

Essential Truths for Christian Living Part II: The miracle that's a process

Do you remember the story of Jesus healing of the blind man at Bethsaida? The story tells us the healing took place in stages; two of them to be exact. The placement of this account, only recorded by Mark, is interesting. It is sandwiched in-between two stories.

One tells us of the slowness of the Disciples to realize who Jesus was, His mission, and the danger of the Pharisees in spite of the great miracles they had seen. The story following the healing involves the confession of Peter that Jesus was the Christ, yet Peter still not realizing the need for Jesus' suffering. In other words, the healing of the spiritual blindness of the disciples (8:18) also took time; it came in stages.

That's not unlike our own lives. Change and growth come in stages. We may even acknowledge that, but here's my question. Do we live in that reality? Do we realize that God realizes that we haven't arrived? Of course, He lives with that reality; the reality that we are, and always will be, a work in progress. Imperfection is a fact of every Christian. Change is a process. I'll address some pretty exciting truths about that another time. But for today, please nail down that idea. Change is a process. For much of my Christian life, I thought the Spirit's work was more like turning on a light bulb and when I got filled, I got zapped. All too often, the switch just didn't work and it made me feel like giving up.

Grab the Word and read 2 Corinthians 3 with me. Let's zero in on 3:18. It reads, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." This passage is loaded.

Context and observations

Unlike the Old Covenant ministry under Moses, the glory of this ministry increases rather than fades. Our "unveiled" faces are exposed to the glory of God in His Word. Scripture is like a mirror that reflects God's limitless glory on us and changes us. Just like Moses, when we're exposed to that glory, it impacts us.

Ever had that experience? Ever read the Scriptures, get blown away by something the Spirit shows you, and feel like you've been in the presence of God? You often feel like you have to tell someone, you've got to share what you've just learned. Usually, you want it to be someone who will be just as excited as you are and can't dial fast enough. You've just encountered a taste of the glory of God...and it changes you, often permanently. That's a good part of what we're talking about here.

When we expose ourselves to the Word of God, we can be impacted by the glory of God and the Spirit uses that to change us. So, what do we need to do? Well, for one thing, we need to have contact with God's word. We need to look into the mirror to see God's glory. When we do, it causes change, then growth in our lives.

Paul had explained that Israel could neither understand nor appreciate the Scriptures due to the “veil” over their hearts that came from unbelief. Of course, a Christian has believed and doesn’t have that veil. Faith is an important precondition to the process and it remains a critical part of the Christian faith. Paul makes that clear in Gal. 2:20 when he tells us that the life he lives he lives “by faith in the Son of God”. Faith is critical to growth and transformation. Let’s look at that transformation process.

When the Bible says we are “transformed”, it is something God does “by the Spirit of the Lord”. So, Christian growth is also a miracle. It’s a miracle of the Spirit’s work as we see “the glory of the Lord”. Just like Rom. 8:11 told us that our dead bodies are made alive by the Spirit, so this process takes place through Him. Our dead bodies experience a resurrection miracle to be made alive. Here, change also takes place by the Spirit’s work. This is the miracle of transformation. He not only enables me, He changes me. Like my body being made alive, it doesn’t just happen by trying hard.

Just like the two men on the road to Emmaus, when God opens my eyes to His word, we learn, we’re impacted, and we’re changed. But there’s more. And the next part is one of the most difficult realities I struggle to get. It’s a process.

The Bible says I’m “transformed into the same image” (the image of God!!) and that it happens “from glory to glory”. It’s a step-by-step process.

Just like the healing of the blind man, just like the gradual realization by the Disciples of the realities of Jesus, so our Christian growth, our transformation into the image of God, takes place as a process.

I hate that.

I want to be “there”. But that’s just not our present reality. It will be one day (1 Jn. 3:2), but that day is not today. The good news is that God has also factored that into the growth equation. But that’s for another devotional to come.

For now, what to do, what to do? Let’s summarize and talk about the “what to do” part.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18, we’re told that transformation:

1. Comes from us being impacted by the glory of God.
2. Results from seeing that glory in God’s amazing mirror (His word).
3. Takes place as a process; from “glory to glory”.
4. Is a work of God’s Spirit.

Change does not happen simply because I make it happen. I can’t. God changes us through His Spirit. The Christian life is not just a resurrection miracle, it’s also a miracle of transformation.

When I get this, reading the Word takes on a new expectation. Over and again, as we “with unveiled” faces encounter God’s word, we also encounter God’s glory in its many facets and we are changed. Our growth, and eventual change, is a work of God. True, it’s a process. It takes time. And I get impatient. But the great news is that liberty is waiting the person who is impacted by God’s Spirit in His Word (2 Cor. 3:17).