different from traditional models of discipleship as sailing is from rowing. Most of us have experienced the heavy weight of knowing all the things we should be doing and all the things we should not be doing, and the exhaustion of being forever behind where we think we ought to be by now. Giving more and trying harder seem to be the only alternatives we know. Many of us have virtually given up hope of becoming more of what God wants us to be, because we have no idea how to add any more to what we are already doing.

When we stop and ask what it is Christians need to do in order to grow, what do we hear? "Read your Bible, pray, and get involved in ministry." But Bible reading often feels more like doing homework than feeding the soul, and what many Christians seem to get out of it is an even stronger sense of how they are failing. Prayer is also hard, sometimes because we cannot seem to focus, and other times because we cannot figure out how to pray for help. On the one hand we feel the need to ask for forgiveness for what we can't seem to *do right*. On the other hand, when we pray for strength we are left perplexed as to why God does not make us

strong enough to *get it right*. Lastly, the prospect of getting more involved in ministry is the very thing we dread: doing more. We keep hearing the same thing over and over: "Row harder!"

What all of these approaches have in common is the belief that *it really is up to us* to do what Christians are supposed to do, and that God's part is to provide the necessary energy to keep us going. We are more or less left with the conclusion that the only difference in "rowing" between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is that New Testament rowers get spiritual injections to help them. This view of the Christian Life is terribly mistaken!

We need to come to grips with the fact that this approach to the Christian life has very little to do with life led by the Spirit. It is essentially life under the Law dressed up in New Testament terminology. No matter how much we try to give the Holy Spirit credit for whatever good happens under this paradigm, this whole way of proceeding is firmly rooted in our own effort, based on our own willpower and our own understanding of what we need to do in order to become better Christians.

Now as it turns out, some of us are really good rowers! Unfortunately, that adds to the illusion about this being the way to go. But quite literally, this is the world's way of achieving mastery, not the way of transformation in the Kingdom of God. All of life outside the Kingdom tells us advancement is earned, and mastery is achieved through hard work. Even human maturity is based on developmental tasks which must be practiced and learned (more on that in Session 12).

Not so when it comes to spiritual growth. Purity, wholeness, healing, and restoration of the ruined soul *result directly* from engaging with God – not in traditional one-way prayer, but from dynamic tangible interaction in which we are involved both actively and consciously. ***Instead of trying to make ourselves do more of what we think Christians ought to do, hoping it will make us into the people we were meant to be, we need God to make us into who we were meant to be so that we can do what He wants us to do.*** That's the difference between rowing and sailing!

Instead of making myself face my offender and say the words "I forgive you," what if God changed my heart so I *actually forgave him* and my mouth then expressed the care of my heart? Instead of trying hard to *act as if* I loved my enemy, what if I engaged with God in ways that changed me so I *actually loved my enemy* and my actions came out of my heart? My task then becomes a matter of lining up with the wind in my sail, rather than rowing against the current of my own heart in order to achieve an outcome I think is right.

The truth is, many Christians have given up belief in the possibility of being transformed. Feeling helpless in the face of their own mal-formed souls, they resort to forcing the behavior they believe Christians *ought* to portray out of obedience to God. But that amounts to picking up the oars because we never learned to sail.

Well, what if we could learn? What if you and I came to believe that God not only *can* change our hearts, He very much wants to do so? What if the biggest thing by far between our heart and our transformation is our own misinformation and insufficient training on how to engage with God in ways that bring life? What if we *can* learn how to sail? Now that would be Good News!

Learning to be with God, to develop a genuine relationship with God, and to engage with God for transformation is precisely what *Forming* is about – how to be formed more and more into the image of Christ, so that the life of Christ comes out of us by virtue of who we are – ***how to change from the inside out so that good comes out of us because of who we are and not in an effort to override who we are.***

Christian Formation is about learning how to receive from God what we cannot do on our own, namely, *to change our own heart to be more like His*. We learn how to feel the wind, to align with it, to be changed by it, until we find ourselves moved to places that would never have been possible by rowing alone.

We have a God who moved heaven and earth for our restoration and who is committed to restoring our souls as the first fruits of His new creation. What we need to do is to stop trying to get there by direct effort, and instead become apprentices of life, learning how to be with this God who transforms, and to engage with Him for our restoration. Then we will become free to be who He has designed us to be and to do what He wants us to do.

I say, "Let's go sailing!"



## How to Get the Most Out of *Forming* and This Workbook

*Forming* is designed to be much more than another course in Christian Education. Much of this course will involve experiential learning, intended to help you engage with God in ways that will build up your relationship with Him and bring new life to your Christian journey. So please take note of the following items.

### **Teachings**

Most sessions will include a couple of 15-20 minute video presentations designed to refresh or re-orient your understanding of certain basic principles regarding God's intentions for His people. These videos are also intended to help you get the most out of the session exercises. As you listen, jot down any ways in which the ideas presented intersect with your own life experience. The more you can personalize this material, the more you will be able to internalize it.

### **Exercises**

Each session has one or two exercises designed to help you intentionally put into practice the things you are hearing. Please participate in each exercise as fully as possible. We will begin with some very simple exercises of quieting the soul and reflecting on spiritual matters, and proceed toward learning to hear from God and participating in inner healing prayer.

None of this requires that you divulge any personal information to others or submit to any ministry sessions or similar experiences. Most of the exercises are strictly between you and God for your own edification and experience. There will be a few small group and large group discussions, but you are free to share as much or as little as you want.

With each lesson there will be at least one exercise to be done on your own between sessions. These are very important. In order to be deliberate about how your soul is being formed, you need to set aside time for that purpose. The exercises are intended to give you some concrete ways of spending time with God in personal reflection. The more you enter into these exercises, the more you will get from the course.

### **Workbook Contents**

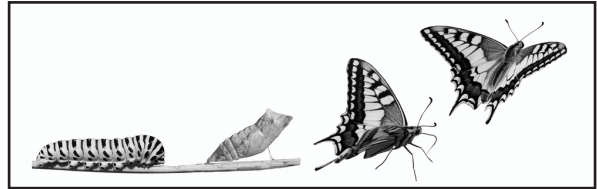
The workbook has a number of features to make it easy for you to personalize this course.

- An introduction to each session. Whenever possible, read the first page of each session before watching the video, to orient your mind and heart to the session material.
- A wrap up to each session. At the end of each chapter, the author reflects on how the material has impacted his own life in a section called the "Ship's Log." We suggest reading this after each session.
- Presentation notes. All of the presentation material is included in bullet-point format.
- Wide margins. The presentation pages have wide outer margins for you to make personal notes.
- Writing exercises. Most exercises recommend writing out your reflections. There should be plenty of space to do that. For those of you who want to preserve a clean copy of the exercises for when you review this material in the future, please note that all of the exercises done during the sessions are duplicated at the end of the book.
- Bibliographies and other notes.
- Articles. A few longer articles and various short descriptions of issues have been included.

## Session 1 – Changing Our Minds About Change

### We Need a Better Way

How does change really happen? All throughout the New Testament, the Holy Spirit paints a picture of life with God that far exceeds what most of us have known experientially. When we try to make those things a reality in our own life, we usually discover a substantial disconnect between what we see in the pages of the Bible and the life we actually have.



Most of us have been taught that in order to change we must decide what we want to be like, make a strong commitment, and then work toward our goal. One of the reasons we believe in this approach is that it actually does work for some things some of the time. Most of us are able to train ourselves to exercise regularly, to go to church every week, and many other things as well.

But most Christians also discover a great many areas of the heart that never seem to change no matter how many years they try, no matter how many times they repent, or how many times they ask for prayer. They look for hidden sins, they try to recommit, they even try to stop trying. What is the problem? The truth is we have had far too much faith in our own ability and willpower to bring about the changes we need. Oh, we pray for strength and ask God to help us, but in practice that means we believe "God helps those who are trying hard." However, as we will see later in the course, this really is *not* the Holy Spirit's primary way of helping us.

If we are honest with ourselves, Jesus asks us to do a lot of things we actually cannot do. He tells us to love our enemies, do good to those who take advantage of us, forgive seventy times seven, and not harbor any resentment or contempt toward others. How do we follow His commands when we are unable to make our heart go along with what we are supposed to do? It is not enough to just keep repenting for our failures. There needs to be a way of becoming the kind of person who can live like this, or else Jesus' expectations of us are truly unrealistic.

It is time to ask a new set of questions and to be honest about our inability to live out the New Testament by trying hard to do the right things. This session will look at several issues:

What does it mean to be formed by God instead of by my own effort to be a good Christian?

How does that happen? What is my part? How is this course going to help?

And *especially* – How is this going to be different from what I have tried in the past?

As we look at why we have so much trouble living up to the standards we see in Scripture, we will find that most discipleship models are unwittingly based on faulty assumptions which simply do not line up with how God changes lives. So while these approaches may seem to work for some people some of the time, they do not offer any lasting hope for on-going life-long transformation. That is why we need to take a fresh new look at the whole process of spiritual growth and renewal.

Our hope is that this session will truly stir your heart for more of God in your life and for more of what He wants to do in you, and renew your hope for this kind of life.

**[ Video: Session 1 – Part 1 ]****Have you ever thought ... ?**

- There must be more to the Christian life.
- I really dread having my “quiet time.”
- God seems like a million miles away.
- God must be disappointed in me.
- It feels like I am living a double life:
  - a public Christian life and a secret life of pain, disappointment, or failure.
- It feels like no matter how hard I try, I don’t seem to measure up to the standards I know are right and good.

**Changing Our Minds About Change**

- What is Christian Formation?
- Why do we need it?
- What can we expect in *Forming*?
- How can we get the most out of this experience?

Christian Formation is very different from traditional approaches to discipleship.

- Not just more information or more things to do.
- But a significantly better way to re-focus on how God changes us, and practice what we learn.

**For many Christians, the spiritual life is a lot like rowing a boat**

- We may get tired, but we do our best to persist, even when it is hard.
  - Go to conferences, study, get involved in ministry.
- We try to do the right things, but never get as far as we think we should especially when compared to the amount of effort we put into it.

**And there are problems**

- Some feel as if they were issued only one oar and keep going in circles.
  - Or less! No oars at all.
- Others find themselves rowing against the current and going more backward than forward.
- When we ask for help we often hear
  - “Row Harder” – “Do more” – “You are not dedicated enough.”

**Another Way**

- The wind does most of the work.
- Our job is to learn how to align the sail with the wind and let the wind take us places we could not get to on our own.
- Then we will see forward movement.

### **Forming is as Different from Traditional Discipleship as Sailing is from Rowing**

Most of us have experienced the weight of knowing all the things we *should* be doing and all the things we *should not* be doing, and the exhaustion of always being behind where we think we ought to be.

Giving more and trying harder seem to be the only alternatives, despite our desperate prayers for God to provide power for our efforts.

As a result, a lot of people give up hope of becoming more of what God wants us to be, because we have no idea how to add any more to what we are already doing.

#### **What if ...**

- Instead of forcing myself to say the words: "I forgive you" ...
  - I learn how to engage with God so my heart truly forgives?
  - I could then express the forgiveness in my heart.
- Instead of acting as if I love my enemy ...
  - God would change my heart so I actually loved them?
  - I could then express the love in my heart instead of acting "as if".
- I could learn to sail?

I would then demonstrate the life of God because of who I am, not in an effort to *override* who I am.

This changes where I focus my efforts.

My task is to learn how to let God work on my heart,  
rather than trying to do what I think is the right thing to do.

#### **Characteristics of Rowing**

Rowing is attempting to live a Christian lifestyle by direct personal effort.

- Depending on willpower to override contrary feelings and inclinations.  
(No real expectation about those inclinations ever changing.)
- Repeated cycles of repentance and re-dedication:  
Stability → Failure → Repentance → Stability.
- Discouragement over lack of growth despite our best efforts.

#### **Characteristics of Sailing**

Sailing is about participating with God to move our *inner* life forward in ways we cannot manage by our own willpower and effort.

- Deeper intimacy and trust in God.
- Scripture comes alive.
- Internal healing and growth become our normal everyday experience.
- Life is increasingly seen the way God sees it (through the eyes of heaven).

To clarify: Sailing is *not* about making life easy or pain free.

**Discuss**

- In what ways can you relate to rowing?
- When have you felt like you were sailing? What made the difference?
- What other reactions do you have to this metaphor?

**[ Video: Session 1 – Part 2 ]****Christian Formation Defined**

We are being formed spiritually all the time, whether or not we are aware of it, by everything we experience, and everything we think, say, or do.

Christian Formation:

Being intentional about the ways we are being formed,  
by engaging with God in ways that are life-changing  
so we become more and more like Jesus.

In order for this intentionality to be effective, we need to refocus several areas.

**Different Goal**

Instead of **trying to do** the right things ...

we focus on **becoming** who God intended us to be.

For Example:

- Trying to act in loving ways vs. becoming a loving person.
- Going through the motions of forgiving, vs. developing a forgiving spirit.
- Making yourself volunteer vs. having a heart that wants to volunteer.
- Forcing your quiet time vs. becoming a person who loves to connect with God.
- Trying hard to make fruit vs. connecting to the vine so fruit results by nature.

Instead of trying to force the right things,

we focus on becoming the kind of person from whom good things come.

**Different Means for Change**

Instead of expecting our effort and good works to change our heart...

we engage with God to change our heart directly.

Pharisees were experts at "doing the right things," but look at their hearts.

According to Paul, trying to keep the Law does not change hearts (Col.2:22-23).

**Different Role for the Holy Spirit**

Instead of indirectly helping us do what we try to do out there ...

He is our Mentor and Guide and working directly with us and in us to help us become who we were designed to be.

### **Different Relationship to God**

Instead of just knowing *about* God ...

- Stories about what God used to do.
- Trying to apply what we read and make resolutions for change (rowing).

Getting to *know* God:

- Having conversations with Him.
- Enjoying His presence with us.

Relationship is something to be experienced.

It is not simply an arrangement or a legal standing.

### **Different Perspective**

Instead of trying to achieve Christian growth by trying hard (Rowing) ...

we learn to participate with what God does in us through a Relationship with Him that is substantial enough to change us (Learning to Sail).

### **Forming Objective #1**

To better understand the process by which we are formed into the image of Christ.

### **Forming Objective #2**

To actually experience God in substantially deeper ways.

### **Forming Topics**

Overview of the rest of the course (by session):

#### *Foundations for Christian Formation*

- God is Relational (2) – Developing genuine closeness to God
- Conversational Prayer (3,4) – Learning to hear God's voice
- Change by Grace (5) – How Grace is actually a means for change
- Engaging With God (6,7,8) – Ways to engage with God that are life-changing

#### *Fostering Growth and Renewal*

- Renewing Our Mind (9) – How to internalize Truth so it changes us
- Healing Our Identity (10) – Healing from distorted self images
- Disarming Our Fear (11) – Finding new forms of security and safety
- Two Kinds of Maturity (12) – Integrating human and spiritual maturity

### **Our Hope and Calling**

"In order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might" (Col.1:9-11).

Imagine if we could learn how to engage with God to incorporate all that He wants to do in us and for us! Our lives would never be the same.

## Exercise 1 – Isaiah 55 and Sailing

This passage is a beautiful, poetic message of *receiving from God what we need for life*. Since we are looking for how God can bring life to us in ways we cannot achieve on our own, this passage is very relevant.

Enter into this passage with all your heart, yearning for more of the spiritual food God has for you. Listen for God's leading as you reflect and write. Since there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers, be as honest as you can about your thoughts and feelings as you pay attention to how these verses impact your heart and mind. Ask God for what you need to see and hear. Do not worry about writing well or only writing what you think is important. Simply begin writing as you are reading and reflecting – whatever comes to mind.

1. Read the verses below from Isaiah 55.
2. Reflect on what is God saying to you about *you*, about "*receiving*," and about *God's Heart for you*.
3. Write down the words and phrases that most capture your attention, whatever emotional reactions you have, and any longings these verses stir up in you. Do not wait until you have a well-formed response. Simply write whatever comes to mind. (This is not a test to see how well you can formulate an idea. We are practicing active spiritual reflection).

### Isaiah 55 (selected portions)

(NRSV)

Hey, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;  
and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

2) Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,  
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

3) Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live.

10) For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered  
the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,

11) so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;

it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

12) For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace;

the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song,  
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

( this space is for Exercise 1 – Reflecting on Isaiah 55 )



## Session 1 Sailing Practice – Isaiah’s Invitation

1. Read the full article, “*Rowing or Sailing?*” at the beginning of this book.
2. Read all of Isaiah 55.
3. Based on what you have read and our first session:
  - What reactions do you have to the invitations in the text? (Be as honest as possible.)
  - What hope is God calling you to?
  - What do you want to ask God for?
4. Spend 20-30 minutes writing out your thoughts and reactions below.

## Additional Reading

Dallas Willard: *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (NavPress: Colorado Springs) 2002

## Ship's Log – Session 1

It has been quite a journey so far! Looking back over the last five decades, I need to say that God has really been at work in my life. By the time I was finishing high-school, I was already a great rower. Almost every Sunday a small group of friends and I drove to a rest home to lead a service for some of the poorest people in the county. We would lead them in a few hymns and give our testimonies, then I would preach a sermon. I served as president of our youth group for several years, and on one occasion, I even filled in for my pastor.

Throughout my young adult life I often led Bible studies, taught adult classes at church, and generally served in as many ways as I could. For many of those years, I was one of those people every pastor loves to have in his congregation, because I could always be counted on for lively discussions and serious Bible-based teaching.

But there was another side to my life that never seemed to catch up with my active church life. I had very few functional friendships, was depressed most of the time, hated some of my family members, and hated myself much of the time as well. As a father, I was fairly clueless and had very little idea what it was my children needed, although early on I was so certain that my extensive theology would make me a good parent. What I did not know at the time was that I was still suffering from my own childhood, and there was no way I could give my children what I did not have to give. For that matter, I was not much of a husband either, although I seemed to stumble on a few ideas gleaned from my mistakes.

What puzzled me most of all was that my constant study of theology and the Bible did not seem to help. In fact it seemed to make things worse, because everything I learned seemed to widen the gap between what I knew God wanted from me and what I saw in the mirror. I could do lots of stuff at church, and look really good on the outside, but on the inside I was dying! My heart never seemed to change. No matter how much I wanted to be different, no matter how hard I tried to be different, I could not become the person I wanted to be. Rarely was there even any movement of my heart in the right direction. The best I could say was that I was becoming less dogmatic and a lot more understanding of others who seemed to be stuck as well.

But in late 1985, God began bringing people into my life who provided glimpses of what it might look like to have the kind of life I wanted. By 1998, I could hardly keep pace with the mentors He was sending my way – through seminars, books, friends, and finally, Himself. I found healing and relief from many of the painful wounds I had been carrying around for as long as I could remember. Within a few short years, my low-grade depression had lifted, and I was experiencing more joy and hope than I had ever imagined possible.

Perhaps the most wonderful thing of all was the discovery that God wanted my restoration even more than I did, and that we can learn how to engage with Him for the changes of heart we so desperately need and cannot accomplish on our own. My greatest desire at this point is to pass along those things I have learned about how God changes lives.

David Takle  
Sailor Apprentice

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