

What's God's Part and What is Mine in the Transformation Process?

In our longing to know God and walk in his ways, most of us have followed some kind of prescribed formula for spiritual success. We believe the right doctrines, live upright lives, we are faithful in ministry and attend church consistently and we think that should be enough. Yet for all our personal strategies for personal transformation, they do not ultimately achieve what we had hoped for. After 20 years of knowing Jesus, often our lives are not much different. We still struggle with the same doubts, harbor the same unforgiveness and indulge in the same vices. In the end, our spiritual lives often leave us exhausted and the transformation for which we'd hoped eludes us. In reducing the abundant life to external results and effects, we miss the point when Jesus said, "I have come to give you life." The abundant life, the life of Jesus ...the life we have always longed for, has not so much to do with *making* a life as it is *receiving* the life Jesus died to give us.

The abundant life Jesus talked about has nothing to do with us getting it "right" or that our circumstances be "right." The abundant life has everything to do with the on-going, creative work of the Holy Spirit in our lives in making us more like Jesus. The great work of God in our lives is that we might become like Jesus...that the life of Christ might be fully formed in us that it might flow from us. It is for *this purpose* that God is present and active in every moment of our lives. Look at:

Rom. 8:28 And we know that in all things **God works** for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose

Ephesians 1:11 - In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of **him who works** out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will

Philippians 2:13 for it is **God who works** in you to will and to act according to his good purpose

What is that great work? Scripture describes the end-result or goal of all this in Romans 8:29 – "For those God foreknew he also predestined **to be conformed to the image of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters." (Emphasis mine)

Ga. 4:19 says it this way – "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth **until Christ is formed in you.**" (Emphasis mine)

The good news is that that the Holy Spirit is always active in our lives to birth in us the life of Christ we cannot produce ourselves. We cannot by direct effort manipulate, control or manage spiritual reality. Understanding this makes *all* the difference. When it's up to us to make the Christian life "work" more often than not, this reduces our



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spiritual life to external acts of worship, routine exercises of piety and service performed out of duty. We become more concerned about fixing problems, mastering principles, and racking up “brownie” points and we drift further and further from the life offered by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

So what’s our part in all this? *Our part requires not so much doing for God but paying attention to what God is already doing.* Once we realize the Holy Spirit is constantly at work drawing us and keeping us in relationship the Father, we begin to cultivate different things; things like keeping our hearts focused and alive to what God is doing to keep us in relationship with him. Our responsibility is simply to co-operate with this great work he is already doing in our lives. It has a lot to do with paying attention.

How do we do that?

Look at what it says in Matthew 11:28-30: "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me--watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly" (The Message).

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Often, but not exclusively, we learn to do these things, partnering with the Holy Spirit, in the context of the spiritual disciplines: Prayer, Scripture reading, solitude, etc. They are *indispensable* to a life of faith *but* only to the degree that they allow us to “keep company” with Jesus. They are not a means of earning points or manipulating divine favor; they are a means of grace. Often it is through a spiritual discipline we make space enough in our lives for us to “get

away,” “walk with,” or “keep company” with Jesus. It is out of that place of abiding, he transforms us.

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The fact is we can’t force ourselves on the course of transformation by sheer determination or willpower. Rather it is often through these practices we position ourselves to open our “sails” and best catch the wind of the Holy Spirit and we respond to his leading with surrender and obedience to his will and ways. That’s how we cooperate with him for transformation.

This is ultimately a journey of the heart. To be truly transformed into the likeness of Christ we are going to have to engage our heart in these practices and other environments to encounter Jesus in real, meaningful ways and experience his transforming presence.