

# 1

## TRANSFORMATION

### UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS

*Stephen W. Smith*

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Man looks at the outward appearance,  
but the LORD looks at the heart.

1 SAMUEL 16:7

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**A**t age thirty-four years, I was called to be the senior pastor of a large, thriving church in a southern city. This was a “megachurch in the making,” complete with four Sunday worship services, scores of deacons and the “greatest staff ever called to serve.” Moreover, I was the leader. My suite of offices looked palatial, with mahogany credenzas, a huge desk and heavy crown molding.

I felt a sense of entitlement in this new position. For ten years I had kept to a relentless schedule, working my way through several churches, each with more members, larger budgets and greater prestige than the last. All the while my eyes had been on the prize—pastoring a large church. And now my dream had come true!

At the zenith of my career, I invited Gary Chapman, author of *The Five Love Languages* and contributor to this book, to lead a citywide conference based on his book and themes. During his presentation, Gary





guided us in identifying our own “love language.” The conference was hugely successful and just one more recognition for our church.

After Gary's last service, my wife, Gwen, served a wonderful Sunday dinner to our family. While savoring our meal, I began to hurriedly “check in” with the family. After all, I had to return to church in two hours for a leadership meeting. We planned to announce our proposal for a bigger sanctuary.

Our dinner became more like a business meeting as I probed Gwen for how she thought Gary did and what responses she had heard from our congregation. She suggested I ask our sons. Evidently, some discussion had already taken place prior to my arrival at home.

Starting with Blake, our oldest son, then ten years old, I asked, “Did you enjoy Dr. Chapman today?”

“Why yes, yes I did, Dad,” Blake replied haltingly.

“Do you happen to know which love language you have?” I probed, glancing at my watch, mindful of the upcoming meeting.

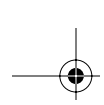
“Yes, Dad, I do know my love language. My love language is time, and you never give me any.”

My son's words devastated me. His disappointment in our relationship was clear. Hadn't I always wanted to be such a good father? My own father was devoted to his work and provided well for our family. But I always yearned for more of Dad's time. Now Blake confronted me with the same problem—father hunger. Ten years had gone by and I hadn't made time for my sons or my wife.

Guilt consumed me. Reflecting more on Blake's words, I began to see myself for what I had become—a sort of driven machine that showed up and sprinkled “pastor dust.” Although I hoped my presence would make occasions better, I wasn't real any more. I had neglected the price that one pays for deep relationships—time, balance and connection to God.

I had no strength or desire to hide behind a façade any longer. I could no longer ride the waves of success and significance wreaking





havoc throughout my family, world, friends and heart. This wake-up call proved a sacred epiphany—my opportunity for transformation.

**BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE**

The journey toward transformation is all about reshaping our hearts, not the muscle within our chest but what Henri Nouwen calls “our hidden center.”

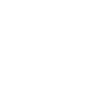
We know little to nothing of our spiritual heart. We keep our distance from it, as though we were afraid. What holds the passion inside of us is what frightens us most. Where we are most ourselves, we are often strangers to ourselves. That is the painful part of being human. We fail to know our hidden center and our submerged parts and so we live and die without knowing who we really are. If we ask ourselves why we think, feel and act in a certain way, we often have no answer, thus proving to be strangers in our own house.<sup>1</sup>

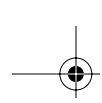
Recently, I sat with a military officer and his wife. This career officer, conditioned by years of training to hide emotion, sat stoically at attention with his wife in front me. The wife began to speak in a frustrated and sadly defeated tone: “I can’t take it any more. To live with Mike, well, it’s like . . . it’s like living with a rock. I can’t get through. He is so tough on the outside. But I don’t think there’s *anything* on the inside.” She continued, “All I want is his heart. I want all of him. But he won’t give it to me.”

His wife was going to leave him. He wouldn’t be with his children. His outer life was disintegrating and his inner life was in turmoil. What was I going to say? “Read a book about renewing your marriage? Have a ten-second kiss each morning and evening? Take fifteen minutes to ask about each other’s day?” This man needed to journey deep within himself to discern his heart and share what he found with his wife.

**RENOUNCING DENIAL**

The journey to transformation begins with the desire to look at and own the truth about myself. It continues as I face the *larger* truth that I’m un-





able to permanently change myself without the power of God. If I could have, I would have. Nothing short of this sincere desire for change will launch us on the path toward transformation.

A good mirror shows us truth. But we have to look into that mirror. We must *seek* to *find*. A mirror's reflection reveals the truth about every man. Can we really cover things up? Can a well-made, tailored jacket cover forty-five extra pounds? Can a quick smile cover the rage we just expressed? Can warning the family that "We don't talk about this outside this house" hide the lurking dysfunction?

One evening in the middle of the night, Bill's wife caught him staring into the computer screen in the basement office. Bill had escaped there to enter the dark hole of cyber pornography. Once confronted by his wife through angry tears, Bill promised to "never do it again." He meant it too. He was almost relieved. Bill wanted to return to his values.

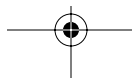
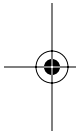
Yet, within days, Bill secretly slipped off to the basement after making sure his wife was asleep to revisit—just this once. He wrestled with guilt yet returned again and again. Bill was held in the clutches of false intimacy, unreal women and selfish desires. Soon, he justified his need for this gratification and pronounced it one of his little secrets. He simply couldn't stop.

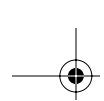
Most of us have lived long enough that we have no interest in judging Bill or interpreting his actions. We realize that life as a Christian man simply doesn't work like a logarithm in a math class. Indeed, we know our *own* slippery places, and we know that solemn promises often don't stick. Our old friend self-reliance often lets us down.

A friend confessed in a men's group I led recently, "Steve, I *need* transformation because I know what it is like *not* to be transformed." My friend succinctly stated what is true for us all. We yearn for real change, and we know we can't do it alone.

### I DON'T HAVE WHAT IT TAKES

Jesus and John the Baptist announced the kingdom of God with the





words “Reshape your lives, because God’s new order of the Spirit is confronting you” (Matthew 3:2; 4:17 *Cotton Patch Version*).

Reshaping our lives involves picking up a reliable mirror and looking squarely at ourselves—above and below the surface. Paul’s words in Romans 7:18-24 model this kind of reflection for us.

I realize that I don’t have what it takes. I can will it, but I can’t *do* it. I decide to do good, but I don’t *really* do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don’t result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time.

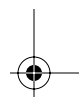
It happens so regularly that it’s predictable. The moment I decide to do good, sin is there to trip me up. I truly delight in God’s commands, but it’s pretty obvious that not all of me joins in that delight. Parts of me covertly rebel, and just when I least expect it, they take charge.

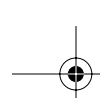
I’ve tried everything and nothing helps. I’m at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn’t that the real question?” (*The Message*)

Paul’s honest admission leaves little room for blaming others, making excuses or complaining about his lot in life. Instead, this biblical passage shows an honest man, without excuse, holding up the mirror of self-reflection. I wish we were all this honest.

At the revelation that my family had suffered from my work addiction, my heart and soul were in pain. I was overwhelmed and exhausted from forcing things to work in my life, yet I didn’t know how to let go of the control. “Please,” I cried out to God. “I’ve had enough. Help me to find and live my true purpose. My way just does not work!” I asked God to remove my enormous need for validation and recognition from others and seek true validation from him.

I knew I would need help to keep in step with God’s work in me. I turned to three male friends. We shared our struggles with family, mar-





riage and work, and became soulful advocates for one another. Gone was the pretense of having the perfect life. We were simply “two or three gathered in his name” (see Matthew 18:20). We read books, studied the Bible together and spent time exploring life outside of our work worlds. In this environment I wasn't judged, nor did I judge. It was much like being cocooned in order to experience a deep, divine work of transformation.

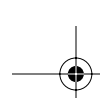
I felt led to resign as senior pastor of the largest church in town. After a brief sabbatical, God showed me my true calling. Instead of pastoring megachurches, I now felt a God-given desire to pastor microchurches of two to three people. Free from demands of budgets and buildings, I could be a companion to a few instead of a leader of the masses. These days, our ministry facilitates retreats that invite others to experience the transformation of the Potter's hands. The Potter's Inn offers soul care to people on the fast lane who want to live with heart and save their souls from destruction. It is the confluence of our gifts, passion and experience. I no longer believe in the magic formulas to the good life that are extolled in shelves and shelves of self-help books.

In “small places” and retreats, I've learned to offer my battered heart to others and invite them to walk the path of transformation with me. The connections I longed for with others have been restored as I've stepped out of my isolation and opened myself to others.

My own family became a place where I experienced the fruit of transformation. The longing for authentic transformation required that I give up my megadreams of an illustrious career and embrace my microfamily as the starting place for the deep change I wanted and needed. I began to give my wife and sons time with me to bridge the chasm that had formed between us. We took long walks together in the woods and learned to talk to one another again. We camped in the wilderness in a pop-up trailer. A wonderful sense of aliveness seemed to flow through me. God, nature and my family restored my painful soul.

I was becoming more sensitive, more human, more alive as my heart awakened. The world acted as a sort of mentor as I witnessed God's fin-



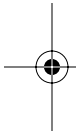


gerprints in those long walks. In fact, these walks have become a signature event in our own ministry. We call them “God Walks” because they introduce our busy retreat participants to the simplicity of silence and solitude that a walk through nature or a city park can provide.

My wife and I moved from functioning as ministry partners to serving as life companions for one another who love and support one another in our woundedness. It has taken time and being more intentional to guard our new learned intimacy with one another and to reclaim the ground we lost.

As of this writing, sixteen years have passed since that pivotal year for me. Now in my fifties, I’m more grateful than ever that I invited God to transform my heart.

Has my life been perfect since? Were all of my problems solved? Absolutely not! Transformation didn’t mean I wouldn’t suffer or experience hard times. After all, the Bible reminds us, it rains on the just and the unjust. A few years ago my wife was diagnosed with breast cancer. One year later while hiking in the Grand Canyon my youngest son almost died from a ruptured appendix. He remained in the hospital for more than a month. These experiences with the people I love most offered me challenging opportunities to truly live and be a transformed man.



### **THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION**

Transformation is *never* complete. I am no trophy of transformation, only a man in the process of transformation. I can only confess (and you can confess with me):

God uses flawed men to accomplish his purposes.

I am a flawed man.

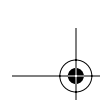
I am a man in process.

God is using me now and will continue to use me in the future to accomplish what he desires.

I am not perfect, but I am available.

Come, O God, and transform my heart.





There is both glory and ruin in our hearts. The ruin in our hearts is easier to see. It's that mess inside of us, the residue of sin that has colored everything in life, including our hearts, to motley gray. The ruin in our hearts is of our making—the mistakes and missteps that mar us. It's the sin and guilt inside of us that has twisted, hardened and gnarled our hearts against God's design for us. The glory is harder to see: it is knowing that Christ is there and knowing that he takes up residence inside of us. The glory is seeing ourselves as objects of God's passionate creation and affection. The glory places us on the receiving end of sacred love. The glory is Jesus Christ dwelling in our hearts.

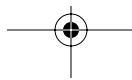
Consider the worksheet on pages 22-23. Scan the three filled columns, paying careful attention to the longing in your heart for "authentic transformation" and the stirrings of self-recognition as you read about "pseudo-transformation." Then evaluate some of your own attempts to address the ruin and to lean into the glory in your heart by filling in the fourth column.

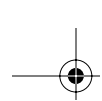


### THE JOURNEY TO OUR HIDDEN CENTER

Once we've committed to the journey toward authentic transformation as opposed to the pseudo-transformation of tips and techniques or an instant cure-all, our imaginations can help us understand the transformation process. When we envision our hearts as instruments of clay that the Potter shapes and reshapes with strong and loving hands, we relax more. We accept unpredictable circumstances and crises as catalysts for change and transformation. We envision the clay spinning on the wheel and note the different shapes and forms it takes over time. The Potter has a unique design in mind as he shapes our hidden centers into new states of being and understanding.

Many of the men you'll meet in these pages have journeyed to their hidden center. Sometimes bravely, sometimes full of fear, these men pushed on. They pressed past excuses. They surrendered to God those fears, those past events and the present turmoil that had prevented their





journey within to the most amazing, remarkable and “fearfully made” sanctuary where God resides.

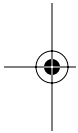
In most of our stories the men forged ahead with God and refused to be satisfied with anything less than authentic transformation. Some experienced the gift as a previously unexplored creative ability, a deepened marriage, a new life purpose of service and meaning, new and significant friendships or even a slowing down that matches and complements life rhythms. Some relied on prayer; others came alive through journaling their journey. All of the men found their personal and unique ways to lean toward God. In all cases their formerly hard hearts were softened—paradoxically bringing forth stronger, more resilient men.

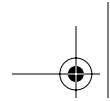
Let’s join some ordinary men as they explore their hearts and share their stories of transformation. Listen with your heart as they courageously examine what lies below the waterline.

Watch them

- make room in their hearts for Jesus
- let Jesus transform their hard-hearted natures
- become men after God’s own heart
- speak from the heart
- live with heart

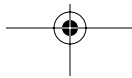
The real transformation of a man involves his heart. If we are to be transformed, God must have access to that sacred place within. Let the transformation begin!

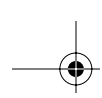




Transformation Worksheet

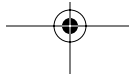
<b>Authentic Transformation</b> <i>Important ingredients in the process and journey</i>	<b>Pseudo-transformation</b> <i>Where we've been before—previously explored territory</i>	<b>My Story</b> <i>God's fingerprints in my life.</i>	<b>Your Story</b>
Faces the truth: I want to experience authentic transformation in a specific area (Romans 7:15-25; John 8:31-32)	Perpetuates a lie and excuses behavior: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I don't have a problem."</li> <li>• "Everyone does this."</li> </ul>	I had to face the truth about my life and admit what I needed, what was missing.	
Admits brokenness: I cannot change myself. I need God's help to truly transform. It is beyond my own strength or abilities. (2 Corinthians 4:7-12)	Portrays polished façade: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "There's nothing wrong with me."</li> <li>• "Everyone else is doing this."</li> </ul>	I realized what I had done when my son confronted me.	
Embraces a process: Transformation is not a quick fix. Becoming like Jesus involves time and mistakes. (Jeremiah 18:1-6; Ephesians 4:13-15; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 John 3:2)	Frantically looks for quick answers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• steps</li> <li>• logic</li> <li>• laws</li> <li>• tips</li> <li>• techniques</li> </ul>	I gave up the quest for success by looking for the right book or technique.	
Requires surrender and humility: I can't do it alone. God, please help me. (Matthew 26:39; James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6)	Insists on self-help and self-reliance. Keeps the struggle a secret.	I gave up on the power of my self-will. I relied on God's guidance.	

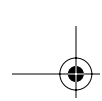




Transformation Worksheet, continued

<b>Authentic Transformation</b> <i>Important ingredients in the process and journey</i>	<b>Pseudo-transformation</b> <i>Where we've been before—previously explored territory</i>	<b>My Story</b> <i>God's fingerprints in my life.</i>	<b>Your Story</b>
<p>Inside-out change: Authentic transformation requires more than changing on the surface. (Matthew 23:25; Mark 7:18-23)</p> <p>Collaborative and cooperative: I need encouragement, help and accountability to experience authentic transformation. I cannot do this by myself. (Philippians 2:12; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Matthew 18:19-20)</p> <p>Personalized process: What works for you may not work for me. Trusting that God knows me and is familiar with all my ways means that God knows what I need for change. (Psalm 139:13-15)</p>	<p>Outside, external change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• preoccupied with appearances</li> <li>• concerned with reputation.</li> <li>• "What will others think of me?"</li> </ul> <p>Competitive and judgmental:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• desperado/Lone Ranger mentality</li> <li>• critical of others who seem far behind.</li> <li>• ungracious toward others who fail</li> </ul> <p>Cookie-cutter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "If I could find the right program or method, I'd really change."</li> <li>• "I'll wait till the next book or program comes out."</li> </ul>	<p>I was done with superficial self-improvement; I took a deep look at my heart with an eye toward true, DNA-level change.</p> <p>I sought out others to accompany me on this quest. I opened myself to their feedback. Along the way I became more accepting of others, more forgiving and less judgmental.</p> <p>I recognized that what seemed to be working for others may not work for me. I committed to a personal process.</p>	





## 2

# THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

## EMBRACING TRANSFORMATION

*Howard Baker*



As I reached the trailhead, my watch displayed 5:30 on a clear, crisp Colorado morning. I had planned the night before to get an early start in order to watch the sun rise over the Rocky Mountains. Somehow I hoped the clarity and brightness of the morning would burn away the hazy fog that had clouded my mind and heart. But just the reverse occurred. Shortly after beginning the trek up Monte Cristo Gulch I found myself scrambling over rocks and through brush with no trail in sight. My internal confusion was now externally visible. The invigorating morning hike I had imagined devolved into frustration and weariness.



When I had given up hope of finding the trail and was about to turn back, there it was! A short, steep climb placed me back on the marked path for the remainder of the ascent. Though still strenuous, the hike now had a completely different feel. I was motivated and energized. The beauty of the mountain dawn, hidden by earlier frustration, now captivated me. This is what I had hoped for!

What was it that transformed my trip up the mountain from weary wandering into joyful journey? The *awareness* that I was on the path

