

# Where We Are Going Series

## Transforming Character (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

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By  
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### At A Glance:

- I. Introduction
- II. Explanation of Character
- III. How to Transform Character
- IV. Conclusion
- V. Questions for Further Thought

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*These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.*

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# Transforming Character

## I. Introduction

### A. Illustration: Testimony of David Wood<sup>1</sup>

1. Dr. David Wood is a man whose life has been radically transformed by the power of God. David is a man who describes himself as violent, selfish, and uncaring. Wait until you hear why he says that. David didn't have any emotions about anyone else. When his elementary school best friend died, his response was: so what? David thought he was the most important person in the world...literally. Growing up, David had choked his best friend until bloody foam came out of his mouth after hitting him with a shovel. Why? Because his friend had disagreed with him over something that David couldn't even remember. He watched his mom's boyfriends beat her right in front of him and didn't lift a finger to help her, even when he could have—he just didn't care, and was proud of it.
2. David was also in trouble with the law. While running from the police on one occasion, David was walking through a strangers' back yard. He remembers thinking that he cared nothing for the people whose house he was trespassing, so why was he concerned about not walking through their beautiful vegetable garden? Why should he care about these plants if he didn't care about the people who owned them, since they were merely a worthless clump of cells, and how he treated them didn't really matter. Concepts of right and wrong were simply helpful myths made up by society that only shackled his own self-expression. With that, he purposefully stomped through the vegetables, destroying all he could in his escape with a tremendous sense of freedom.
3. He had a strong desire to torture people. He wanted to do violence to others, going so far as to research ways to do it. He learned how to make homemade bombs, a grenade launcher, and disguises so as to not get caught. All this took place at the young age of 18. He dreamed and planned, creating his own mass murder event. Not being satisfied with that, he decided to go to college and major in chemistry in order to "create something a little more sophisticated" with which to kill people.
4. David eventually thought the best way to start killing people was to start close to home. Any amateur can kill strangers, but to kill people close to you would take real courage. One night, David attacked his Dad in his sleep with a ball peen hammer and left him for dead. David did this even after being unable to think of one wrong thing his dad had ever done to him. David went to prison for this act.
5. Following a journey with a cellmate who was a Christian, David came to believe in Jesus. For the first time in years, he didn't want to hurt anyone. When following his own, heart David felt a sense of freedom, but that freedom turned out to be a prison because he was controlled by his own desires. The freedom he now experienced in

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<sup>1</sup> [Why I Am a Christian \(David Wood X-Atheist\) - YouTube](#)

Jesus, while it came with restrictions on his behavior, provided a freedom that unleashed David from himself.

6. Fast forward to when David was in college after prison: he becomes so concerned about reaching his best friend and roommate, Nabeel Qureshi, with the gospel, that he spent several years learning about Islam and having patient conversations with Nabeel about the truthfulness of Christianity against the truthfulness of Islam. David went so far as to get a degree in philosophy of religion, with a specialty in Islam, for the purpose of persuading his friend to become a Christian. Nabeel eventually did become a Christian.<sup>2</sup> Today, David Wood is known around the world, including in Jerusalem, as a leading spokesperson for Christianity when it comes to Islam.
  7. How does a guy who had absolutely no regard for another person (and took pride in that) and saw empathy, compassion, and feelings for others as a sign of weakness to being so concerned for another human being that he invested years of his life to sharing the message of Christianity with one person? The power of God accomplished this life transformation.
- B. Is it possible for a person's life to be significantly changed because of the power of God? The answer is a resounding yes, and there are testimonies to that fact ever since the time of Jesus. While it is possible to doubt this reality by looking at the modern church and seeing the suspicious absence of changed lives, there are still plenty of genuine cases in which people's lives have been dramatically changed from what they once were.
- C. There are divine resources available for a stubborn person to become flexible, an angry person to become patient and self-controlled, a loud-mouthed jerk to learn how to control their language, or a heavy drinker to find comfort without a bottle. Jesus has the ability to transform any person's character no matter how bad it might be. Not only is this possible, it is the purpose of the Bible for our lives. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, we will learn how God transforms lives.

## II. Explanation of Character

- A. When the Three C's were first introduced, the second C of character found its Scriptural foundation in Romans 5:4. Through this verse, we learn that God desires His people to have dependable and reliable character. God wants us to be shaped into people He can count on to do the good works He wants us to do, and to be the people he wants us to be. This is not just theoretical or having a desire to do good; rather, it is something we demonstrate consistently. God wants us to have "proven character". Developing quality character is something that "is precious in the sight of God" (1 Pet. 3:4). Those who love God will want to give Him what is precious to Him. Character and integrity will matter to them in their own life and in the lives of others. A person can't genuinely love Jesus and not care about character development at the same time.
- B. Just like the last message, we want to move forward beyond this brief introduction of character by looking at a few important passages that define and explain the Biblical notion of character. A critical passage that describes the nature of character is Romans 6:17-18: <sup>17</sup> But thanks be to

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<sup>2</sup> You can read about Nabeel's testimony in his book *Seeking Allah Finding Jesus*. It is quite the story just like David Wood's testimony.

God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed,<sup>18</sup> and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”. God-centered character development means to become “obedient from the heart” to the message of God. Heart obedience is the essence of godly character, not behavioral alignment. It is possible for a person to do the right action but still have their hearts not set on obedience.

- C. True disciples will have an internal God-given desire and drive to want to please God, which results in them being progressively freed from sin and committed to righteousness. Godly character will not allow a person to live comfortably in known sin. That doesn’t mean a disciple won’t ever intentionally do what they know is wrong, but it means it will bother them and their disobedience will go against the deepest desires of their heart. This internal drive will have an impact on who they are and what they do. Their heart obedience will move them forever towards the righteousness of God. This desire will naturally motivate action. The person who says they want to obey God but never shows any evidence of doing so in their actions have deceived themselves about their desire for obedience.
- D. The goal of transforming our character is to align our will with the will of God. Jesus is the perfect and ultimate example in this as He said, “<sup>38</sup> For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.” (Jn. 6:38).<sup>3</sup> Jesus not only lived for the purpose of carrying out the will of the Father, but also successfully did so in every moment of His life (“I always do the things that are pleasing to Him” Jn. 8:29). When our character is transformed by the Word of God in the working of the Holy Spirit, disciples will desire, move towards, and carry out the will of God because they want the same things that God wants. Godly character should be conceived in these terms.
- E. Moral and godly character are typically described in the Bible by its virtues—personal characteristics. Godly character is described by virtues like patience, kindness, compassion, humility, love, perseverance, longsuffering, and self-control among others (Gal. 5:22-24, Col. 3:12-13, 2 Pet. 1:5-8). Those with godly character will become like God Himself, taking on His very nature (2 Pet. 1:4). The Bible teaches us not just what character is, it also specifically defines the characteristics of godly character. Disciples of Jesus will put energy and effort into developing each of the virtues modeled in the life of Jesus through the resources He provides.
- F. Why is it so important for disciples to develop godly character? One of the reasons character is so important to God is because only those with godly character will be capable of doing the difficult job of His kingdom’s work in this world. Only individuals with mature godly character will be able to live fruitful lives. Even many pastors get out of ministry, never to return again, because it is too challenging. Living for Jesus sounds appealing until you start doing it and begin to realize what it will cost. The person of character, who possesses the right inner qualities and whose life penetrates into the world, will labor long and effectively for the King.<sup>4</sup> Only the person with godly character will persevere when serving Jesus gets difficult. Many will give up

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<sup>3</sup> John 5:30

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hull, [\*Jesus Christ, Disciplemaker\*](#), 20th Anniversary Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 154.

as soon as challenges, unpleasantness, or persecution comes (Mt. 13:18-23, 10:16-23). Fruitful workers are few and hard to find (Lk. 10:2).

- G. Lots of people like the idea of serving Jesus, but far fewer desire to continue to serve Jesus when the rubber meets the road. Like the way movies present soldiers dying in battle, many people live with a romanticized view of living for God that ignores the true realities of what this requires (Lk. 9:57-58). Many enter into the service of God, expecting it to be nothing but a wonderful and enjoyable experience. Then, someone complains while another criticizes. Yet another tries to “helpfully” point out all the mistakes they are making. Still another wants to debate an unimportant detail about something that was said. Some people may disagree with the way you serve Jesus to the point that they just don’t like you anymore. You may frequently be the target of other people’s anger. This is the reality of serving Jesus. These dynamics are friendly fire—consequences coming from fellow Christians. What will happen when the person serving Jesus comes into contact with the world—those who are hostile toward Jesus?
- H. The only way perseverance in serving Jesus will last in order to produce fruitful kingdom work will be for those who are serving Jesus to have the character necessary to patiently deal with everything that comes along with living faithfully for God.

### III. How to Transform Character

- A. How do we actually change who we are on the inside? Is there anything we can intentionally do to improve our character, or is all we can do to pray for it and ask God to give it to us? While most people are familiar with what character is, we are much less knowledgeable about how to develop it. While ancient cultures very much cared about virtue and being a good person, the modern world has completely eliminated all virtue, and we are simply told to do whatever we want, thus eliminating any and all need of character development. There is no real right and wrong, after all. What we know about character development is that we shouldn’t ask God for patience because He will give us opportunities to grow in it—and that is a bad thing. This is why an understanding of the basic four-step character development process ordained by God is so important.<sup>5</sup>
- B. The four-step process of character transformation is clearly described by Paul: “<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; <sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). It is this character development process that prepares disciples to conduct themselves in ways that are pleasing to God, “so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” If disciples want to live fruitful lives for God and be ready to do any good thing God wants them to do, they must first undergo this character-transforming process. Character always precedes conduct. Who we are determines how we live. The Bible is “profitable.” That is, it is effective in accomplishing specific effects in our lives. God’s Word produces healthy and happy lives for those who are shaped by it.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> My understanding of this process was greatly helped by Jay E. Adams, [How to Help People Change: The Four-Step Biblical Process](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010). While I don’t agree with everything he says in this book, his treatment of the four step change process is helpful.

<sup>6</sup> John Calvin and William Pringle, [Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon](#) (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 249.

- C. Just like convictions, character is also deeply dependent on the most important resource in the Christian life: the word of God—the Bible. The primary tool used by God to change our character is the Bible.<sup>7</sup> The Bible isn't the only tool used by God to transform our character, but it is the most influential one. An individual's contact with the Bible, and his response to it, will be the primary factor that determines his character. While some people can be more naturally inclined to have good character than others, the process of changing character requires personal contact with the Word of God.
- D. It is possible that the first two steps in the process are referring to the life of the mind and what people think, while the second two steps refer to the way people behave.<sup>8</sup> One term in each set is positive, while the other is negative. Teaching is paired with rebuking, while correcting is paired with training in righteousness. While not everyone agrees with this interpretation of this passage, this structure is still helpful. The process of character transformation begins in the way people think, and it leads to a change in conduct.
- E. Disciples who allow the Word of God to do its work in their hearts will be equipped to live the kind of life God wants them to live. They will be prepared and have all the resources they need to do any good action God asks them to do. Those who undergo God's character transformation process will, by nature, live a pleasing life before God.
- F. What does the word of God do in a person's life? There are four major soul-shaping activities that, taken together, transform our character. First, the Bible is useful "for teaching" (v. 16). Teaching refers to the content of our convictions, which we covered in the last message in this series.<sup>9</sup> To be taught is to be educated and instructed, activities that impart knowledge or skill.<sup>10</sup> The Scriptures teach the message of God and what He wants from people in the world. This is why disciples were told by Jesus to teach everything He commanded and how to carry out His commandments (Mt. 28:18-20). Paul uses the general term of "sound doctrine" to refer to what is to be taught to the church (1 Tim. 1:10, Tit. 1:9, 2:1). Good Biblical teaching nourishes the soul and this should be done constantly (1 Tim. 4:6).
- G. All change starts with learning something new. The reason we do what we are currently doing is because of what we already know. We will never do differently until we first know differently. Learning new information is the first step in doing differently. A person will never do differently until they know differently. Without learning, there will be no change. Only when a person learns new information will the potential for change be possible. A person should never expect life transformation without furthering their education, but it is equally important to realize that life transformation doesn't end with teaching, either. The general outlook of the church that says, "as long as people are being taught the Bible, their lives will be transformed," is

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<sup>7</sup> Robert W. Yarbrough, [The Letters to Timothy and Titus](#), ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2018), 431, George W. Knight, [The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1992), 449.

<sup>8</sup> Donald Guthrie, [Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 14, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 182.

<sup>9</sup> George W. Knight, [The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1992), 449.

<sup>10</sup> Logos 9 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on 2 Tim. 3:16 "teaching"

destructively mistaken. Character transformation requires much more than simply having the right information. To expect a person to change just because they attend a Bible study is naïve. Learning is part of the process of transformation, but it is just that: a part.

- H. The second step in the character transformation process is “for reproof” (v. 16). To reprove someone is to point out what is at fault and to bring attention to that which is wrong or broken. It is an act or expression of criticism and a judgment involving condemnation.<sup>11</sup> The Bible, and those who teach it, will point out that which is not right in people’s lives. Contrary to what many think, this is an act of love, as love does not “rejoice in unrighteousness” (1 Cor. 13:6). It is not loving to sit in silence while a person harms themselves and those around them. To use the Scriptures to help others see where they are in the wrong is an act of love. Unless a person is willing to take a look at the hard things in his life, he will not progress in the Christian life. We have to look at the unpleasantness of our own hearts in order for our character to be transformed. If all we want is encouragement and to feel good about ourselves, we will be greatly stunted in our spiritual growth. It is probably this part of the process that is most lacking in the modern church’s ministry philosophy and practices.
- I. Some Christians mistakenly think a good person will never say anything “bad” about anyone.<sup>12</sup> If this is the true standard, then not even Jesus is good! Jesus regularly pointed out the evil and wrongs in other people’s lives (Jn. 7:7). Pointing out the wrongs done by others is not inappropriate. Protecting other people’s feelings at all cost, including ignoring or denying truth, will not promote righteousness. Confronting and resisting sin is not unloving. In fact, we are commanded to expose the deeds of darkness (Eph. 4:15, 5:11). Telling a person what they are doing is wrong is not rude. Obviously, wisdom is necessary for how best to do this, but the fact that we are to do this as disciples should not be questioned. In a culture that tells us, “Let everyone live their own lives,” and “Who are we to criticize the life choices of others?” this part of discipleship is much harder to understand for many today.
- J. Third, the Bible is effective “for correction” (v. 16). Character transformation does not only require a knowledge of what is wrong, it also needs an understanding of the way to fix what is broken. Correction is the act of offering an improvement to replace a moral mistake by using an objective standard.<sup>13</sup> Restoration by putting things back the way they ought to be is a part of character transformation. Paul tells the church not just to stop stealing, but also to work hard with their own hands so they have enough to give to others (Eph. 4:28). Putting a person’s life back together the way God originally intended it to be is an activity accomplished by the Bible. Merely highlighting what is wrong in a person’s life is not enough; helping them know how to fix it is also required for character development. Confronting others must always be accompanied by offering a helping hand for those who are willing to repent.

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<sup>11</sup> Logos 9 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on 1 Tim. 3:16 “reproof”. The condemnation here is not the same condemnation that is forbidden in 1 Cor. 4:5. Making moral assessments is not the same as passing final judgment on people.

<sup>12</sup> Gossiping about the faults of others for the purpose of damaging another’s reputation is wrong. However, actively trying to help another person stop doing wrong for their benefit and the benefit of others is an act of love. Using real life examples to help others become discerning and understand the difference between right and wrong is also permissible. Jesus also did this.

<sup>13</sup> Logos 9 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on 1 Tim. 3:16 “correction”

- K. Note carefully how there is an assumption here—when sin is removed, there is the possibility of restoration. In other words, sin always takes something good away from us. How different our lives would be if we actually believed this! Disciples who are convinced that it is the nature of sin itself to cause harm and destruction are the ones who passionately pursue character development. Those who think sin and their own moral failures are “not that big of a deal” will likely see little progress in character development.
- L. The fourth and last step in the character transformation process is “for training in righteousness” (v. 16). The Bible helps us to live disciplined lives that promote the good, moral standards of God. Character transformation requires learning practical life skills in order to know how to carry out what is good from God’s perspective consistently in our own lives. Disciples need to develop consistent, God-centered life skills. Developing self-control around what is good leading to consistent and predictable behavior, is part of how our character is developed. Training in righteousness refers to the positive behaviors that stand in replacement of the previously held immoral behaviors. Until a person knows how to personally live out God’s standards in his own life, there is still character development that needs to happen. A person who doesn’t know how to control his negative and critical thoughts about others has not yet completed the character development process required for that area of life. This stage of development will not ever be completed in this lifetime. Completely developing God’s righteousness in every area of our lives is something we will permanently progress in, but never fully achieve, until by the power of Jesus, we are remade for eternity. Disciples will always have the opportunity to further deepen their godliness.
- M. Character transformation begins with learning new information, proceeds with identifying where we are at fault or in the wrong, continues with knowing how to fix, and actually fixing, what is wrong, and progresses to the development of consistently good actions. This character developing process happens as a result of people’s productive interaction with and reaction to the Word of God. This character development process is what the Bible is intended by God to do in our lives. If any of these four elements are missing, the church will not be producing people who are prepared to do what God wants them to do. There may be a good work that God wants a person to accomplish, but they will lack the ability to do it. If the church as a whole neglects any of these four steps, they are shooting themselves in the foot and hindering their own effectiveness for the kingdom.
- N. Some wholeheartedly believe the statement, “People don’t change,” and they give up any hope of people making any real or significant improvement. While this may be true without God’s help, those who have the Holy Spirit inside them and use the Bible as their guide have all the resources and strength they need to drastically change for the better. The reason more lives are not transformed the way they ought to be is because people refuse to let the Word of God dwell richly within them (Col. 3:16) under the powerful and effective influence of the Holy Spirit. Those who either neglect the Word of God or refuse to let it shape their lives will not see the life transformation God intends for them to enjoy.
- O. What impact has the focus on character had on Community Alliance Church thus far, and how will it change what we do in the future? One of the biggest areas that character will influence us



is going to be on the culture we want to encourage here at CAC. The leadership of our church wants people to move past shallow relationships and keeping others in the church at arm's length, being willing to only talk about the weather, events in our lives, or the Packers. We want disciples to go through life together for encouragement and support. It is our hope that every person who comes to CAC will develop a close friendship with at least one other person in the church. We want a focus on what is going on inside people to become a natural focal point. We want it to be okay to talk about what is going on inside us and how we need to grow in godliness. We want open and honest discussion to become normal and welcomed both in the classroom and in casual conversation. We want it to be acceptable to tell others where we are at in our Jesus journey in a transparent way without feeling judged or criticized by others. Our desire is to create a safe environment for people to feel comfortable enough with one another to have real conversations about the most important issues in their lives.

- P. Our hope is to have every person who connects with us to develop relationships with others at such a depth that we can hold one another accountable and encourage one another regarding our character. Do we know one another well enough to do this? Am I close enough to other people in this church that I share my struggles and weaknesses with them? I'm not saying we should be up in everyone else's business, but we should be familiar enough with some people in the church in order to do this. Is this a natural part of how we treat one another? Is personal accountability for the way we are living our lives a regular part of what happens when we get together as a church family?
- Q. Fostering a trusting environment of vulnerability is important. We want our church to be a safe place for people to be vulnerable and find help and love instead of judgment. Are we willing to be vulnerable enough to let others in to help us with our issues? If we know and are aware of an area of our life that is out of order and we know it is displeasing to God and we're not doing a good job of handling it ourselves, are we open enough to invite our close church friends into it so they can help us? Or do we merely take the safe route and ask people to pray for us, perhaps without even giving them any details as to what is going on?
- R. Character is going to become more of a point of emphasis when it comes to how we teach the Bible. In fact, the children's church curriculum that has been selected specifically identified and emphasizes a character trait for each lesson. For the *Believe* adult Sunday School class, the curriculum was chosen because it is going to spend ten weeks describing what the character of a disciple should be in practical ways. We don't want people to just do the right thing; we want them to love what is good, and this is going to become more of an emphasis in our teaching as a whole.
- S. Are we courageous enough to lovingly confront others and have uncomfortable conversations? Our church culture should become a place where confrontation occurs naturally and normally with an attitude of encouragement and love. We don't want rebuke to be the exception, but the rule, by considering "how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds" (Heb. 10:24). When something needs to be talked about, will we love one another enough to have those difficult conversations?

**IV. Conclusion**

- A. Who we are is what matters most to God. Jesus spent a lot of time explaining what God desires to be happening inside us. If our character is not right, not even prayer will be pleasing to God. Until a person understands the important role of heart obedience in the Christian life, they will misunderstand what matters to God.
- B. God summarizes the priority of character this way: <sup>29</sup>“Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever!” (Dt. 5:29). God aches for people to have a heart that respects Him and desires to obey His Word so that we might be blessed. Does this describe your heart?

**V. Questions for Further Thought**

- A. Have you ever met anyone with significantly good or bad character? What were they like?
- B. How did Jesus view His own character (Mt. 11:29, Jn. 8:46, 18:19-23)?
- C. What are the qualities of good character? What are the qualities of godly character? Is there a difference?
- D. What other reasons might be offered for why character is so precious to God?
- E. What habits or behaviors might help a person participate in the character development process?