

Seasons 2017



# Season of Transformation

Inform – The Word – Pray – Reach out – Create - Celebrate

## On transformation

Thoughts from Peter Heazlewood

### A little story about transformation.....

Jenny stood in front of the mirror whilst her husband Joe sat on the couch reading a book.

“Oh Joe”, Jenny said. “Look at me! My hair is not what it used to be. My beautiful locks are going grey. There’s no longer any body or bounce in my hair – and the colour’s all gone!”

“Mmmmmm”: said Joe looking up then returning to his book.

Jenny continued.....”Look at my face....the wrinkles! And I used to have such beautiful skin!”

“Mmmmmm” said Joe.

“And my body. It used to be athletic and strong. Now there’s bits going here and there. I’ve got flab!”

“Well” said Joe looking up from his book. “At least your eyesight’s perfect”.

And thats when the fight began.



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Welcome to the Season of Transformation!

So, what exactly is 'transformation'? Our recent Season took us on a journey exploring the concept of our lives as a journey. It explored the notion that our lives are a journey that continues from the day of our birth (or even before) and on from there. Across the journey we take on board a whole range of experiences and work with the changes that life dishes up – many positives and many negatives. Our life journey shapes *who* we are and *how* we are.

So, where or how does transformation fit into the picture? Why is it important? Is it important? What sorts of transformations are we talking about? What is the difference between journeying and transformation?

You might have guessed that I like the process of taking apart words to get some idea of where they come from or what they actually mean. So let's take apart the word 'transformation'.

*Trans* is a prefix able to be applied to many words. It means "across," "beyond," "through," "changing thoroughly," "transverse". To my mind and in the context of this Season, I think one way to understand it is apply the meaning 'be moved'. Think of the word *transport* for example. That's all about using something to take you from one place to another – or being carried from one place to another.

*Form* – well in my definition, that refers to 'shape'. In the context of this Season let's assume that form refers to the way we think, understand or behave.

So, 'transform' refers to 'moving the way you think, understand and behave'.

The Oxford Dictionary identifies 'Transformation' as a noun, defining it as 'A marked change in form, nature, or appearance'. I reckon the key word here is 'change', though all of the words in the definition – 'marked' (or significant), 'form', 'nature' and 'appearance' - are fitting nicely into where I think our season will focus.

In my understanding (and for the purpose of this study), transformation is more than just things we pick up on the journey. It's more than just changes in our lives that happen, because for all of us, things happen in the journey and in our lives. That's a given.

I think that transformation is more about a change (or changes) in the way we understand stuff. Transformation in my understanding and for the purposes of this study, is a change (or changes) in the way we understand and perceive, and based on that, the way we behave. Our understanding or our view is transformed, and with that transformation comes a new approach – a new life.....and yes, transformations can be positive *or* negative.

So, what are some of the significant transformations that happen in our lives?

This is the Season of Transformation. It is no mistake that it starts at Pentecost – the transformation of people through the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Hopefully this paper will prompt some thinking around the theme of transformation. You'll note that there are plenty of questions throughout (including several random/without notice 'Question Blitz's'). I hope that this Season prompts much discussion about transformation and in particular, how we are called to be transformed in the name of Christ.

Enjoy!



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## Question blitz!!!

- Imagine you are trying to explain the word transform to a person who has poor English language skills. How would *you* describe it?
- Talk about positive transformations in your life
- Talk about negative transformations in your life
- In the church we talk about sharing our faith and beliefs to transform the world. Why? What sorts of transformations are we seeking? Why are these efforts to transform often rejected?

## My list

I've been so bold as to brainstorm what I think are some significant events or periods in my life that represent transformations – and possibly for many, transformations in our lives generally. They are listed below. My list is my list. It may not apply to you. I have included some commentary against each item on the list.

Remember, transformation in this context is *more than just steps in a journey.....but things that change the way we perceive (or understand) life.*

So, for better or for worse, here's my list.....

1. Childhood/Growing/maturity – transforming from child to adult.  
*With it comes responsibilities, freedoms, decisions, starts and false starts.*
2. Home/moving away from home  
*We go from the known into the unknown. We put our stamp on things, setting them up how we want to. There is freedom, but there is also cost and maybe compromise.*
3. Education/training  
*We make important decisions. We hope we have direction. We dedicate time and effort and hopefully get a result.....hopefully we learn.*
4. Relationships/marriage?  
*We commit. We compromise. We partner.*
5. New life/children?  
*Wow! We try to impress the things that are important. We partner in the process of growing and in turn, grow ourselves. We imagine what things are like for them. We think about the world in which they grow. We are no longer alone.*
6. Career  
*We apply ourselves. We strive to advance. We take on new relationships.*
7. Loss of career/after career  
*We search for occupation. We rest. We consider next moves.*
8. Loss of relationships – death or betrayal  
*We reflect. We grieve. We wonder what comes next?*

Do you agree with my list? Are the things on my list steps in the journey that you agree are truly transformative? Once again, define your understanding of what 'transformation' is. I invite you to consider each of my list items (and their accompanying comments) and challenge them. Discuss.

- Based on your experience, is there anything you would add?
- Based on your experience, is there anything you would leave out?
- Are there any common properties to the elements on my list?

What about other significant episodes of transformation?

Faith gained - Faith lost

Feel free to share your experience of these.

### **Question blitz!!!**

- In the church we talk about sharing our faith and beliefs to transform the world. Identify aspects of the world that require transformation.
- Can you identify a time when have you sensed the need for a significant transformation in your life?.....and succeeded.....or failed. What was the nature of that transformation?
- What is the difference between making a decision and transformation? Is there a difference?
- The gospels contain many accounts of transformations. Can you identify them? Discuss each in your group. What are areas of common ground?
- Describe something that represented a transformation for you – a moment when you felt yourself transformed. Share with your group.

### **Another list!**

As part of my brainstorming process, I've tried to identify some of the common characteristics I reckon accompany (or can accompany) transformation. Once again, my thoughts here may be quite different to yours. That's okay. See what you think.

In being transformed we experience:

**Learning** – We learn.

**Challenge** – We are challenged.

**Discomfort** - We may be taken out of our comfort zone.

Significant **change** – We will experience significant change.

Involvement/cooperation of others/partnership/new **relationships** – Transformation will/may change our whole peer group or the nature of our relationship with it.

Taking up new **stuff**/possibly leaving behind old stuff – This could be painful.

**Compromise** – This could also be painful and may come at a cost.

**Enjoyment and deep fulfilment** – Hopefully!

### **Transformative faith**

The Bible is full of stories of transformation. In fact, one could argue that the Bible is a book *specifically about* transformation.

The Old Testament recounts the stories of constant transformation. Amongst them the on again, off again relationship that God has with the people of Israel. The people transform into faithfulness and obedience to God. The people transform out of faithfulness and obedience to God. Then the people transform once more into faithfulness.....then back out. It's a bit like the waves lapping on the shore. One of the strong messages of the Old Testament however is the constancy of God's love and faithfulness to the people.

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God is ever present.

- What are significant moments of transformation for various characters in the Old Testament? Discuss.
- What was the nature of each? Who was the subject of transformation?

The New Testament takes transformation to a whole other level. It is no mistake that we're starting our Season of Transformation on the day of Pentecost (2017). Pentecost and the pouring down of the Holy Spirit is the ultimate transformation story. In receiving the Holy Spirit, people are transformed and are never the same again.

So a question for you.....What are the specific transformations that happened for those present on the day of Pentecost? How are they relevant to us today?

As the Gospels recount the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus there is constant dialogue of transformation documented. Importantly, (and at the heart of the Gospels) is the *possibility and encouragement* of transformation. We are encouraged as Christians for our lives to be transformed 'in Christ'. Jesus challenged the norms of the time envisaging a 'transformed world'.

An example - *"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*

Matthew 5:43-44

Wow!! What a clear call to transformation by and through Christ! Read it again and consider what we are called to do. What a change! What a challenge! What a call to leave behind old stuff and take up new stuff! This is the revolution that is the Christ. A revolution of change – of love!

What are other examples of this 'call to transformation' found in the Gospels?

As was the case in the Old Testament, a continuing message running through the Gospels and beyond – God remains with us through transformation. Whatever the transformation is. However it comes.

- What are significant moments of transformation for various characters in the New Testament? Discuss.
- What was the nature of each? Who was the subject of transformation?
- Is there a significant difference between OT and NT transformations?
- How are we called to be transformed through Christ? How are we called to change?

### **Question blitz!!!**

- Identify global transformations.
- Identify intended global transformations that have worked. What were they? Why did they work?
- Identify intended global transformations that haven't worked. What were they? Why didn't they work?
- Identify episodes of transformation in the life of Christ. How might they impact on us personally?
- Good deeds to deeds in the name of God – an expression of our faith. Is this transformation? Discuss.

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In considering our own transformation through Christ, have a think about my list from earlier – that list of things I think accompany (or *may* accompany) transformation:

**Learning** – We learn

**Challenge** – We are challenged

**Discomfort** - We may be taken out of our comfort zone

Significant **change** – We will experience significant change

Involvement/cooperation of others/partnership/new **relationships** – Transformation will/may change our whole peer group or the nature of our relationship with it.

Taking up new **stuff**/possibly leaving behind old stuff – This could be painful.

**Compromise** – This could also be painful.

**Enjoyment and deep fulfilment** – Hopefully!

Have a think about each of these (or any other things you may wish to add) in the context of what you understand to be the call to be transformed through Christ. Discuss each.



## Global transformation

Our emphasis during this Season of Transformation is on personal transformation. We will however, have a chance to reflect on possibilities for global transformation – mass shifts in understanding, thinking and behaving. Where have they occurred? When have they occurred? Which ones have been sustained? Which ones have failed?

Looking towards the future, we will consider global transformations that need to happen. To guide us, we'll use the United Nations' 17 targets for global transformation.



So, welcome to the Season of Transformation. Once again there are more questions than answers – and that's the way it should be. As we move through this Season though, remember that the transforming God is faithful and ever present.

*Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*

2 Corinthians 5:17

# The Word

A study by Gareth Darlow

This part of the Seasons process provides an opportunity to explore issues in relation to transformation in the Biblical context and Christian faith.

## The Day of Pentecost

### Read Acts 2:1-13

Peter and the disciples have been on a journey! Three short years ago they were in Galilee working on fishing boats, sitting at toll booths, building and making things, and in the case of Simon the Canaanite, whispering in dark corners about ways to overthrow the Roman Empire!

Peter has followed Jesus around Galilee, listening as he preaches the Kingdom of Heaven, following as he walks away from the rich and the strong to form a community amongst widows, children, the poor and the outsider. He's listened as Jesus gathered a community of the disenfranchise around him and told them that they are the first citizens in God's Kingdom.

He has stood beside Jesus as they fed the poor and healed the sick, followed Jesus out onto the water as Jesus walked across it, huddled in terror as he's watched Jesus talk with Moses and Elijah on the top of a mountain.

He's followed Jesus all the way south to Jerusalem, walked behind him while he entered like a rock star, stood with him in the temple while he won fiery arguments with the lawyers and the Pharisees.

He's slept beside Jesus while he prayed, tried to fight off the entire temple guard, and then followed Jesus to his death... then been joyfully astounded by his living presence among them.

It has been a long three years.

Told to wait, Peter and his friends find themselves outsiders in a strange city with no families to support them and no work to do. They wait and they pray.

- **Even before the miraculous transformative moment of Pentecost, Peter has been through an enormous amount. The fisherman who first put down his net to walk off with the charismatic Rabbi seems to be gone.**
- **Think about a time of transformation in your life.**
- **Was it something you decided upon for yourself, or was it something that happened to you?**
- **Was the transformation sudden, or did you find yourself slowly changing?**
- **What events in your life prepared you for that change?**
- **A transformation is often a change *from* as much as a change *to*. To quote Paul "The old has passed away... behold, the new has come!" What did you find yourself saying farewell to in your time of transformation?**
- **Whether a transformation happens quickly or slowly there is often a moment of recognition. You realise that something is changed. The day of Pentecost marks a**

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**moment of transformation for Peter and the disciples. Can you think of a particular moment that you understood a change had happened?**

- **The listeners have a mixed recognition of this moment of transformation on the day of Pentecost.. Some are prepared to say something new is happening, others more inclined to blame the wine.**
- **Have you ever found yourself struggling to get people around you to recognise that a transformation has taken place? Have you ever found yourself unwilling to recognise a transformation in someone else?**

### **Read Acts 3:1-11**

On the day of Pentecost, Peter preaches a fiery sermon, decrying those who had put Jesus to death. (We need to be mindful reading these passages in Acts that when Peter or others attack “the Jews” they’re talking about the temple authorities. It’s much later in Acts when Paul has to justify his preaching to the gentiles before the 12 disciples that Peter becomes aware of anyone but Jewish people as Christians. These passages have been used by Christians in the past to attack Jewish people; a profoundly unscriptural act.)

The apostles begin to teach and pray, and they and their converts begin to live collectively, sharing what they have and giving as much as they can to the poor.

Then, in the first public act recorded, Peter and John heal a man who is at the gate of the temple.

- **For a long time the man has spent every day at the temple gate. As someone with a disability, there were large parts of the temple that he would not have been allowed to enter. The first thing he does when he has been healed is to enter the temple. All of a sudden he is not just ‘able’, but able to take up the worship of God in the same way as his neighbours.**
- **Why do you think he clings to Peter and John while they preach?**
- **Peter and John’s Pentecost transformation leads to the man’s transformation; Have you ever seen a transformation take place for someone which changed not just themselves, but how they affected the people around them?**
- **What does the transformation of healing for the man lead to?**
- **The temple is a place which is supposed to be about the worship of God but has become a place of exclusion for some.: Are there places of exclusion in our society?**
- **What are the ways in which our society needs to be transformed?**
- **Have you seen people act as “Transformers”?**
- **Do we as God’s People have a place in that transformation?**



# Prayer

I've mentioned previously, that an ignition-point for the entire Seasons process was a recognition that we as a Christian faith community, need to have a greater focus on prayer.

Through prayer we are offered a chance to reflect on the places we find ourselves – either individually or as a community – and to be transformed.

Through prayer we have opportunity to enter into dialogue with God who exists at the core of our faith – and to be transformed.

Through prayer we create a period of 'time-out', an opportunity to stop, look and listen. A chance to think and consider, dream and contemplate – and to be transformed.

Through prayer we are challenged to hope and dream – to discern what our place and our calling is – and to be transformed.

Through prayer we have an opportunity to experience transformation.

As a group or as an individual you are encouraged to pray. You may wish to use this as a prompt:

*Loving and transforming God*

*We give thanks for your many gifts and many mercies. We thank you for family and for the community of faith that moves around us. Transform us Lord, into people ready to serve others and to live in the way you intend.*

*Transforming Lord of Peace. Visit us with your Spirit. May our hands be your hands, our heads be filled with your wonder and our hearts be filled with your Spirit. Let your Spirit of transforming love flow through our lives and into the world around us.*

*God of transformation. We are a people in need of forgiveness and healing in a world in need of forgiveness and healing. Transform our lives that we may serve others in the way you intend. Transform us that we might be speakers of your word, doers of your works and healers in the world.*

*As we go forward, we pray that your wave of transforming love might wash us clean and push us forward. Be with us in our time of transformation. Be our light and our guide from this moment and in the times ahead.*

*This we pray in the name of Christ.*

*Amen*

## **The miracle of silent prayer.**

Consider silent prayer and meditation. As a group or individual, don't be afraid to allow groups periods of silence during which those who are present can allow themselves to focus on whatever they feel is important.

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# Outreach

We are hopeful that you and your group will decide on some sort of outreach activity (or activities) as part of the Season of Transformation. Through outreach we all have an opportunity to be transformers and to be transformed in the name of Christ.

The choice of outreach activity and the extent to which your group engages this, is wholly the decision of you and/or your group. It may be as big or as small as you decide.

It is hoped that your group will embrace the outreach part of this process as it presents possibilities for very real positive change for others and as such, represents a critical part of ministry in the name of Christ.

**IMPORTANT** - Recognize that in outreach, we are dealing with other people – some we know, some we don't. Ensure that actions we do for other people either directly or indirectly, are done with their permission. If dealing with a person or an organization, obtain permission first. Always respect other people's privacy and right to confidentiality.

# Create

You are invited to contribute to the season's topic creatively. This could mean music, artwork, craftwork, poetry, drama etc. How do you respond to the theme of 'transformation creatively? It's exciting here to consider the possibilities for creative response, and once again, groups or individuals are invited to engage in this part of the process in whatever way they feel comfortable.

# Celebration

At the conclusion of the Season and our focus on transformation, it would be great for your group to celebrate the journey and any outcomes that have been experienced. Celebration can take whatever form your group wishes it to. It may extend simply to a quiet prayer of thanks, through to a presentation or celebration in worship.

# *Finally.....*

We encourage your group to embrace the possibilities of *Seasons*. If you require further information or assistance, please get in touch with one of the Leaders.

Finally, we give thanks to God for the talents and energies of our people.

Coatesville Leadership Group

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