

CROSSROADS COMMUNITY CHURCH

Core Values Lessons for Neighborhood Gatherings

Mission: The mission of Crossroads Community Church is helping people on their journey back to God. We will do this by becoming a spiritually mature community of Christ-followers, equipping ourselves to impact the world as the presence of Christ, in order that lives may be transformed, God's purpose in the world fulfilled, and our Creator honored and glorified.

LESSON 6: THE NEW BEING IN CHRIST

Value: *TRANSFORMATION* — We believe that a relationship with God results in changed people, changed lives, and changed communities.



Breaking the Ice (10 minutes)

- When did you last have an experience of “newness”?
- If you had the power to change anything in the larger community surrounding Zion Crossroads, what would you change?



Discovering the Truth (20-25 minutes)

2 Corinthians 5:17; NRSV

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

In a recent e-zine article John Ortberg noted, “Most Christian folk want to be changed, to become more like Christ. But is it happening?”¹ He went on to discuss the dangers of what he called “boundary marker spirituality,” relatively superficial *outward* signs which identify who’s in and who’s out of a particular religious group. In times past (I hope!) such markers in Baptist life were no movies, no dancing, no alcohol, no smoking, no lip stick, no bikinis — you know the drill — an outwardly visible holiness by subtraction put in place to distinguish between the sheep and the goats.² *This is, in Ortberg’s words, “pseudo transformation”.*

Jesus, however, seemed to relegate such outward righteousness to the garbage heap of religious veneers. Ortberg

¹ “The Danger of Pseudo-transformation vs. Authentic Christian Spirituality” at this link:
http://www.walk-this-way.com/john_ortberg_christian_spirituality.htm

²Today, traditional Muslim societies follow similar practices by insisting men wear beards and women wear burquas. Hell’s Angels did it in the 1960's with leather jackets, war helmets, and tatoos. Who’s in, who’s out . . .

describes it this way:

Jesus brought a message that spoke to the deepest longings of the human heart, to become not simply conformed to a religious subculture but transformed into “new creatures.” Instead of focusing on the boundaries, Jesus focused on the center, the heart of spiritual life. When asked to identify what the law is about, Jesus’ response was simply “Love God, love people.” *He named a fundamentally different way of identifying who are the children of God: “Do they love God, and do they love the people who mean so much to him?”*

Jesus’ early followers understood this clearly. The apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth about the significance of having many spiritual “markers” but lacking the center: “If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.” John put it even more bluntly: “Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God, for God is love.”

This is why the religious leaders of Jesus’ day so often fought with him about circumcision, dietary laws, and the Sabbath. Jesus was not just disagreeing with them on how to interpret the Law. He was threatening their very understanding of themselves as the people of God.

Perhaps boundary-marker spirituality is easier to develop than dealing with the hard work of inner transformation. However, Jesus seemed to be criticizing just such a tendency in the Sermon on the Mount where he kept pointing back to inner transformation, which, of course, does ultimately result in a change in the outer person.

Again, listen to Ortberg:

But Jesus consistently focused on people's center: *Are they oriented and moving toward the center of spiritual life (love of God and people), or are they moving away from it?* This is why he shocked people by saying that many religious leaders — who observed all the recognized boundary markers — were in fact outside the kingdom of God. They were . . . increasingly dead to love. And this is why Jesus could say that “the tax collectors and the prostitutes” who were a million miles away from the religious subculture, but who had turned, converted, and oriented themselves toward God and love, were already in the kingdom.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ-followers are transformed inwardly, from the center, day-by-day, in order that we might be the presence of Christ to those around us. *And a willingness to be that loving, accepting presence is the only mark of identification needed to confirm one’s transformation into “a new creation.”*

For Reflection:

1. Do you agree with Ortberg’s assessment of what it means to become “a new creation” in Christ? Why or why not?
 2. Why do you think many well-meaning, religious people have a tendency to accept what Ortberg calls “pseudo transformation” as opposed to the real deal?
 3. What are some of the “boundary markers” prevalent in popular religion that you see as impediments to effectively sharing the gospel to those in need of a relationship with God?
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Embracing the Truth (15 minutes)

Dallas Willard³ has written that in contrast to the tendency of religions and religious adherents to focus on outward signs of spiritual transformation, the fruit of the Spirit flows forth from an inward self. He states:

... the fruit of the Spirit, as described by Jesus and Paul, does not consist in actions, but in attitudes or settled personality traits that make up the substance of the “hidden” self, the “inner man”. “Love” captures this fruit in one word, but in such a concentrated form that it needs to be spelled out. Thus, “the fruit (singular) of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22). Other such passages easily come to mind, such as II Peter 1:4-11, I Cor. 13, and Romans 5:1-5.

It is the Holy Spirit of God working and living within the inner person who produces a transformed life and the fruit which characterizes such a life. Thus, “being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor. 3:18) is often referred to as “spiritual formation.” It is a process initiated and sustained by the Spirit, a journey toward God, one which ends only when we see Jesus face-to-face.

For Reflection:

1. *Get Real* — If we are being transformed, why then do we still sin? (Clue: see 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 in **For Further Study**)
2. *Where the Rubber Meets the Road* — Paul tells young Timothy, “Train yourself in godliness, for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” (1 Tim. 4:7-8). What might such training consist of?
3. *Tending the Vineyard* — How do you think one might intentionally cultivate the fruit produced by God’s Spirit?
4. *Truth for Life* — If time permits, have one or more group member share a *truth for life* from one of the scripture passages in **For Further Study**.



Connecting (10-15 minutes)

As you share particular concerns and praises with other members of the group, consider discussing a possible commitment to some spiritual disciplines for “training in godliness.” You can get some good, unbiased info at this link: <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artid=81>. A self-guided study in spiritual disciplines is available at http://www.watersedge.tv/disciplines_intro.htm. Connect — with each other and with God.

1. Praises from group members
2. Concerns from group members
3. Share these in conversation with God

³Willard is a Professor in the School of Philosophy at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. He is a widely read and respected writer on the subject of Christian spirituality and spiritual disciplines. He states on his website, “My hope is to gain a fresh hearing for Jesus, especially among those who believe they already understand him.” The quotes above are from an article Willard wrote entitled “Why Bother with Discipleship.” It is available at this link: <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=71>

For Further Study

I love the way The Message paraphrases 2 Corinthians 5:16-21. So, I decided to share it with you!

A NEW LIFE

Our firm decision is to work from this focused center: One man died for everyone. That puts everyone in the same boat. He included everyone in his death so that everyone could also be included in his life, a resurrection life, a far better life than people ever lived on their own.

Because of this decision we don't evaluate people by what they have or how they look. We looked at the Messiah that way once and got it all wrong, as you know. We certainly don't look at him that way anymore. Now we look inside, and *what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons!* Look at it! All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other. God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing. We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you.

How? you say. In Christ. God put on him the wrong who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, *are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another*; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

Romans 6:1-14; NRSV

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, *so we too might walk in newness of life.*

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For whoever has died is freed from sin. ⁸ But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

¹² Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. ¹³ No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Romans 12:1-2; NRSV

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but *be transformed* by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.