

Joshua Daily Devotionals



Week Five: Inner Transformation Is Personal, not Mechanical

Monday, 5/18

By Joshua 9, the Israelites are getting sort of used to being top dog. Walls fall down, battle after battle passes, they are the uncontested heavy weight champs. Everywhere they go, their enemies are scattered, their days of wandering in the desert seem like forever ago, and unfortunately, they start to forget how they got there in the first place. Verse 14 gives us a clear picture of how things went south, the Israelites, "...did not ask counsel from the LORD."

While it's true that the Gibeonites "acted with cunning" in this passage, we should also recognize that they did so because they were in appropriate awe of God. They knew who was running the show.

The Israelites seem to have forgotten who got them where they were. They weren't even asking God what to do anymore, and they were actually going *against* the instructions that God gave them to drive out the Canaanites (this is back in Numbers 33:51-52).

But it's not really even a question of whether they've obeyed a certain list or checked a certain box, the problem is that in this passage, Israel wasn't in relationship with God like they needed to be.

What we'll see from Schaeffer this week is that true spirituality isn't adhering to a list of behaviors, or rituals, or anything like that. (He refers to this as "mechanical transformation") Instead, true spirituality is first and foremost a personal relationship with the living God, out of which everything else follows. (What he calls "personal transformation.")

Can you think of a time when you and God weren't talking like you needed to be? How did that resolve, or what is that like right now?

Psalm 145:18

Tuesday, 5/19

Following the Israelites through Joshua 9 we see their attention waver a bit and they drift off course, away from relationship with God, and more in relationship with what they think they already know.

If you've followed Jesus for any amount of time, you've probably had seasons of growth, and seasons where you've felt further away, so what do we do to stay close? What is the "how" for being close to God?

Schaeffer writes,

"In the light of the unity of the Bible's teaching in regard to the supernatural nature of the universe, the how is the power of the crucified and the risen Christ, through the agency of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, by faith."

First, the witness of scripture orients us towards truth. The Bible is God's self-disclosure to us about him, and it tells us we live in a reality that is more than just the physical.

Scripture tells us that we are able to be in relationship with God, not through special rituals, or actions, or even by reading the right books, scripture points us ahead to the crucified and risen Christ, and the here and now indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

A plant needs to be oriented towards the sun to grow.

The work of growth is accomplished by the sun, and only by the sun.

A plant won't grow by reading textbooks about the sun, talking about the importance of being in the sun, or pretending not to need the sun. It's either being fed by something infinitely beyond it, or it's dying. Those are the choices.

The Christian life is only possible through personal relationship with God.

You and I will never outgrow the need to be in deep, personal, reliant, relationship with God, made possible through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Think of times when you've done a lot of maturing in your faith, how were you able to get close to God?

John 15:4-5

Wednesday, 5/20

Yesterday we looked at the idea that personal transformation is only possible through personal relationship with God, checking boxes and checking out won't cut it, and today we'll read that that personal relationship is maintained through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:13 says, "For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

Schaffer takes this idea and writes,

"The Holy Spirit is specifically introduced to us here as the agent of the power and the person of the glorified Christ. There is not enough strength in ourselves, but placed before us is the power and the work of the glorified Christ through the agency of the Holy Spirit."

You may or may not have encountered a time in your life where you felt like you were just stuck. Not growing, not moving, just stuck.

Maybe worship doesn't feel as alive, reading the Bible seems like a chore, and time spent with God seems more like a "supposed to" than a "get to."

If you know what it's like to be here, or you're here today, and you're ready to get moving again, here's the way forward: connect with the Holy Spirit.

When things are crazy, talk to God about it. When things are wonderful, thank God for it. When you're frustrated, turn to the Holy Spirit in prayer. If you're just sick of the same old, everyday thing, tell God about it.

There isn't a way that an encounter with the Holy Spirit can be done "wrongly." God invites us into his presence, again and again. Whether you're feeling good enough, bad enough, bored enough, or overwhelmed, an experience with the Holy Spirit will always be beneficial to your relationship with God and to your personal growth into his image and likeness.

When was a time when you felt the presence of the Holy Spirit most strongly in your life?

Read: Romans 15:13

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope."

Thursday, 5/21

A good sort of question to ask in most cases is “why?” Why not this way, or why that way at all?

When we hear someone tell us, as Schaffer has told us during this devotional series, that we cannot have a “mechanical” solution to spirituality, that we can’t just do certain specific things and expect nearness to God, it’s fair to ask, “why not?”

Schaeffer tells us, “It is not possible to say, ‘Read so many chapters of the Bible every day, and you will have this much sanctification...’”

And a good sort of question is, “why not?”

To which Schaffer would say, “The real solution is being cast up into moment-by-moment communion, personal communion, with God himself, and letting Christ’s truth flow through me through the agency of the Holy Spirit.”

Which, for the record, could include reading so many chapters of the Bible. But the reading and the study and the disciplines are dead without the life-giving, animating power of the Holy Spirit.

If there is no Holy Spirit enlivening all of this, if there is no living God breathing fresh air into our lives, then we are in a lot of trouble.

There is no amount of trying, discipline, acting, or ritual that will bring us any closer to God. The hope we have is not in perfectly performing the “mechanical” as Schaeffer would call it. The hope we have is in a living God, in an active, unstoppable Holy Spirit, that is interested, invested, and right this moment inviting us to know him personally.

What is something you thought you had to do to be close to God, that you found out wasn’t really necessary at all?

Read: 2 Cor 3:15–18

“Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. ¹⁶ But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

Friday, 5/22 The Pharisee and the tax collector

⁹ He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

- Luke 18:9–14

In this passage Jesus illustrates the difference between what Schaeffer would call mechanical and personal transformation.

You have the pharisees (boo, bad guys), who brag on their good works, and give one of the most passive aggressive, bless-your-heart, kind of prayers on record, and their whole group tried to outdo each other in these virtue displays. They would be the mechanical, rote, routine attempts at transformation.

And then you have the tax collector (boo, also bad guys), who outwardly are the bad guys, but who realize their need, and are trying to get close to God. They would be the personal, engaged, and active attempts at transformation.

This is a great passage because it’s convicting every time you read it. We don’t deepen our relationship with God by posturing and parading. God is a relational God who has invited us to draw near to him.

When have you felt the pressure to “maintain appearances” more than being in real relationship with God? When have you felt the pressure to be more mechanical than personal?

Read James 4:10:

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Saturday, 5/23

We can never get too confident in any method for growth. God is Spirit and we must continuously seek Him.

The concept we've been reflecting on this week isn't too ground-breaking. We need to be in constant relationship with God if we're going to grow into his image and likeness. Mechanical versus personal transformation.

The reason it's difficult is that when we connect with God in a personal way early on in life, that experience can be so powerful and so profound, that we can't imagine that God is inviting us into experiencing him in new ways, and in new places.

The faith that leads us to read scripture, one of the earliest, surest, and most trustworthy foundations for our faith, is the same faith that will lead us to know God through prayer, and to know God in worship, and to know God in whatever wild, unexpected, biblically consistent, and exciting way God chooses to meet us.

A maturing faith is one that recognizes that we are constantly contingent on God's relationship with us. We are forever looking to him, forever understanding new things about him. Not demanding that God conform to how he has revealed himself to us in the past but understanding that the dynamic and living relationship that we have with God will draw us out of rote, ritualized faith.

Schaeffer writes, "Faith is the empty hand, the instrument by which we accept God's free gift."

We will either live in a posture of empty hands, raised in faith to the God who is faithful to satisfy, or we will sit with closed fists focused on ourselves and what we can do, what we can accomplish.

Where is a place that God unexpectedly met you?

Read: 1 Peter 5:6-7

⁶Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.