



Last week we kicked off our Fall by beginning to look at Brentview's DNA. We started to ask - what are the foundational principles from which Brentview's ministry and life should flow? What are the 4 values which need to be part of our DNA so we can live out our mission statement, *"To know Jesus and Touch the World"*? In short, what are the 4 qualities that we want to see lived out in each of our lives as Christ followers and as we join together in this community of believers? We said that Brentview must be a place where:

- (i) We Experience God
- (ii) We are seeing lives being transformed (including our own)
- (iii) We are connecting in Community and
- (iv) We are making a difference in our World...locally and world wide.

Last week we talked about the privilege we have to be able to experience God in real ways. For there may be times in our lives when we have a specific experience with God, such as feeling God speak to us in a sermon, a God moment during a small group discussion, that feeling of wonder and nearness to God at the top of a mountain, or it may happen as we are part of something which we would describe as a miracle. At other times that God moment may happen as we look back at how the Lord has been a part of some life experience we have walked through, where, as we look back we see the hand prints of God all over our journey. Those kind of experiences are gifts from God which help us know that God is not only real but that He wants to be a part of our lives. It only makes sense to me that as we have those experiences, they should have an impact on how we live our lives. And that leads us to what I believe needs to be the second character trait we need to see as part of our DNA as a church. We want to see people's lives being transformed here at Brentview. Our desire is that as you are part of Brentview, you will see changes in who you are, how you live your life and what your walk with God is like. Isn't that what we see in the scriptures?

For example, as Moses left his family and his faith back in Egypt after committing murder and ends up living on the backside of the desert; his life is devoid of God's purpose and passion. And then he has his 'burning bush experience.' He sees a bushing burning in the desert but despite the fact that it was on fire - somehow it isn't being destroyed. As he investigates this iPhone 4 picture moment, he hears the voice of God speaking to him personally. And from the moment he had this experience, his life never was the same again. His life was changed or he at least began a process of transformation.

Now here is where it gets interesting. If you talk to many people they will tell you that people don't change. That once the patterns in our lives are set, due to our genetic disposition, our childhood, our sexual orientation or the choices we make when we are young - 'people just don't change.' And while you can make a few cosmetic changes, really who you are, will be who you always will be. However, I believe that deep within all of us is a hope that this isn't true. That somehow, if 'fate' or 'God' would only intervene, we could become so much more than we are today. I think that is why there are so many makeover shows today on TV. For in each of these shows there is the belief that if you have the right consultant, who can help you pick the right clothes, change your dental work, find that perfect hair style, nip and tuck a few body parts that somehow the real princess within you will magically emerge. Why do these shows hook

us? It is because all of us desire to become more than we are today. And while some of that is because our society and advertisers work hard to keep us unsatisfied. I think it also happens because God made us for more; He made us so we could not only experience more about who He is, but because the more we walk with Him, the more we can live up to the potential of what He created us to become. That is possible because:

### I. **God Changes Lives.**

I believe this with all my heart. Actually, if I don't believe this then I have to quit my job. For, not only do I see this promise in scripture, but I see the need for this as I speak to people about their life situations every week. The scripture say:

- John 10:10, *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."*
- Romans 12:2, *"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."*
- II Corinthians 3:18, *"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."*
- 2 Corinthians 4:16, *"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day."*

Turn to Ezekiel 11:19 – 20, *"I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. 20 Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God."* God is talking about the possibility of a heart transplant; who we were at one time and who we will become can change because *"from our inner most being will flow living water"* (John 7:38) from the new heart God gives us.

As one man said, *"Since I became a Christian even my cat has noticed a change."* That is why in the Old and New Testaments we often find that once a person has had an encounter with God - they changed their name. That is why Abram became known as Abraham (a friend of God). After Jacob wrestled with God, he took the new name of Israel; Saul became Paul after his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus and Peter became known as the Rock after walking with Jesus. The point is that Jesus so impacted their lives, so changed who they were that they needed a name change. Actually, there are places in our world today that as one is baptized they take on a new name to show to others that they have become a new person in Christ and that they desire to be profoundly transformed by the *"renewing power"* of Jesus from within.

Life change has been a mark of the church down through the centuries from the day of Pentecost when they spoke in *'new tongues'* – to the life changes that happened in Philippi to the woman named Lydia who was seeking after God, to the woman who had a demon cast out of her and to the jailer who went from beating Paul to inviting him home for supper and later that night standing with his family as they all were baptized in the name of Jesus. The same pattern was seen as the alcoholic named Augustine found faith, as St. Francis of Assisi gave up all he had to become a Jesus follower, as

Isaac Newton the slave trader became the kind of man who could write, *Amazing Grace* to how Pat Nixon (founder of the Mustard Seed) found faith in Christ as people cared for him from First Baptist Church here in Calgary. And I should add that I have seen prostitutes and cocaine addicts be transformed by Jesus, tough military men be changed by Jesus, husbands whose abuse of their spouse caused their divorce find faith, life change and then I had the chance to remarry them again.

I've seen folks, like one of my best friends, who was a 'Hell's Angel' type, went to jail for attempted murder find faith and become a pastor when he found faith on night as he was about to kill himself. And even more miraculous, I have seen kids with no criminal record, no history of struggle hear the news about Jesus at a summer camp and ask Jesus into their lives and their lives changed in that they never had to fall into the deep sins which would cause great pain to themselves and those they love. And I have seen Jesus cause various life changes in my life, as simple as letting me find Him again after I had walked away from Him in high school to how even lately, I am finding my walk with Him becoming sweeter and more precious. The point I am making is that when John 7:38 says that from your inner most being will flow rivers of living water that Jesus' goal in coming to earth was to make us '*new creatures in Him*' to do a transforming work within us. And for some, that may appear dramatic because of what we have '*stepped into*' but for all of us, it is supposed to be life changing. God Changes Lives. Let me give you an example:

### **(Ryan Howarth Testimony Video)**

Ryan will share a little bit more tonight at Hub. Did you notice that he talked about an initial experience with Jesus that lead to faith and then a renewal of that faith which led to the life change he is experiencing today? His experiences with Jesus led to ongoing changes in his life.

I was listening to the testimony last week of Stephen Baldwin (the youngest of the Baldwin movie star brothers). He told, how in the middle of being caught-up in all the excesses of Hollywood they decided to hire a nanny named Augusta from Brazil. Who, when she arrived seemed to always being singing and the only word you could understand was the word Jesus. So one day, Stephen's wife asked her why she was always singing about this Jesus. To which the nanny almost feel over laughing, but seeing the confused look on her boss' wife's face, she quickly added, "You didn't think I came all the way from Brazil just to clean your house do you? When you asked me to come, I went to my church and asked people to pray if I should come or not. At that prayer meeting someone stood up and said that I should accept the job because I needed to share the gospel of Jesus with you so you would accept the Lord and have your own ministry which would touch many people." A while after that, Stephen's wife became a dedicated Christ follower - the kind who spends 45 minutes beside her bed every morning in prayer. Eventually Stephen became a Christian because he said he couldn't shake the fact that his best friend - his wife, was being transformed by her faith in Jesus. Now Stephen runs '*Living it...Skateboard Ministries*'. This ministry is doing some amazing things across North America reaching Skateboarders for Christ. At the end of his testimony he said, "*I am now the guy I couldn't become on my own.*" That is what Jesus wants to do in our lives.

We don't do this very often but last week, I saw a video from a conference that Bill Hybels lead. What I saw grabbed my heart and I think it will encourage your heart as well.

### **(Bill Hybels – Changed Lives Video)**

What I loved about the video was that while we celebrate the stories like when Stephen Baldwin was saved, the wonderful thing is that like with Ryan's story, we all have a story. For some of you it is as amazing as the healing story of the man cured of fourth stage Lymphoma; for others, it is as simple as moving from ME to WE or from WONDERING to KNOWING. All are just as profound and because they are personal to us, they are just as important. As you came in this morning you were given a sheet of paper. Can I ask, if like the folks you just saw on the video, you were asked to write down where you were at one time and what God changed in your life, what would you write down? For some it would be, I messed up my marriage and now I am the husband I always needed to be. For others it could be, I wasn't sure what to do with my life - Now I know or I was so alone and now I found faith and community. I know it may be hard but take a moment and either write the before and after comments on your paper or at least, in your mind, write down what it should say.

## **II. Is He Transforming Your Life?**

I know that it is hard to write something down in such a short time. But here is a dirty question? If I gave you until tomorrow evening and you still couldn't think of what has changed in your life since you started following Jesus, what do you think that should tell you? I say that because in Isaiah 6:1 - 8 - when Isaiah had an encounter with God at church it resulted in a drastic life change for him. He started to look at the sins he had been playing with in his life, and he found a new purpose and calling concerning his life.

*I Corinthians 6:9-11 "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."*

An encounter with Jesus should lead to life changes. That is why I wanted you to hear Ryan's testimony or see the huge variety of things God had done in the people's lives who held up the cardboard testimonies. Because of that all of us need to hear again that God can make things change in our lives. And because we all know that we have areas in our lives that we aren't letting Jesus save or change the way we let Him save our soul. But let's be honest; change is not something that comes easy to us.

Dr. Edward Miller, the Dean of the Medical School and CEO of the Hospital at Johns Hopkins University was commenting that when a patient undergoes bypass surgery, a traumatic and expensive procedure, it can cost more than \$100,000. About 600,000 people have bypasses every year in the United States and 1.3 million heart patients have angioplasties -- all at a total cost of around \$30 billion. Then he added that while the procedures temporarily relieves chest pains they rarely prevent heart attacks or prolong lives. Why? Bottom line - patients could avoid the return of pain and

the need to repeat the surgery -- by switching to healthier lifestyles. Yet very few do. *"If you look at people after coronary-artery bypass grafting two years later, 90% of them have not changed their lifestyle. Even though they know they have a very bad disease and they know they should change their lifestyle, for whatever reason, they can't."*

Here is the issue. Once we are saved, it is supposed to have an ongoing impact on our lives. Scriptures says, *"Be holy as I am holy. You are the temple of God and 'you are a new creation.'"* It is saying that change is supposed to be happening. We have just had heart surgery. Then why over time do we go back to our old habits and our old way of doing things? Maybe it is:

- (i) because we don't believe change is possible – that we said is false,
- (ii) because salvation and church has helped stop the heart pain so we have forgotten what it was like to live without Jesus
- (iii) because we are lazy or
- (iv) because we have substituted caring for the church for a love for Jesus.

But no matter what has been standing in the way of our experiencing change in our lives, we need to hear again the song that was in the background as the testimony boards were being shown. *"There is an invisible presence as close as the air we are breathing.. There is a call to a life that is greater. There is a hunger to believe in. There is a voice of the risen saviour and he is giving us an invitation to a rock we can truly stand on to a more secure foundation. Are you willing to follow in the steps of the risen Saviour."*

Can People Change? You bet we can! We have seen plenty of evidence of that this morning (and week by week in our church). So what do you need to fill in on the paper in front of you which need to be touched by the grace of God? Then are you willing to (unlike our heart patients) follow through with Jesus' help so that soon you will be able to turn over the page and see what God has done in your life? Today we celebrate the Changes God has brought into our lives and the lives of those in this place. And with strong hope that God is the able to change us, we need to place that which still needs His touch in His hands and determine to join Him on the journey toward change.

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