

Transformed by the Light of Christ

Series: The Light on the Hill - Vision and Strategy 2026

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Location: St George's Battery Point

Texts: 2 Corinthians 3.16-18; Psalm 1; Luke 19:1-10

How do people change? How can you change?

You've been wanting to shed a few kilos but you never seem to manage to get to the gym. You're fighting with your spouse of some minor thing again and realise that you've been stuck in the same pattern for years. It's late one night. You're feeling pretty low. And you find yourself online, following the same sequence of websites till you're at that porn site you keep coming back to.

Whatever it is, all of us experience a gap between who we are and what we do and the person we would like to be, the kind of person we know we should be. All of us know that change, deep, lasting change, is really hard. How can you change? Is change even possible?

Over the last few weeks we've been looking at our vision as a church for the next 4 years. God has called us to the the Light on the Hill. Christ is the Light of the World in and in him we find our light and life. Through him we can know God as our Father and ourselves as his children. And so we hold out Christ as the Light. Our mission is to see people *Drawn to the Light of Christ, Transformed by the Light of Christ and Sent out to shine the Light of Christ*. Last week we saw how we might see people drawn to the Light of Christ. We're called to love each other as Christ has loved us, and to extend the welcome to others that God extends to us in Christ. This week we're looking at that second movement in our mission

To see people *transformed by the Light of Christ*.

And so we're asking the question, how do people change, because that's what we want to see, our lives and the lives of others transformed for the good. Whether you've been a Christian for many years, or if you're new and checking out this whole Christianity thing, my guess is that this is a big question for you. There are two parts to the question. First, What is our goal or direction as human beings? If we're going to change, what do we want to change into? And then second, how can we move towards that goal?

These two questions are distinct yet intrinsically linked to each other. And the Scriptures answer them together. Have a look with me at our key verse for today, 2 Corinthians 3.16-18:

But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 *And we, who with unveiled faces all contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

Verse 18 is one of those key verses in the Bible. I'd encourage you to read, learn, mark and inwardly digest this verse. This is how we as a church will see people transformed by the light of Christ, even

us. *We gaze upon Christ, growing more like him, to be secure, humble and generous children of God in the power of the Spirit.*

Have you ever wondered what God's plan is for your life? This is it. His plan for your life is that you would reflect the Lord's glory. His plan is to transform you more and more into his likeness. That is, his plan is to make you more like Jesus so that you reflect his glory. Each of us is made in the image and likeness of God and crowned with glory and honour. This is the incredible dignity and worth that God gives to each person. But tragically that image is cracked and tainted. Each of us fall short of the glory for which we are made. We fail to love our neighbours as ourselves, let alone love God. So God sent his Son, the Lord Jesus. He is the true image of God, the only one who has truly and wholly loved God and loved his neighbour. And God's purpose is that as we give our allegiance to Jesus as our king, as we trust him as our saviour and follow him as our master, then he will work to restore that broken image in us.

Jesus shows us how to be truly human. And this is what the Christian life is all about - changing and growing to be more like Jesus. Did you feel the energy and life in Paul's language as he writes these verses. The Christian life is not drab and boring and joyless. God's purpose is not to spoil our fun. It's to make us shine with his glory! And I have to say this is one of singular joys being your minister. I get to see God's glory shining through you. I see it as people reach out to welcome the stranger. I see it in the care and delight you take in the kids at St George's. I see it as people learn to say no to self destructive behaviours. I see it in generous sacrificial giving. I see it as people persevere through great suffering and hardship. I see it in small, unnoticed acts of thoughtful generosity. I see it in decades of faithful prayer. I see it in people comforting others with the comfort they have received. I see it in tireless acts of service. And I've not named anyone in this list to avoid embarrassing them, but there is a person behind each of those statements, and I'm not even scratching the surface. Are you looking for it in others? If you stick around, you'll be able to see God's glory shining through the lives of your brothers and sisters here.

God's plan is to transform us so that we can shine like stars in this dark world. Not just at church. In our workplaces, our schools, our families. Our world needs people who are secure in who they are, who don't need to prove or justify themselves but are able to bear up with grace and courage under pressure. Our world needs people of deep humility, who lift others up, who don't think less of themselves, but who think of themselves less. Our world needs people of abundant generosity, who spend themselves in the service of others, who give themselves to make this world a better place.

God's plan for us is to transform us to be more and more like Jesus so that more and more we reflect his glory. But how does this transformation come about? Our text tells us. First it says, *we are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

Ultimately it is the Holy Spirit who transforms us into the likeness of Christ. It's not something we can do. It's only and always the gift of God. I am so thankful that the Holy Spirit is at work to change

us. I know it's hard enough to change my own heart. But God says he will change hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. And if Jesus rose from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit, then surely he can change and transform you and me. And so we pray. We pray that God will change us, and change those around us.

But this doesn't mean we are passive in the process of change. Did you see how it is that the Spirit does his work of transforming us?

we, who with unveiled faces all contemplate the Lord's glory are being transformed

The Spirit changes us as we contemplate the Lord's glory. The picture that Paul uses is that of Moses who used to go into the Tabernacle into God's presence and speak with God. When he came out his face would be shining with God's glory. Paul says when we turn to Christ, and contemplate his glory then like Moses we will reflect that glory. This is how we change to become more like Christ and reflect his glory - we contemplate his glory.

In fact one of the ways of describing the goal of Christian hope, is to see God face to face. Revelation puts it like this,

Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.... The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴ They will see his face...¹

Christian tradition has called this the *beatific vision*. That is what we long for. Paul says that in contemplating Christ we encounter God and see his glory.

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ²

This side of the new creation our vision of God's glory in the face of Christ is, not to put to finer point on it, partial and fleeting. Again Paul says,

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.³

Although this side of the new creation, our vision of God's glory in the face of Christ is only partial, it is still transformative. It's as we see Christ that we see his beauty, his majesty, his power, his love for us, that our hearts are melted and drawn out to love him in return. That's because his glory is to love the unworthy. His glory is to forgive the guilty, even us. When you experience that kind of unconditional love, you can't help loving him in return. Encounter Jesus and you will be changed. Think of Zacchaeus. His encounter with Jesus transformed him from a greedy extortionist to a generous benefactor.

"Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

¹ Revelation 21.3-4, 22.3-4

² 2 Corinthians 4.6

³ 1 Corinthians 13.12

If it's through encountering Jesus that we're transformed, how do we encounter Jesus today? The answer is through the means of grace. What are the means of grace? The means of grace are the ordinary things through which we slow down to gaze on Christ and which the Holy Spirit uses to transform us to be like Christ. Our problem is that we have short attention spans and forgetful hearts. There are all sorts of things that compete for our affections and promise transformation and satisfaction. That is why we need to keep coming back to see Jesus. Another way of thinking about the means of grace is as spiritual disciplines. They are spiritual habits, like going to the gym or brushing your teeth. We work at making them part of our daily and weekly routines, in ordinary stuff of life, so that we can keep recentering on Christ. Like going to the gym, over time they build our spiritual muscles so that we grow. They engage our heads and our hands and through them our hearts. Paul writes,

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Through the means of grace our minds are transformed as we encounter Christ in word and sacrament and song. Through the means of grace we learn how to offer our bodies as living sacrifices in worship to God. There are 6 spiritual disciplines that I encourage everyone at St George's practice

- Corporate Worship
- Personal prayer and Bible Reading
- Bible Study Groups
- Serving in Ministry
- Giving Generously
- Gracious Witness

Do you want to change and grow? Give yourself to these means of grace. Through them you will encounter Christ. They're not flashy. They are the ordinary means that the Holy Spirit will use to transform you. What about for us corporately as a church? How can we see people transformed by the Light of Christ? We will work on 4 strategies.

1. *By Making Sunday a highlight of the week by creating a culture of sharing and celebrating how God is transforming us and is at work in our lives.*

There is no greater investment that you can make to grow spiritually yourself and to see St George's grow than by coming every Sunday to church. The Holy Spirit does so much as we meet together! We will work hard at making Sundays the highlight of the week.

2. *By Growing and refreshing key ministries and teams to be purposeful, connected and sustainable, including through the servanthood pathway (p15).*

God transforms us as we serve. Sometimes we just have to get things done, but on the whole we want serving to be a joy not a drag, so we're going to work on this.

3. *By Developing and implementing a sustainable long term plan for youth ministry.*

We don't just want to grow as adults. We want our kids to grow as well. There has been lots of great work done with Kids Church over the last 4 years and that is in a good place. But we've struggled with keeping and investing in our teenagers. So this will be a focus for the next 3 years.

4. *By Expressing our prayerful dependence on God by establishing systems and ministries that facilitate informed and regular prayer.*

It's God who gives the growth. We cannot grow spiritually or numerically without him. Everything we have is from him. Prayer is our greatest privilege as Christians. Through prayer we're brought again in dependence upon God, and at the same time he delights to answer if only we would ask. We've grown in prayer over the past few years, but there is plenty more growing to do! Speaking of which, let me invite you to our Parish prayer meeting tonight, 7:30pm in the Parish Room.

How will we be transformed by the light of Christ? *We gaze upon Christ, growing more like him, to be secure, humble and generous children of God in the power of the Spirit.* God loves you and welcomes you as you are. But he loves you too much to leave you as you are. He wants you to grow. He wants you to shine with his glory! My prayer is that each one of us will give ourselves to these means of grace. That we'll come with hearts longing to see Jesus and be changed by the Holy Spirit. Why not start with a prayer each day, "Lord, make me more like Jesus, and show me where I need to change." And may God do his work of transforming us to be more like Christ that we may reflect his glory, bless our neighbours and bring praise to his name.