

3 Wise Ways to Cooperate With God in Your Transformation

If you're on your deathbed, forgiveness is the best news you could possibly receive. You're facing eternity, and you can know that things are right between you and God. Jesus' death and resurrection makes forgiveness free, and it's glorious. But for the rest of us who aren't on our deathbeds, there's something a whole lot greater than forgiveness.

Some of the songs I cut my spiritual teeth on I still love to sing: "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine." Or, "Oh happy day, when Jesus washed my sins away!" That was a happy day! May your own happy day never fade from your memory.

But then comes the next day. And the next. The problem with a forgiveness-based gospel is that it does little to deal with the rest of your life. It's good news for a moment, but what about when you can't seem to keep away from that porn website? Or when you keep blowing up at your spouse when they aren't communicating well? Or when find yourself struggling again with fear, or greed, or selfishness?

Jesus had this strange idea that His followers should do what He said. He asked His followers, "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). He likens a person who "hears these words of mine and does them" to a man building a house on a rock that withstands the fiercest storm (Matt. 7:24-25).

You say Jesus was all about love. And He was! Then note Him saying this: "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

What Jesus Intended

There's nothing in Scripture that says saying the sinner's

prayer and showing up in church now and then is what Jesus intended. He intended you to actually follow Him, become like Him, do what He said.

But how can we do that? Anyone who has “tried harder” to follow Jesus has met up against the reality that trying to “be good” just doesn’t work very well, or very long.

And that’s why the gospel is so much more than “Your sins are forgiven.” The really good news, that’s so much greater than forgiveness, is this;

You Don’t Have to Live Like This!

What kind of relief would it be to actually do the right thing? And not because you were white-knuckling it by trying harder and seeing how long you could go without doing something really sinful, but because doing the right thing was your natural response.

Hear me carefully; forgiveness *is* good news! None of us can be sinless by trying. “There is none who does good, not even one” (Ps. 14:3b). We would be forever hopeless without the forgiveness that Jesus offers because of His death on the cross.

But the *really* good news is that you can begin living the kingdom-of-God kind of life right now! Jesus’ primary message when He was here on earth was not forgiveness, but this; “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

My paraphrase for us 21st-century people; “You don’t have to wait until you die to experience living the life God has for you. You no longer have to live messed up. Because I’m here, you can begin living the kingdom-of-God life right now!”

What’s the Alternative?

So if trying harder doesn’t work, what does? Do you just keep

praying the sinner's prayer again every time you mess up? If praying the sinner's prayer doesn't "zap" you into holiness, is there another magical prayer that does? Are you supposed to isolate yourself from everyone and everything in "the world" so you have no temptation? (Fat chance of that working!)

In our modern Western culture, we get so focused on instant gratification that we seldom embrace the process. Instead of "zapping" you into holiness, God takes you on a journey of transformation so that in the end you look just like Jesus. (See Rom. 8:29). We are *being changed* into His likeness (see 2 Cor. 3:18).

As Dallas Willard often says, "God is not opposed to effort, but to earning." There are things you and I must *do* to build our house on the rock. Here are a few of the ways we do that. These things do not earn salvation; Jesus did that. But these are ways you and I can cooperate with God in our transformation process.

How We Grow

1. **Choose your environment.** The health of a plant is determined by where it is planted and how it is cared for. Your vitality and growth as a believer will be greatly impacted by where you place yourself. That means staying away from things that stunt your growth and investing regularly in things that nourish your soul.
2. **Keep coming back.** Oh, how we want things fast! Growth is just that; growth. It's "first the blade, then the head, then the full seed in the head" (Mark 4:28). God loves you, welcomes you, celebrates you at any and every stage of your growth. But it's important to continue the process. Whenever you sense a piece of your life is less than God intended, come back into His presence.
3. **Welcome the Holy Spirit's work.** Regularly during your Christian experience, the Holy Spirit will reach deep into your heart, mind or life, put His finger on

something and say to you, “This right here; it needs to change! Let Me have this.” When He does, learn to just say yes.

This process won’t stop until Jesus returns. But in the meantime, you’ll become ever more like Him. And as great as forgiveness is, becoming like Him is so much greater than forgiveness.

And over the next few weeks, we’ll explore those *doing* steps in more detail. I hope you join us.

Your Turn: How are you different now than when you first said yes to Jesus? What kind of spiritual growth have you experienced? Are there any ways you need to step back into the process of transformation that God has for you? Leave a comment below. {eoa}

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