



grow groups

Valley Ranch
BAPTIST CHURCH

Week 3: Faithful to Transform the Willing

1 Thessalonians 4:1-3a, 5:23-24

GOAL: To explore the topic of sanctification and grow in our desire to become more like Jesus.

CHECKLIST

- Prepare for your group meeting by praying for yourself and your group (feel free to use the prayer below) and reading through this Leader's Guide.
- Welcome anyone who is new this week. Discuss any logistics (weekly schedule, snack signup, serve project, etc.)
- If you have not yet signed up for your group to serve with Building for the Better, find the date that works best and have them sign up during your group meeting.
- Take attendance in Planning Center, including guests/new members. Help new members register for your group using the QR code in your room or at vrbc.net/grow.

PREPARING THROUGH PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, thank you so much for bearing the full weight of my sin on the cross and making it possible for me to be forgiven. And now, until the day that you return and make all things new, I want to do everything I can to open myself to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in my life. Help me remember that your will for me is to be holy, and teach me to see this as a gracious invitation into the best possible kind of life - for your glory, my good, and the good of those around me. Thank you that the power for transformation is found in you, and teach me how to more fully cooperate with your Holy Spirit as God sanctifies me through and through. In your name I pray, Amen.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

CONNECT

- Use this time to connect with your group relationally - both formally and informally.
- Invite your group to share one way that they have seen God at work in the past week, and one way they're praying for God to move in the week to come.
- Spend time praying for your group members and for your time together today, noting any praises or prayer requests from your previous conversation.

COORDINATE

Spend a few minutes covering any details the group needs to know:

- Choose a date for your group to serve with Building for the Better. This year, you cannot sign up for spots in bulk. You will need to ask each participating group member to sign up themselves for the date that your group selects.
- This is a great time to plan a group social (Super Bowl party, Galentines brunch, supper clubs, etc).
- Introduce your Inreach Coordinator to the group (they may arrive a few minutes late from the training), and invite them to share with the group about their role.

DISCUSS

- What stood out to you from the Growth Guide readings this week as we focused on how God transforms us? How did the Holy Spirit speak to you in your times of reading and reflection?

Leaders Note: *We're asking a question like this each week as a way of encouraging people to spend time regularly reading and reflecting on God's Word, and to give them an opportunity to share how God is speaking to them and process it together. It will be helpful if you encourage the group to bring their Growth Guide with them to your meeting so they can refer to their notes.*

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-3a, 5:23-24.

- What were the big pieces in the spiritual timeline John shared in his sermon? How would you describe this in your own words?

Leaders Note: *The big pieces were:*

- **Before Christ** - *the time before we gave our life to Jesus. Ephesians 2:12 says that at this time we "were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world." In this part of our journey, we were ruled by our sinful nature and lived in order to please ourselves.*
- **Justification** - *In the sermon, we defined justification as "the act of being made right with God." This is when God, as the righteous Judge, declares us to be righteous in his sight. This is when*

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God, as the righteous Judge, declares us to be righteous in his sight. This is made possible by grace through the blood of Jesus shed for us on the cross. Romans 3:23-25 describes it this way: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood - to be received by faith.” Romans 5:1 follows up by saying, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” It’s important to note that at this moment of justification, other wonderful things take place as well - we are “born again” (John 3:16), we are adopted into God’s family (Ephesians 1:5), and we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13).

- **Sanctification** - In the sermon, we defined sanctification as “the process by which Christians become holy.” This is what takes place between the time we are justified and when we are glorified (at Christ’s return - see below). As we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit, God transforms us by his grace so that we increasingly reflect the character of Christ (Romans 12:1-2, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24). This kind of life-change isn’t just for “super-Christians.” The Bible describes it as a normal part of the Christian life, and it’s something we should expect to see in ourselves and others who are following Jesus.
 - **Glorification** - In the sermon, we defined this as “sharing God’s glory in the new creation.” When Jesus returns to earth, all those who are in Christ will be resurrected and given new, glorious bodies (Php 3:20-21 - “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”) and we will share his glory.
 - **New Creation** - This refers to the new heavens and the new earth that God will create when Jesus returns (2 Peter 3:13, Revelation 21:1). All those who have been adopted into God’s family through faith in Christ will live and reign forever with Christ in this perfect new creation, where “there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Revelation 21:4).
- Author Ruth Haley Barton defines spiritual transformation as “the process of being conformed to the image of Jesus for God’s glory, for our own well-being, and for the sake of others.” Discuss this definition with your group - what stands out and why?

Leaders Note: You may want to take this definition phrase by phrase:

- **The process** - spiritual transformation doesn’t happen all at once! It’s a process that continues throughout our lifetime. Remember this week’s passage from 1 Thess 4:1 - “now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more,” as well as 2 Corinthians 3:18 - “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory.”
- **of being conformed to the image of Jesus** - this is the heart of spiritual transformation...the Holy Spirit changes us from the inside out (Rom 12:1-2) so that we are more and more like Jesus. Romans 8:29 says, “for those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.” NT Wright says that Christians are to be like “angled mirrors” - reflecting the image of God into the world and reflecting the praise and worship of people back to God.

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- **for God's glory** - as we increasingly reflect the character of Christ and the world sees a clearer and truer picture of who God is, it results in God's name being glorified.
 - **for our own well-being** - God created us, and he knows what we need to thrive. As we are transformed into his image, we begin to live the kind of life that he intended for us, which is the best possible thing for us.
 - **and for the sake of others** - Our spiritual formation isn't just for God, and it isn't just for us...it is also a blessing for the world! As we increasingly reflect the character of Christ, the people around us experience God through us and are able to live more of the lives that he originally intended for them. This is really impactful to think about...when I am not transformed into God's image, I don't just hurt myself - I hurt those around me. And when I am transformed, the blessing spills out onto everyone with whom I come into contact.
- 1 Thessalonians 4:3 says, "It is God's will that you should be sanctified." How do you feel when you hear this?

Leader's Note: Encourage your group to answer this question honestly. You may hear responses like:

- *Intimidated* - "That sounds really hard, and I'm not sure I'm strong enough to pull it off."
 - *Guilty* - "I know I have so far to go."
 - *Excited* - "That sounds like such good news!"
 - *Motivated* - "I want to do what it takes to be able to live that kind of life."
- What was the main point of John's illustration about the village that received running water? In what ways do you sometimes find yourself "still walking to the well?" Pick one of those examples and discuss how God's way is better.

Leader's Note: The point of the illustration was that just like it wouldn't make sense for someone who has running water in their house to walk two miles to get muddy water from a well, it doesn't make sense for a Christian to continue to live in the old way when the new way is available. In other words, the new life that Jesus makes possible - the transformed sanctified life - is so much better than the old life of pleasing ourselves!

Christians often miss this. We can tend to think of sanctification as a chore...something we are "supposed" to do. In reality, it is an invitation into the best possible kind of life! It isn't always easy, and it comes with a cost, but it is by far the best way to live.

Help the group personalize this illustration by identifying some ways we sometimes still live according to the old way of life instead of the new life that Christ makes possible, and by discussing why God's way is better. For example, someone might say that one of the ways they find themselves "still walking to the well" is living in worry rather than in faith. Even though they recognize that God is sovereign and good, they still nurture thoughts of worry. In this instance, you could discuss why living a life of trust and faith rather than a life of worry and fear is better not only for you, but also for the people around you.

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- In his sermon, John said that not only does God want us to be holy, he is also faithful to make us holy. If this is true, what might our role be in the sanctification process? What could this look like in your life?

Leaders Note: *It's important to note that while the power for transformation comes entirely from God, we have a role to play as well. God will not change us against our will – we have to partner with him in faith, trust, and obedience.*

Sometimes people are afraid that any discussion of “effort” in the Christian life is incompatible with grace. I (John) love what Dallas Willard says about this:

*“In most churches, we’re not only saved by grace, we’re paralyzed by it. We’re afraid to do anything that might be a ‘work.’ People need to see that action is a receptacle for grace, not a replacement for it. Grace is God acting in our lives to do things we can’t do on our own. **Grace is not opposed to effort; it’s opposed to earning.**”*

In other words, actively opening ourselves to the Holy Spirit’s work in us is the way we experience this transformational grace. And sometimes that requires effort on our part! Discuss with your group what that might look like. A few thoughts to get you started:

- *Praying (Psalm 139:23-24 is a great model) that the Holy Spirit would show you the areas of your life that need sanctification.*
- *Confessing your sin and repenting (turning **from** your sin **to** God)*
- *Reading and meditating on Scripture as a way of opening yourself to the Holy Spirit.*
- *Participating in other spiritual disciplines (silence, solitude, service, simplicity, fasting, celebration, worship, etc.)*
- *Actively choosing to obey God’s word in practical areas of your life.*

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION & PRAYER

For these final questions, split into smaller groups (same gender if possible). Share the questions with the groups before you split up. It might even help to text them the questions to make it easier to remember. Ask them to close their time together by praying for each other, asking God to sanctify them in the specific areas they discuss.

Leaders Note: *These questions are designed to help your group members further personalize the discussion, and to give them an opportunity to let the Holy Spirit identify areas of potential growth. Sharing these areas openly with one another is a powerful step in allowing God to work on us!*

- Is there an area of your life where you have seen God change your character or behavior? What difference has it made for you?

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- Has there ever been a time when you stepped out in faith and obeyed Jesus even when it was hard or when it cost you something? How did your obedience in that situation contribute to your transformation?
- Think back to John's story about the father and son vacuuming the house. What is one area of your life where there are there "goldfish in the corner" that the Holy Spirit may want to clean up?

Within your small groups, close your time together by praying for each other, asking God to sanctify you in the specific areas you discuss.