

A Time to Flourish

Part 4

Transformation

Opening scripture: Romans 12:1-2

Introduction: By now we know that ‘flourishing’ is that *good and acceptable will of God* for our lives. As we saw, to flourish means: “to grow or develop in a healthy or vigorous way, to thrive, to increase, to enlarge, to prosper, to abound, to expand, to spread out, to make steady progress, to be at a high point in one’s life”.

I came across another definition that says: to live ‘within an optimal range of human functioning’. Jesus called it the “abundant life” in **John 10:10**. John put it this way in **3 John 1:2** “*Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.*”

Flourishing is the perfect will of God. However, today, I want to talk about ‘transformation’. “Flourishing” is where we want to end up but “transformation” is more about the process to get there. The seed is not transformed into a mature plant, flourishing and ready to pollinate, overnight.

Here’s how we enter the process of transformation:

1. We need to acknowledge that we are not there yet and that we need to change.

I think that most people would agree that they need to change and be transformed. Bookstores are filled with books that promise all kinds of ideas for people to change themselves. I believe that only God can ‘deliver’ when it comes to transformation, because the answers are not ‘within’ or ‘in self’ but in Him.

Colossians 2:3 - *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

We need to acknowledge that we need Him and that we need that upgraded, perfected, version of ourselves that matches the description of a flourishing life. We need to submit to Him: the Divine Gardener who nurtures and sometimes prunes, to the Potter that transforms a lump of clay into a vessel of honour.

2. We need encounters with God

Romans 12:1 - *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.*

God is the starting point of the journey. We need to present ourselves to Him, we need to spend time in the presence of God.

- a) ‘*I beseech you*’ – in the Greek, *parakleo* – Before a battle, commanders would come alongside their armies before a battle and give them an exhortation to fight courageously to victory.

- b) *'that you present your bodies'* – he didn't say 'your soul' but 'your bodies' meaning that part of us connected to the flesh, our carnal nature – the driving force of our lives before Jesus came in.
- c) *'as a living sacrifice'* – in the Old testament, the temple was the place where on a daily basis sacrifices were presented to God. We need to come to God for a daily encounter with Him.

In **Genesis 35** Jacob had an encounter with God and he became 'Israel'. God transformed Jacob's life forever. He never walked the same way again.

In **2 Samuel 10:6** Saul had an encounter with God and was transformed "*into another man*".

In **Mark 9:2-3**, Peter James and John saw Jesus transfigured before them. The place of the God-encounter, the place of the glory, is the place of transformation (here, the word 'transfigured' in the Greek is *metamorphoo* and is also translated as 'transformed').

In **Acts 6:15**, we read how the face of Stephen was seen as the face of an angel – that is transformation that can only come as we spend time in the presence of God.

3. We need to embrace a different pattern for living

Romans 12:2 NIV - *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

The "pattern of this world" is this world's system of ideas and a reflection of the age we are living in. If you operate according to the world system, you can only produce what is natural to that system. You need to tap into God's system – His values, His way of doing things, His pattern, His values etc.

You can only be transformed to the measure that your mind is renewed and that these principles operate in your life.

You can't expect to flourish if your roots are deep in a soil that is barren and lifeless. The flourishing tree is the one (trans)planted into the house of God. We separate ourselves from the system of this world that leads to death and we plant ourselves where the soil is well watered and rich in nutrients.

4. The work of the Holy Spirit

Let me finish today by talking about the Holy Spirit. He is God's agent for change in our lives.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 - *¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. ¹⁸ 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.*

The role of the Holy Spirit is to transform our lives – He makes us not just a ‘better of version of ourselves’ but he makes like Jesus. He transforms us gradually – from glory to glory. It is a process.

In the book of **Esther (2:9,12)** we read the preparation that this young Jewish girl was to undertake be presented before the Persian King.

Esther is a prophetic picture of the church:

1. She is getting ready to meet the king – we are getting ready to meet Jesus.
2. She underwent a whole process to be beautified – the church will be presented glorious, beautiful, a flourishing church without spot or wrinkle (Ephesians 5:27)
3. The wait to meet the king took one year – the era of the church is “*the acceptable year of the Lord*”
4. Seven choice maidservants were provided – the Bible speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit in sevens:
 - Isaiah 11:1-2 – seven operations of the Holy Spirit
 - Zechariah 4:1-10 – seven lamps
 - Revelation 4:5 – seven Spirits of God. In this passage verse 12 mentions oils and perfumes.

The Holy Spirit is at work in the church to transform us, to beautify our lives, to cause us to flourish. How we need to acknowledge the Holy Spirit, live in the Spirit and be filled with the Holy Spirit!

Conclusion

2017 is the year that the righteous will flourish like the palm tree. It will be a year of transformation, of Holy Spirit activity, of God encounters. We will never be the same again!