

“Transformation Through Truth”

Were you ever in a hurry to grow up? Funny thing, while getting older we may find ourselves wondering if people ever really grow up. After some people become adults they wish they were children again so they can escape the responsibilities of life. Regardless of our attitude, one thing life does is challenge us with change.

My mother used to race me across the back yard when a child. From the edge of the patio to the clothesline. She always won. Then for several years no race was run, until one sunny afternoon when this old challenge arose once again. Dad set us off and away we went.... That’s right... Mom lost...badly.

Both of our bodies had changed. Mine got faster, and hers got slower. Change also takes place in our spiritual lives. Sometimes we think that we are standing still just counting time, but God is a God of action. Thought-by-thought, action-by-action, if we are not for Him then we are against Him. The result will be evident in the way we live.

God desires that change always brings growth in our relationship with Him, through Christ, within His love. We may struggle to live out our idea of a “good Christian” life yet find ourselves overcome by the turmoil of our existence.

We might throw our hands up in despair, feeling that life is so little of what we think it should be, and so much of what we know so little about. It becomes easy for confusion to set in, and for our faith journey to appear complex, and beyond our comprehension.

In previous chapters we have been thinking about that faith journey and the way love grows. The scriptures tell us that we are to “...grow up in all aspects into Him,...” (Eph 4.15).

“Therefore if any man is in Christ, He is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold new things have come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17) Now let’s seek to understand the way this change will take place so the love of God may be clearly seen within our actions.

A passage of scripture which is special to me in regard to this change is Romans 12:1,2. “I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

The intent here is not to provide a running commentary of this passage, but to take particular note of the word “transformed.” In Christ we will change. We will become different than we were before accepting Him as Savior. This requires us to “Present our bodies” as a “living” sacrifice, to seek God and His will for our lives. In this way we will be giving Him first priority.

Still, the question remains as to how this transformation is going to take place. Did you notice what Paul said? We will be “transformed by the renewing of your mind,…”

Why didn’t he say spirit? Isn’t all that we gain in Christ given to us by the Spirit, and aren’t we regenerated spiritually? Yes, but Paul had already spent the first eleven chapters of Romans addressing various aspects of that spiritual regeneration. Now, He is going to tell us about living the redeemed life and these two verses are the primary changing point in His text.

In order to be transformed, our minds must be renewed. This is very much a spiritual process, which must become real through our obedience to Jesus as Lord.

In no way are these Spirals to be seen as sure-fire methods of spiritual growth by just going through the paces, and out we pop as Super Christians. There does seem to be, however, a way to begin to understand this process of renewal and transformation which is linked to the question: “What is truth?”

Webster’s Dictionary says that truth is, “...that which is true; that which conforms to fact or reality;...” The word true is defined as, “Conformable to fact; correct; not erroneous, inaccurate, or the like.”

The problem still remains as to who is going to determine what is fact, and what is not. This question poses such a problem for us because our perception of things is almost as varied as the number of people considering what is being perceived.

When we add to this our concepts of God, then things can really get confusing. The reason is we are using our ability to perceive as the standard for determining truth, rather than allowing our standard to be set by “the” truth: God is Truth. (Please read The Essence of Our Faith.)

What God knows, and how He perceives the world is Truth. There is no inaccuracy within God. The difficulty lies in our perception of Him, and His Truth. As Paul says, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known." (I Cor. 13:12)

Fortunately, God does not leave us alone to our own devices in this search for truth. His scripture gives us guidance. "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth was realized through Jesus Christ." (John 1:17) "Jesus said to Him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through me" (John 14:6). "And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is the truth" (I John 5:7)

"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come." (John 16:13) "Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth." (John 17:17) One of the great promises from Jesus is John 8:32, "...and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Free to call Go "my" Father, free to know more about God, free to learn to love Him more, free to be transformed; and in each case the word "free" could be replaced with "enabled." Here we are set free from much of the stumbling through life as we search for truth, because our perceptions are not based upon the things of the world, but upon the truth as it is revealed to us through Christ, by the leading of the Holy Spirit.

One of the things which stand in the way of progress in our transformation through Christ is what we have learned from the world to be truth, which in fact is a lie. As we grow older we are taught many things by other people and events in our lives, which sometimes prove to be lies or half-lies.

Are any of these familiar? "You can't please everybody so you've got to please yourself." "Love means you never have to say you're sorry." Remember that is important to be able to say, "I did it my way!" There is an underlying current in the world which teaches us that we have to lie a little bit, and cheat a little bit in order to make it through life.

Whatever our particular combination of worldly truths, and God Who is Truth may be, this represents "truth" for us.



(Know World's Truth)

When we accept Christ as Savior the Holy Spirit comes within us and begins to teach us His Truth, which God freely gives to us. It will be consistent with the scriptures because there is no inconsistency within God. The presence of the Holy Spirit will begin to reveal to us the things which we accept as truth that are in fact lies.

One of the ways He does this is by reflecting our unrighteousness against God's absolute righteousness. This causes the things in our life which are sinful to stand out for our consideration under the scrutiny of His Spirit.

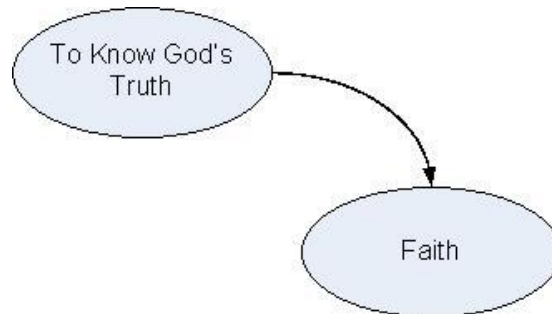
The more we know about God the more complete this reflective process becomes within us. That is why we must present ourselves as a living sacrifice, so we might be surrendered to God's teaching and leading.

We accept our that identity based upon what we've learned from the world is dead, because we have become new creations within Christ. So, our old self is sacrificed, and this allows the Life of Christ within us, our new Life, to be revealed. Thus, we become a living sacrifice.



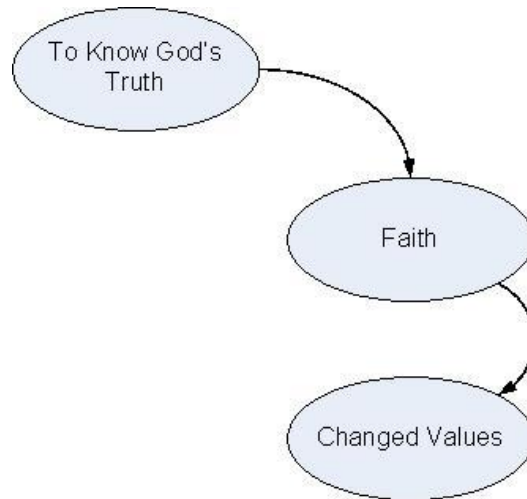
(Know God's Truth)

As the Holy Spirit guides us into all the Truth we are given the opportunity to act upon our trust in that Truth. This is faith at work: To trust in something and to act upon the basis of that trust. When we act on the basis of the Truth which God reveals to us the next step in the transformation process can take place. Our values will change.



(Faith: Trust in Action)

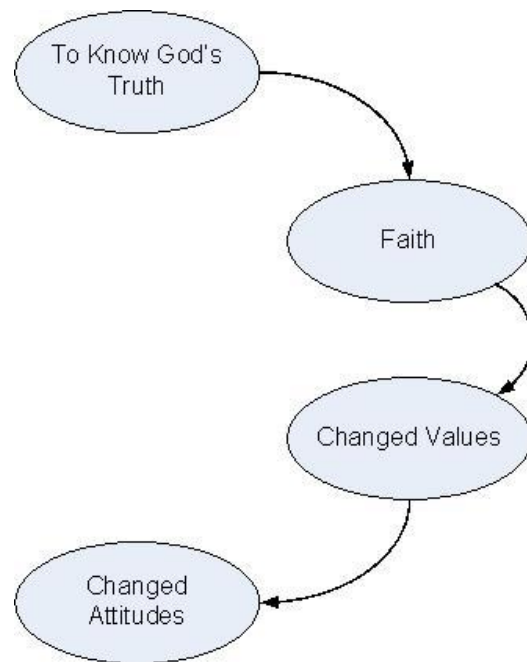
What we think is important will slowly begin to comply with what is important to God. We will learn to value what God declares valuable. His Truth will reveal what is important to Him, and we must surrender ourselves to that Truth.



(Changed Values)

As we do this the Truth begins to have an active result within and through our lives; the word of God becomes more alive within us.

Through the Truth we are set free to properly understand the true values of God, and thereby establish a moral philosophy in line with God's will for our lives. This is able to take place because our attitudes change. Here we see the next result of allowing the Truth to live in us. As our values change our attitudes will change, and this in turn will cause our way of thinking to change.



(Changed Attitudes)

When our thought patterns are changed to align with God's Truth then our minds are being renewed. The way we process thoughts is rechanneled.

Now, this Spiral is not about being an expert on the psychological processing of thought patterns, this is only an illustration. The point is our values and attitudes shape the way we think about things, and this is all determined by what we believe to be truth.

Let me try to clarify this by an illustration. If we believe that power is one of the most important things in life then this will effect what we value.

Chances are that something we will value greatly is money. Why? Because in our society money is usually equated with power.

We believe money allows us to control much more of what happens in our life experiences. The kind of house we live in, how we are perceived by others, the type of education our children have; all of this is directly impacted through the power of money. With money at the top of our list of things we value, our attitudes will be formed.

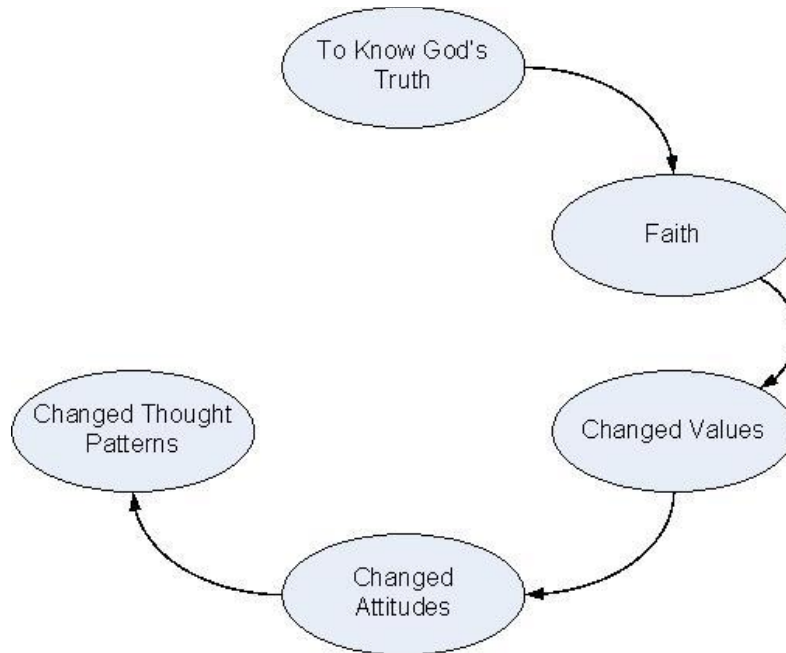
We may not think much of people who are poor. Their value is diminished by our desire for power, so our attitude may be generally negative toward them.

Thus, when we are standing on the street corner and a vagrant comes stumbling toward us, our thoughts might be, "Why do those people have to be here?", or "I'd better be careful!" Our thoughts are shaped by our attitudes.

If, on the other hand, we have learned God's Truth about the value of life, and allowed that to push out of our hearts the lie about power, then when we see the vagrant our thoughts will be different.

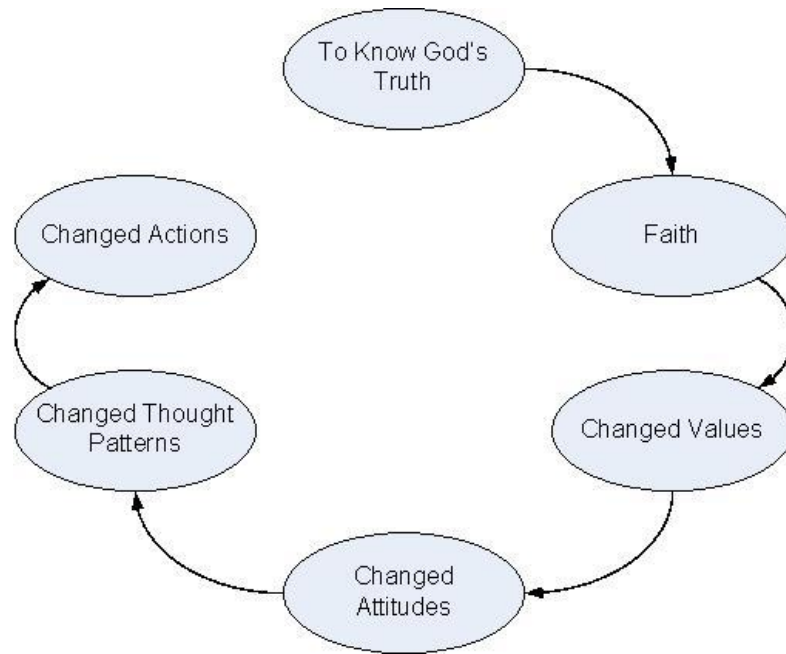
We may still think that he needs a bath and feel unsafe, but we are now able to see him as a person who is important to God, and therefore important to us. Thus, our thought patterns will have changed, and can change further to align with God's perspective.

Renewal, and growth is a progressive process. Perhaps this is more about consistency of growth than the speed at which we grow. We will probably all mature in our relationship with God, in Christ, at different rates of growth. It's not about comparison. It's about relationships that bring about change that's aligned with God's will for us.



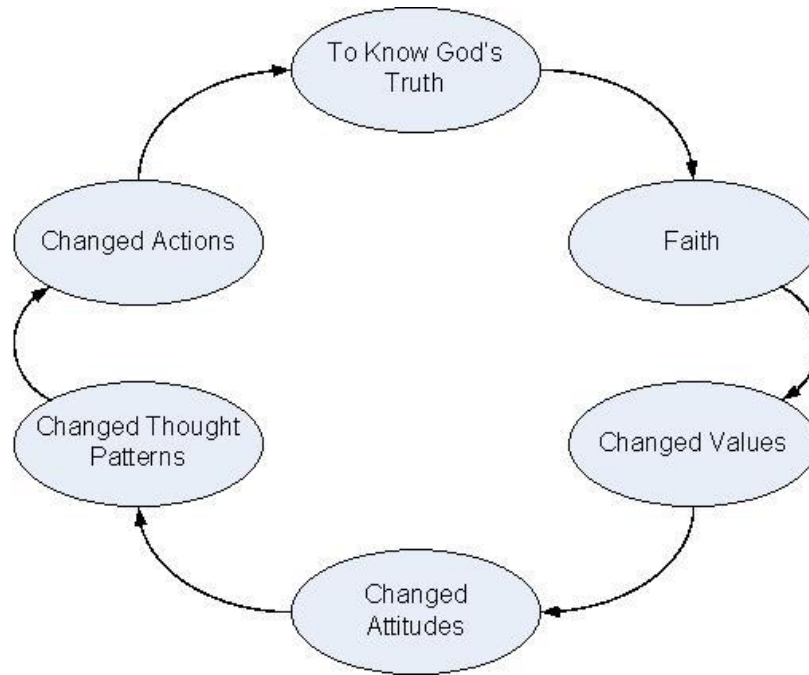
(Changed Thought Patterns)

Because our thoughts are different the next change can take place in this transformation process. Our actions will change. Instead of telling the “looser” to get away from us, the love of God may compel us to help this person in some way. Here is where our transformation by the renewing of our mind begins to “prove what the will of God is” to the world.



(Changed Actions)

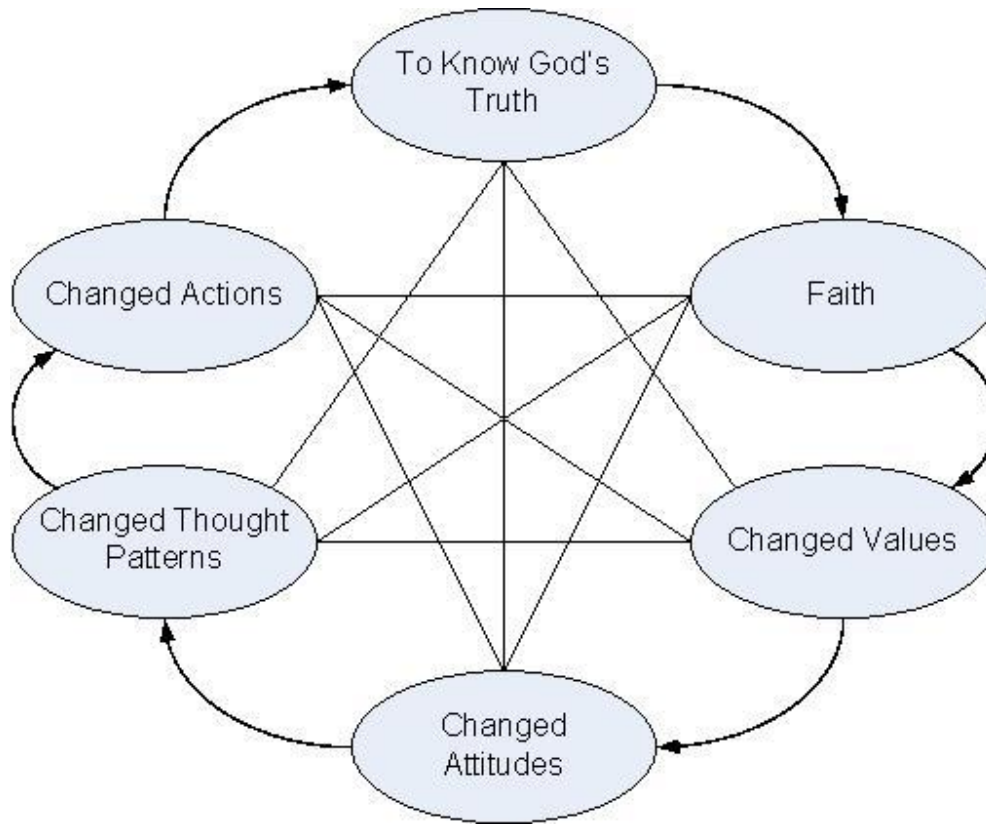
By acting upon the Truth that God has given us, through this process of transformation the final part of this Spiral is completed. The Truth that began the process in the first place is reinforced as we witness the work of the Spirit of God in our life reaching out to others, and at the same time meeting our need to love others. This will create the interest, desire, and drive to understand more of God's Truth.



(Completes the Spiral: Back to Knowing God's Truth)

The more we seek God's Truth for our lives, surrendered to the leading of the Holy Spirit, the more our life will be transformed by God. This whole process works to increase our time with God, knowledge of Him, and our trust in Him, which will in turn cause our love for Him to grow. This, in turn, causes us to desire to know more of His Truth!

Once again, the more this pattern evolves the more interactive it becomes. This increased dynamic can foster growth to occur that might otherwise lie dormant within us for years. Why? Because we will have suppressed our growth by continuing to live according to the lies propagated within this world.



(Interactive and Iterative Growth)

Many people break down this growth Spiral by trusting in their own strength in order to try to make their actions comply with the Truth God reveals to them in Christ. Discipline is necessary as a temporary substitute for the time it takes to allow the renewal process to bring forth results. This discipline, however, should be motivated out of our love of God and our desire to please Him. It must work together with the Spirit of God within this renewal process.

What may happen to those who seek to live in their own power is similar to something we may have done as a child. Did any of us ever play outside after a heavy rain storm?

My hand is raised. Do we remember the water rushing down the curb or ditch? For some reason that water never seemed to be deep enough for me, and the logical answer was to build a dam. So, by piling everything that could easily be found in the path of the water – rocks, mud, bricks, and sand – an acceptable pool for play might be created. Usually, sooner rather than later, the water built up and either ran around the dam, or over it and washed it away.

We do similar things with our thoughts. If we learn that we are not supposed to act a certain way then we attempt to stop that action at the thought level. When temptation arises, and incorrect thoughts begin to flow down old thought patterns, we immediately try to “dam up” those thoughts so they don’t turn into actions.

Circumstances within our experiences are good at throwing enough of those temptations in our way so that our mental dam is overflowed, and this causes us to fall back into old patterns of actions. Just when we think we might be in control it's easy to be washed away by the torrent of temptations.

The renewing of our minds does not just "dam up" old thought pattern channels – it rechannles those thoughts instead. They are given a new direction because their supporting attitudes, values, and truths are different: "The old things" pass away; "Behold new things have come."

It is this transformation, by the renewing of our minds, which allows us the ability to grow even in the midst of the painful experiences of life. In the next chapter we will study the Spiral of growth in times of tribulation. My hope is that through us, in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, God will be revealed within the world as the God of victories rather than defeats.