

# MORPH

*Handout*



**GREENHOUSE**  
SCHOOL OF MINISTRY

# MORPH

Dead religion does not \_\_\_\_\_ people. It's a neutered version of Christianity that sounds like it belongs to Jesus, but never seems to resemble the Jesus we read about in the Bible. It over-promises and under-delivers. It teases the hungry soul but always leaves it dry. Like a cheap piece of candy, your mouth waters only to dig in and discover it was hollow all along.

The soul can only tolerate so much disappointment. Is the way of Jesus actually weak and ineffective, or have we often settled for some cheap version of the real thing? A form of godliness that denies the transformative power thereof. Let's be honest: most Christians just don't \_\_\_\_\_ very much.

But there is another way. And we're invited, if we want it. I am convinced that transformation is utterly possible because we have watched it time after time in the lives of 15 year-old young people. And 21 year-old college students. And 45 year-old doctors. And 75 year-old widows. And single moms. And church ladies that were stagnant for 30 years. When ordinary people say yes to the invitation of discipleship they change.

*Disciples are people of \_\_\_\_\_.*

They are people that have been - and *are being* - changed by Jesus. Morphed. Let's spend a little time thinking about what happens when people transform.

Foolish disciple-makers and pastors tend to spend the majority of their time trying to convince \_\_\_\_\_ people to do what they really don't want to do. Why? Because they have not really changed. The way of Jesus was never meant to be the compilation of a long list of new year's resolutions. It's a whole new way of living.

Some of these transformation-deprived "Christians" are actually not true Christians at all; they need what we call \_\_\_\_\_. They need to be born from God. But many more really do belong to Jesus, yet desperately need to experience what theologians call sanctification. They need soul-transformation.

So what's the key to true transformation?

**We \_\_\_\_\_ *like what we* \_\_\_\_\_.**

"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."

**2 Corinthians 3:18**

"... looking unto Jesus, the Author, and Finisher of our faith."

**Hebrews 12:2**

# FIRST OBSERVATION

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**People change when focused on \_\_\_\_\_ and Him crucified.**

It is interesting that the apostle Paul claimed that all of his teaching and disciple-making could be summed up in these words: "Jesus Christ and Him crucified." (1 Corinthians 2:2) The point is this: there is a way that gazing upon the finished work of Jesus on the Cross changes us like nothing else can. This is the Gospel. Revealing vividly the saving work of Jesus and emphasizing the centrality of believing it. Really believing it in every area of our lives. I perceive this to be a challenge for many of us so I'll spend a bit more time on this subject.

By grace through faith. Chew on those words.

*We are not only justified by faith (not works), but we are also sanctified by faith (not works).* Most Protestants would say they believe this and yet very few disciple-makers recognize how the finished work of Jesus relates to the ongoing work of the Spirit. The Reformers taught that not only was justification by faith in Jesus' work alone – not ours, but sanctification is **also** by faith in Jesus' work not ours.

If we are honest, most believers actually believe that:

- 1) We are justified/saved/adopted by faith in Jesus' work, but then,
- 2) We are sanctified by trying really, really hard to live out biblical principles. The results are tragic.

We need to think about the relationship between justification and sanctification.

True transformation rises or falls on our alignment toward the Cross. The danger is to see our human effort as the functional means of transformation, as if we only needed the Gospel to get through the front door of the Kingdom, but now that we're in, we can take it from here. What a mistake. Transformation is not really about something brand new, but rather connecting deeply with the same Gospel that brought us in. We don't need a new seed; we need to take **the** seed deep. We never move past the grace of God; we only take it deeper.

*It is a mistake to try to "move on" from imputed righteousness (our adopted position in the spirit realm) to practical righteousness (the actual way we live on earth). We never move on. Any breakdown in our practical righteousness is the result of a breakdown with our connection toward our imputed righteousness. Feed on your salvation! Leaders must point people to the Cross and what Jesus has done!*

Here is the point. We need a *living faith*. All of this sanctification thinking does not mean that there is no place for devotion and good works. But *at the deepest level*, the root problem is never just lack of moral effort. Or lust. Or greed. Or worry. Our root problems are always related to the fact that we are not living \_\_\_\_\_ in Jesus as Savior, in some particular area of our life.

We tell people that they are saved by grace through faith. Trust Jesus. Believe in Him. Come into a relationship with Him and you will be eternally changed. But then when it comes to addictions or porn or anger or depression we jump ship and put the weight on our actions and boundaries and will power.

We need to connect the dot that if we are initially saved by a grace-faith-trust-relationship... then we will be *continuously* transformed by the same reality: a grace-faith-trust-relationship.

So if I am discipling you and you have a lust problem I will indeed give you moral counsel (e.g. flee youthful lusts, give no place to the devil, set nothing wicked before your eyes, download accountability software, etc.). But the counsel needs to be an exhortation to faith: truly trust Jesus in this particular area of your life.

Everybody sins in a general way because we are all sinners. But why do we sin in any particular instance? Any sin is rooted in the inordinate lust for something which comes because we are trusting in that thing rather than in Jesus for our righteousness or salvation or completion or fulfillment. Therefore, in our sin we are always *forgetting* what God has done for us in Jesus and instead are settling for some idol.

When we lie we somehow believe that a person's approval can make us complete. When we act on our sexual lusts we somehow believe that a moment of pleasure or an experience will satisfy our soul. When we get into relationships that are not in God's will we convert a person into a functioning savior and believe that they can deliver us from our loneliness of hell and bring us to a heaven of companionship. When we long for a job or money or house or promotion in a way where we soul-gaze upon it in the morning and evening we set up functional saviors in whom we "believe" for our functional "salvation".

It's really a form of practical faith.

If our Christianity is all about avoiding scandalous sin, then we can find a way to behavior-modify ourselves into a form of virtue and cleaned up living. But that is not transformation. Appealing to someone's sense of dignity can shame them into virtue but it's not transformation. Telling a leader that adultery will ruin their ministry will scare them into external virtue. But it's not transformation.

When we look to "Christ and Him crucified" we engage in one of the ways the soul can behold the glory of Jesus. We remember what Jesus has accomplished; we remember that it is finished (so we cannot improve upon it); we remember that we are accepted (so human approval is less influential); we remember that the ultimate enemy of death has been defeated (and that is the very worst blow this life can give us). When we remember the Gospel we "lift Jesus high" and, like the Israelites with the brazen serpent, we are helped and healed. And changed from the inside out.

Why do I sin? Because I \_\_\_\_\_ Christ and Him crucified. My anger problems are belief problems. My greed problems are belief problems. I was saved by looking to the Cross in general. And I am sanctified in specific areas by looking to the Cross in that specific area of challenge.

Will power can *restrain* the heart, but it will not *change* the heart. And God wants changed hearts. I hope you see the concrete application in disciple-making. I cannot make myself change; but I can make the decision to look to Christ and Him crucified in any circumstance of my life. The lonely single woman needs to learn to preach the Gospel to herself. Disgruntled marriages need to learn to do the Gospel on each other. Porn-addicts need to look to Christ and Him crucified.

You have to get this first point to really move on to the next one. Until you know you're utterly accepted right now because of what Jesus did, you cannot do any good work. Faith deeds never start until you look to His deeds as utterly sufficient.

# SECOND OBSERVATION

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## ***We need to train.***

If you want to grow, you need to train. Transformation comes by gazing at Jesus. But how do you put yourself in a position to gaze at Him?

You train.

Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, and John Ortberg are some of the authors in recent years that have written on the subject of spiritual formation and the spiritual disciplines. John Wesley was a good historical influence.

The great news for ordinary people is that Jesus is still taking students in His school of discipleship. The kingdom is now present and available and Jesus wants apprentices that are willing to learn His yoke. His way of life. Not only is Jesus our Savior; He is also our Teacher and our Leader. He teaches us how to live in His now-accessible kingdom where He rules.

He was, and He is, and He is to come.

When we “look unto Jesus” we gaze upon the Suffering Savior on a Cross, but we also dial into the reality of the living Lord who has eyes that are like a flame of fire. We look to what He accomplished on the Cross, but we also ask, “What is Jesus doing now? How can I join Him? How can I follow in His steps?”

Abraham was righteous because He believed God would with Him – right now. This is eternal life, according to John, that we may “know” God (John 17). And now that we know Him, we can do life with Him. Having grasped the implications of the Cross we now have the power to take the words of Jesus seriously. *Now* we can do good works. *Now* we can take His yoke.

Of course, our problem is that, although we may want to do right we are prepared to do wrong. This is where training comes in.

Disciples are. They exercise themselves unto godliness (1 Timothy 4:7). They embrace a faith that works through love. They embrace a lifestyle of ongoing “training.”

Disciplines like prayer, fasting, solitude, worship, Bible reading, study, memorization, confession, simplicity have been nothing less than revolutionary in our lives, because they enable us to gaze at Jesus.

Journaling does not change me; but what it can do is help me get into a position where I am gazing. The macro goal is not to pray for 60 minutes per day; it's to know Jesus. But prayer puts me in a position to know Him, so I might set micro-goals in prayer. There is nothing virtuous about reading a religious book. But when I chew on the Scriptures in a way that I interact with God, transformation starts to happen. Meditation without Jesus may actually be dangerous. But meditation with a gaze toward Jesus will change your very destiny.

Only Jesus can clean my house; but through training I open the door to let Him in. Only living water can quench my thirst; but the spiritual disciplines act as "straws" that help me gain access to that precious living water.

You don't need new information nearly as much as you need to go all the way with the information you already have. When you train, you heat up your soul with Father's love.

Too many believers are stalled in their transformation because they are waiting \_\_\_\_\_ for some internal sense of peace or wholeness. They become idle as they wait for further transformation. It is a warped discipleship. Train! I'm not talking about striving in self-effort, but true training in faith. Put yourself in position to be amazed with grace and warmed by the love of Christ.

Enough behavior modification. Enough dealing with branches. Let's go to the roots and faith-gaze at Jesus.

# THIRD OBSERVATION

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**We need the \_\_\_\_\_ experience.**

The key to transformation is gazing at Jesus, but this is more supernatural than we might imagine. We need the Spirit of Jesus to point us to Jesus. He Himself taught us that the Spirit bears witness of Him. Sometimes people make contact with a Spirit-filled church and worry that Jesus will not be lifted high. No worries! The Spirit always points to Jesus.

In Acts 8 there is a fascinating story of a man named Philip going to the city of Samaria to preach the Gospel. The results are dramatic: people believed, many were baptized, healings and miracles took place, evil spirits came out of people, and "there was great joy in that city." (8:8)

You'd think that when the apostles back home heard about everything going on, they would be content. But something crucial was missing.

As soon as they heard the reports, an alarm went off in their brains. All of this kingdom activity was amazing; just not enough. Immediately they sent Peter and John to Samaria to complete what was lacking in order to set these new believers up for victory. What did they do? They:

"Prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

**Acts 8: 15-16**

A quick reminder: Every believer "has" the Holy Spirit living inside of them. "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'" (Galatians 4:6). However, every believer is not always "filled" with the Holy Spirit. This is why Paul says in Ephesians 1:13 that all believers "were sealed with the Holy Spirit" but then four chapters later he says to "not be drunk with wine... but be filled with the Holy Spirit." (5:18).

The apostles knew what they were doing in Acts 8. It is entirely possible to be forgiven, baptized, and on your way to heaven – but still remain unfilled. Be \_\_\_\_\_. Paul compared it to coming under the influence of alcohol.

This is why in Acts 19 Paul's opening question to a group of disciples was, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" (v. 2) Think of the questions you hear from other Christians when they first meet you. I'd bet you rarely hear this question asked. If we are honest, 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians have drifted quite a distance from the approach of those in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

We want what they had.

Are you living out a life in the Spirit?

Just surf through the eighth chapter of the epistle to the Romans some time. Right there in the middle of Paul's theological masterpiece we find a man obsessed with the work of the Holy Spirit. Why? Because we are wired to follow Jesus. And Jesus did everything in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Follow Him!

I'm an expert in chocolate milk. I make it from scratch. I know how to mix in just the right amount of cocoa with just enough sugar. But there is one more crucial step: you have to stir it up. If it just sits there, all the chocolate settles at the bottom. When you get filled, the Spirit is stirred.

It's a tragic thing; while the world has become spiritual most Christians have gone secular. We were never wired to be satisfied with a purely natural life! There's so much more. We were made to experience God. Don't settle for a natural Christian life. We absolutely can (must!) be filled with the Spirit.

Jackie Pullinger saw results with heroin addicts on the streets of Hong Kong that blew people's minds. Lives were being changed. Transformation was taking place. Lost causes were being resurrected to hope. What was her secret? She would get the addicts filled with the Holy Spirit... every single day.

It's amazing what happens to a soul that spends regular time under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

What could be more futile than a church that makes its plans for the future in the flesh? Natural thinking, human reasoning, leaning on its own understanding. We weren't made to live naturally; we were made to follow Jesus. And He lived in the flow of the Spirit.

So how do we do it? "How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:13). \_\_\_\_\_, and then keep on asking. Expect the power and presence and manifestations and fruit of the Spirit.

# FOURTH OBSERVATION

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***We need to engage in \_\_\_\_\_.***

Which came first, the chicken or the egg? This is a fascinating dynamic that we must not ignore: when we engage in the mission of God we behold a side of God that we do not encounter anywhere else. And we are changed.

We sometimes think that we are supposed to wait for an inner sense of change before we branch out to change the world. I often buy into the lie that unless my heart feels soft I am not ready to touch a needy world. Yet my experience has been that many times it is in the process of leaving my comfort zone that my heart softens.

Augustine said the poor are sacramental. Something happens to your soul when you begin to walk and talk among the poor, the afflicted, and the needy. But Jesus Himself reminds us that judgment day itself will be scrutinized under the light of this question: what did we do with the least of these? (Matthew 25)

The same could be said about the lost, because they are truly "poor" in spirit.

There is a way in which Jesus reveals Himself to us among the lost and least, that we will not experience anywhere else.

When we step out of our normal "safe" places of convenience and comfort we discover a world that desperately needs our Father. And He desperately loves this world. And He has wired the universe so that some transformation only happens when we are on mission.

Some parts of God's glory don't show up in prayer meetings; they show up on the streets. Some aspects of God's glory will never manifest in a church gathering, no matter how large or small; they manifest when we look in the eyes of spiritual orphans. I have never ceased to be amazed how God changes people who it seemed would never change - when they get on mission. There are some parts of transformation that will never happen with another Bible reading, prayer, or Christian meetings. We have to get up and do what we were made to do. And Jesus meets us there every time.

It really is mysterious. On one hand I need an internal change to prompt me to go do mission in faith. On the other hand there are times when the internal change never occurs until I get active. To use James' vocabulary, sometimes faith precedes works, but sometimes my faith follows my works.

The call is to love God and love people. Not just church people. Not just people you already like. *All* people. Lost people. Dirty people. Sick people. The people no one else wants. There is a part of your soul that is ignited when you become a co-laborer with Jesus in pursuing the people who Jesus is longing to be with. We are not bringing anything new to the table. We are simply joining God in what He is already doing.

In conclusion, if we do not provide churches that produce true transformation, we have not accomplished anything of eternal significance. So we commit ourselves to plant churches, do ministry, and multiply disciples in ways where true transformation takes place. And then we will change the world.

Not by trying harder, but:

- Trusting more deeply in the sufficiency of Christ and Him crucified.
- Training more wisely.
- Encountering the Spirit.
- Engaging on mission.