

Engaging His Transforming Work

Long Beach Alliance Church • December 27, 2015 • Pastor Chris Lankford

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the LORD, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

~2 Corinthians 3:18

1) What Are You Resolved To Change In The New Year?

- A) The New Year is often a time for making goals and resolutions for change. Generally, over 50% of the population will make some sort of resolution for the New Year. Most of us are taught to make measurable goals, gauging success according to time (target dates or time invested), numbers (pounds or inches), or content (finishing a book or hiking a mountain).
- B) Measurable goals often fail, not due to the measurements, but because people have a hard time with the inevitable failure rate required to achieve a goal. Almost all goals experience significant failure before success. Researchers have found two helpful correctives.
- C) The first helpful corrective for goal setting is “shotgun goals over bullet goals.” A bullet hits a very specific point, whereas a shotgun sprays a pattern of smaller pellets at its target. Bullet goals are very specific, often experiencing intolerable failures, leading to abandoning the goal. A shotgun goal is more broad, and can absorb more failure because of its breadth. A bullet goal would be ‘losing 15 pounds by Valentine’s Day,’ whereas a shotgun goal would be ‘becoming more healthy by changing dietary, exercise, and sleep habits by Valentine’s Day.’
- D) The second helpful corrective for goal setting is “community goals beats individual goals.” An individual goal is something not shared with others, for fear of shame from inevitable failures. Community goals are shared with at least one friend or cohort/partner, which helps in making a goal more reasonable and in getting encouragement when failure feels intolerable. For instance, many people want to exercise more in the New Year. Only a few will do so with a partner, or even better, with a trainer. People who choose community experience dramatically higher success than those with individual goals.

E) This has been important to me as I have considered this sermon because I typically make a gigantic end-of-year push for Bible reading resolutions and goals. I am convinced the Word of God is the most effective means for positive change in a relationship with Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 3:16-17). However, I have lamented as people have reported short term success, followed by struggle and failure. This has often produced shame and guilt in relationship with Jesus Christ, exactly the opposite of desired positives such as intimacy and freedom.

2) A New Approach For 2016

- A) Rather than simply provide a very specific Bible reading goal/plan for the New Year, I want to challenge our church family to a “communal shotgun goal” which actively engages our relationship with God. This challenge will begin with two core truths, and then I will follow up with five primary ways God has already provided for you and I to succeed at this goal.
- B) But before I get into the details, let’s begin with a great challenge for 2016; a New Year’s “communal shotgun goal” for our church family. Simply stated, will you join me in actively pursuing transformation into God’s provision of holiness? The Bible calls this “sanctification,” the process of becoming who you already are in Christ. More simply stated, will you join together with others to increase in holiness in 2016?

3) Two Core Truths

- A) To understand what I am asking means defining some terms. The word “sanctification” means “making something/someone holy.” Whenever the Bible speaks of “being holy” or “becoming holy,” it is using sanctification language, the language of holiness. Sanctification means you are chosen by God for God’s purposes. This leads us to our first core truth: Holiness is something you are, AND something you are becoming (Hebrews 10:10, 14).
- B) It sounds odd, but sanctification is becoming who you already are (Galatians 2:20). When we are called to be saved by God, we respond by submitting our whole life to Jesus Christ. This begins by trusting that Christ’s sacrifice on the cross provides forgiveness and cleansing for sin (1 John 1:9), AND it continues by providing Christ’s holiness in us (2 Corinthians 5:17, 21).
- C) This is what Jesus meant when He said, “abide in me, and I in you...” (John 15:4-5). Union with Christ is not something which can be fabricated. Like a tree which builds itself from year to year, each ring showing its age or maturity; so also the Christian life builds from abiding in Christ, from the interior life of the soul to the outward life of revealed actions and behaviors.
- D) Sanctification is God’s work of bringing us into conformity to Christ, a soul metamorphosis (Philippians 2:13). This leads to our second core truth: Holiness is an internal work of God in your soul; sanctification is preeminently a work of the Spirit of God in a man or woman’s soul (2 Corinthians 3:18). Fruit grows from a fruit tree, so also holiness grows from the Holy Spirit.

4) Community Helps Prevent Decorative Fruit Displays

- A) This is often where things can get screwy for Christians. Since God is doing this work from the inside-out of my soul by the power of the Holy Spirit, and I am already definitively “made holy” because of Jesus Christ, is there anything I really need to do? Can I just “let go and let God?,” or simply “relax and yield?” In the words of the Apostle Paul, “MAY IT NEVER BE!”
- B) Imagine living in a neighborhood where everyone had fruit trees in their front yards. But, because you are a very busy person with diverse priorities, you do not have the same time as your neighbor to care for your trees. But, when your neighbor’s fruit trees are in season, you notice it makes your fruitless trees look embarrassingly barren. So, rather than endure the shame of disapproving glances, you decide to order big, beautiful decorative fruit and glue it to your trees. Just to make sure no one gets too close to your faux fruit, you build a beautiful (but sturdy) white picket fence to keep your nosey neighbors just far enough away to assure your phony fruit is never discovered.
- C) While ridiculous, this is what many church-going people do every week. Many listen to the indicatives of the Bible -- inspiring statements of identity in Christ; to the point of forgetting the imperatives of the Bible -- complementary commands which launch and guide our life in Christ. This is why goals must be genuinely communal, lived together in a church family, rather than pursued privately, which often leads to disillusionment and failures. Nothing in the spiritual life is private (James 5:16, see also Acts 5:1-11 & 2 Samuel 12:1-12). Nothing.
- D) Many church-going people are experts at displaying authentic looking fruit behind carefully guarded picket fences. This is the difference between rules and relationship. Rules appeal to change on the outside of a person, and can be for display without an authentic heart. Relationship transforms the soul, revealed in displays of authentic character and behaviors.
- E) As you consider the ‘communal shotgun goal’ of increased sanctification (holiness), you will have to allow choice and trusted people “inside your fence.” Let me encourage you! Holiness is not just possible, it is who you already are! Work compatibly with Christ, and pursue your God-given identity in Christ! Do not settle for faking out those around you, welcome Christ’s great work in your soul and discover fruitfulness beyond imagination!

5) Five Ways God Has Already Provided For Increasing Our Holiness

- A) The Bible clearly teaches that God has provided numerous ways for increasing holiness in our lives. In other words, God has supernaturally empowered special ways for you and I to grow in holiness which he created to bring transformation into the life of the believer!
- B) Amazingly, God has provided key ways to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12)! Make diligent use of God’s ways! God’s ways are true!

- C) **Read The Bible!** You will never stand a chance in defeating the natural and distracting desires of your own flesh or the sins offered in our world if you do not read the Scriptures! The Bible is God's voice, breathed into words on the page (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Scriptures give a voice for the Holy Spirit (John 16:13), and bring sanctification (John 17:17). The Word of God gives us guidance (Psalm 119:105), and renews our minds (Romans 12:2).
- D) **Pray!** God speaks truth and goodness into our lives through the Bible (Psalm 19:7-11) and we respond to our Lord with prayer, speaking to God within the context of the Scriptures (John 14:13-14). Prayer adjusts our hearts to receive grace (Philippians 4:6-7), and recognizes our dependence on God (Hebrews 5:7-8), bringing endurance (James 1:2-8).
- E) **Maintain Community!** Our church is a family, a small taste of the fellowship and wonder of eternity with the family of God! Transparent community, where you are known and you know others, produces holiness (Hebrews 3:12-13). The Christ-centered church family is a light to the world of the love of Jesus (1 John 2:9-10) and is revealed in our intimate relationships with one another (4:7-11). Do not neglect meeting together (Hebrews 10:23-25)!
- F) **Ongoing Gospel Awareness!** When we read Scripture together, pray for/with each other, and we grow in our community with God and each other, we begin to experience the true reality of God's providence, His mastery over all creation and how it encourages and speaks to us through the wonder of everyday events revealing the glory of God (Romans 8:28). True purpose in the Gospel and sanctification can even be discovered in our times of pain, shame, suffering, and trials which bring God-provided depth and maturity (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).
- G) **Obedience Produces Holiness!** As we remain connected to Christ (John 15:1-17), His life flows into our hearts and we abound in love and joy (15:10). Obeying Christ develops a love for His ways which brings joy in our lives, which produces more love, which leads to greater obedience. Miraculously, this cyclical design of God ushers us into a deeper life with Christ!



Beloved, are you willing to separate your heart and your love from all forbidden love, every unhallowed friendship and every purely selfish affection, and let Christ be the Master of your heart and its chief object of affection and delight?

Then He will fill that heart and adjust all its chords to harmony and happiness. Into every relationship of life he will so infuse His own Spirit that we will be enabled to adjust ourselves to all our mingled and manifold situations and relationships so that everyone will be a link with Him and a channel of holy service and blessing.

~Albert Benjamin Simpson, Founder of The Christian & Missionary Alliance