

the Source

WARM-UP: turn to a partner and answer these questions

Growing up, what were you taught about God and spiritual matters? What do you presently think about what you were told?

Introduction

Transformations is meant to help you discover who God is and what it means to follow him. The journey begins by admitting our questions and needs.

We might have questions about the trustworthiness of the Bible, the character of God, or the integrity of Christians. Deeper than intellectual questions, we also have personal needs. Ultimately, we seek *security and significance* – we all want unconditional love and meaningful purpose.

How do our questions and needs get answered? It begins with finding the right source. *Source precedes content* – just ask a judge or journalist.

While the number of questions is endless, the number of sources is limited to three:

HUMAN – whether we trust in experts, family, prophets, or self, people are the most common source of truth and love. The problem is, we're...



- *Ignorant.* The reality is, we're mostly guessing. What's worse is that we don't know what we don't know!
- *Sinful.* Our past confirms that we do wrong things all the time. Even our good deeds have mixed motives.
- *Powerless.* We can't control the past, the economy, people, our selves, or what happens after we die.

THINGS – while people bring pain, impersonal things leave us cold. Ideas don't care about us, money can't buy love, pets can't save our souls, "stuff" gets old, and nature can be heartless.

DIVINE – If people and things can't satisfy, from the thousands of Hindu gods to the one Muslim god, how can we choose a god that does? The only who is worthy of our trust, must be the source of truth, love, and power. Shockingly, this criterion reduces the options to just one: Jesus Christ.

How do our questions and needs get answered? It begins with finding the right source.

The quality of our life is determined by the quality of its leadership.

Jesus is Truth

Jesus does not just know truths; He is the truth.

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life." (John 14:6)

Our pursuit of truth, then, does not end with good facts; it ends with a person. Since truth is a person, it takes *trust* to know the truth, not just logic. Trust enables us to know God, and rightly interpret His actions.

Jesus is Lord

While we all have had bad experiences with leaders, Jesus boldly says He is Sovereign Lord. "Sovereign" means He has no limitations: not time or space, ability or knowledge, powers or people (1 Timothy 6:15). Jesus is never confused, afraid or surprised. Even when God limits himself, He does so out of his own free will.

The only appropriate response to this kind of God is fear. As our Creator, He has the power to bless and curse, heal and hurt, save and destroy (James 4:12). For this reason, it is foolish to defy God.

- As unsettling as it might be to know that God is all-powerful, it is what we need Him to be. Anything less leaves us vulnerable and unprotected (Psalm 135:5-6).
- Rather than treat God as smaller or more manageable, it is better to admit He is King, and live on the right side of His power.

Jesus is Love

If Jesus were only all-powerful, we would be in a lot of trouble! Fortunately, He is also pure love. In fact, God's thoughts and actions define what love is.

God is love. (1 John 4:16)

- God's love is comprised of mercy and justice. His justice cares for victims, and His mercy offers love to criminals. He governs the world with the perfect blend of these two qualities.
- The clearest demonstration of God's mercy and justice is Jesus paying the price for our sins.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

Following Jesus

The quality of our life is determined by the quality of its leadership. If our ultimate trust is in a lover, a job, our intellect, an angry god, or material possessions, we can expect to be anxious and sinful, insecure and insignificant – these are the natural symptoms of trusting in an inadequate life leader (Psalm 115:8).

Therefore, humanity’s core problem is a crisis of leadership – the leader of our lives in particular, and our world in general, isn’t qualified.

Since our lives are a reflection of who we follow, the only way to improve our lives is to follow a better God. Therefore, the most important question in life is, “Who is worthy to be my source of truth, love, and power?”

Only Jesus is worthy. No other god left heaven to be with us (John 1:14). No other god died for our sins and rose from the dead (Luke 24:46-47). Only Jesus uses His divine power to serve (Luke 4:18-19). Only He is Truth, Lord, and Savior (1 Timothy 1:17).

How do we trust Jesus? We follow Him (Mark 1:17). Regardless of whether you try to be good, call yourself a Christian, had a religious experience or heritage, or believe that Jesus was a good man; Christians follow Jesus – “If it quacks like a duck; it’s a duck.”

Whoever claims to live in [God] must walk as Jesus did.
(1 John 2:6)

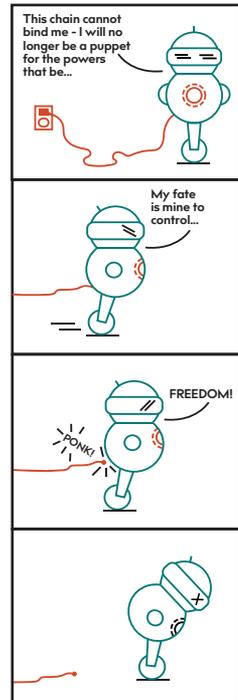
Some say, “Jesus doesn’t work”, but God cannot save what He does not rule. He only “works” when we trust His love and follow His leadership. The alternative is to be unplugged from the source of life.

This course is called, *Transformations*, not *Minor Adjustments*.

Our life cannot be changed with a few tweaks; our struggles are evidence that our life leader is unqualified. The choice is clear:

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life.
(Deuteronomy 30:19-20)

We can try to avoid this choice by hoping for a third option, like being sincere, or believing in reincarnation, or that “all paths lead to the same source” (Hebrews 9:27). But either we follow Jesus or we don’t. Do not let the myriad of options distract you. So will you



follow Jesus to the exclusion of all other options? Will you trust Him as your source of truth, love, and power? Will you let Him define your thoughts and feelings?

Choosing to follow Jesus is the best decision we can make, for as we do, our lives reflect His wisdom, strength and beauty. Moreover, we discover a relationship with God that make the pleasures of this world a cheap alternative.

DISCUSS: Answer these questions with your small group

1. Introduce yourself – where you are from, what you do, what you hope to get out of *Transformations*, and something that you learned from today's talk.
2. "To improve our lives we must follow a better leader". What do you think about that statement? How can you tell who your life leader is?
3. Everyone trusts someone; the question is, who is worthy of our trust? In the past, who was your source(s) truth, power, or love? Why does Jesus say He is a better source?
4. What makes trust difficult for you? What would a step toward trusting Jesus look like in this course? Let your *Transformations* Coach pray for each of you in this regard.

Each week, you will do a Bible study for homework. It is simplest to go online to look up the Bible verses (www.bible-gateway.com). The NIV or NLT versions of the Bible are easy translations to read. Be prepared to share your insights with your group the following week. Plan to spend an hour or two each week studying the Bible.

Our ignorance doesn't change the fact that truth exists. God helps us know the truth by giving us the Bible. We trust the Bible because we trust its divine Author. We do not trust in new philosophies or old suspicions about the Bible, because God is willing and able to speak clearly to all people at all times.

**2. Why is the Bible the only reliable source of spiritual truth?
2 Timothy 3:16**

Without Biblical truth, everything in life is left to personal opinions, leaving us uncertain, misguided, and hopeless. The authority of God's Word silences the noisy, competing voices of human speculation. It explains our reality from God's point of view, enabling us to rightly interpret God, our lives, and our world. We must not let the ever-widening circles of human opinion distract us from pursuing God's truth.

3. Why do we reject God's truth? Romans 1:18-21

Volunteers in a research experiment were asked about their relationship with their parents, and then a few weeks later, they were asked about their views of God.¹ Look at how our personal experiences shape our view of God:

Belief About Parents	Belief About God
"My Father always insisted I make the most of my abilities."	"If there is a God, then I have dissatisfied him, because I have not made the best use of my abilities."
"I was never close to my father."	"I have never experienced closeness to God."
"I don't ask for anything from my father."	"If I'm in distress I don't resort to God because I have no belief in God."
"The provider in my family was my father because he worked."	"I think that God provides for my needs because He watches over us."
"If I could change my past I would like to change my parents and my religion, as they make me feel guilty."	"If I receive an absolute proof that God does not exist, I will be happy, because I won't feel guilty."

Five signs that the Bible is God-inspired

Historical Corroboration

Other historical documents support the historical facts of the Bible, and archeology has never contradicted Biblical facts.

Prophetic Correctness

For example, nearly 500 Old Testament prophecies concerning the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ were fulfilled.

Personal Confirmation

Those who follow it's teaching consistently attest to a transformed life and a personal relationship with God.

Internal Consistency

That 40 authors, spanning over 1,600 years, in three languages, wrote a consistent message, reveal one divine Author.

Scientific Continuity

As an ancient work, the Bible is not a "scientific" document; yet science is not in conflict with its Creator or His Bible.

It is easy to assume that our beliefs about God are true, but unless our source of knowledge is the Bible, we will struggle to experience His life-changing truth. This is why regular Bible reading is central to our relationship with God – we can't be helped by what we haven't read!

The Bible is not a manual or textbook; it as an opportunity to discover firsthand, the heart and mind of its divine Author. Trust that God is willing and able to speak to you through the Bible (John 10:27; 16:13; Jeremiah 33:2-3).

Prayer

Prayer is talking with God. If we reduce prayer to techniques, formulas or agendas, we remove the intimacy. Prayer is powerful because it connects us with the living God. Just being in His presence changes us, and refocuses our hearts on Him.

We pray when we see our need for God. We pray with *faith* when we trust that our Father listens, cares, talks and responds... to us! This is a privilege not be rushed.

More than personal benefit, prayer changes our world. It miraculously changes hearts, lives, and circumstances. Prayer is our first action toward bringing God's will to earth.

Matthew 6:9-13 is called, *The Lord's Prayer*. It outlines five main prayer topics:

- **Praise** – "Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name." God wants our worship because He desires our affection and knows that we need to trust Him (Psalm 100:4-5). So praise Him for who He is, and thank Him for what He's done.
- **Petition** – "Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Pray for God to practically change hearts, lives, and circumstances (Philippians 4:6-7).
- **Provision** – "Give us this day our daily bread." God is a good Father; He wants to bless the work of our hands. So pray specifically, trusting in His goodness.
- **Peace** – "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Pray for a relational harmony that is about true love, not fearful compromise (1 John 1:9).
- **Power** – "Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Spiritual forces constantly act against us. Pray for God to overpower evil in us and others.

5. What do these verses teach us about prayer?

Matthew 6:5-8 _____

I Thessalonians 5:16-18 _____

2 Chronicles 7:14 _____

Matthew 7:7-11 _____

John 10:27 _____

James 4:3 _____

I John 5:14-15 _____

Prayer is relationship, and any healthy relationship is about honesty and trust. So tell God about your hopes and hardships, and rest in His great love and power.

All truth is God's truth

While the Bible is the source of truth, we see echoes of that truth in secular and spiritual writings. So if an idea reflects or does not contradict the Bible's message, we can appreciate its value.

Daily Devotions

Bible reading and prayer come together in something called Daily Devotions. Our personal Devotions are at the heart of our relationship with God. They are an unhurried time of “praying the Bible”. Devotions require five basic things:

- **A Time and Place** – Every healthy relationship needs consistent, focused times of being alone together, free from distractions.

When and where will you meet alone with God?

- **A Bible** – Choose a Bible version that fits you. The NASB or ESV are very literal translations, the NLT is easier to read, and the NIV is in between.
- **A Bible Reading Plan** – A reading schedule helps you know what to read in your Bible (see *Search the Scriptures*, by Allan Stibbs).
- **A Notebook and Pen** – Marking in your Bible helps you interact with God, and a Prayer Journal is a way to record your journey and how He’s answered prayers.
- **A Humble Attitude** – More than anything, faith and humility turn the written word into an encounter with God. When we anticipate engaging with the living God and responding to what He says, our time alone with Him is a life changing experience.

Remember, God’s Spirit helps us know and trust God (John 14:26). He doesn’t only instruct our minds; He transforms our hearts. This means that these five things are simply ways to make room for God’s Spirit to speak to us.

Now it's your turn!

Ask God to speak to you from Matthew 22:36-40. Use a (multi- colored) pen to mark and write, then answer the questions below.

³⁶ "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"

³⁷ And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."

³⁸ This is the great and foremost commandment.

³⁹ The second is like it, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

- **TRUTH – What is the main point(s) of this passage? What does it say about God/us?**

Pray, "Dear Father, reveal Your truth to me today." Summarize in writing, the main point(s) of the Bible passage:

- **REPENTANCE – How does this truth impact my/other's life?**

Pray, "Father, I turn my heart and will to follow Your truth." Write out what God is highlighting:

- **FAITH – How will God help me/them?**

Write down what your faith/obedience will practically look like. Who needs to know about what you've learned? Write out your prayers to God, following the Lord's Prayer:

Congratulations, you just had a Devotion! While any time we spend with God is meaningful, just like building any relationship, there is no replacement for frequent, focused time together. If we are casual or inconsistent, or if we expect every Devotion to be a profound experience, we lessen the opportunity to develop a strong relationship with God. It is consistently walking with God through life's storms and sunny days that yields a quality of relationship "fair-weather" Christians never have.

So treat Devotions as a "get to", not a "got to". We discipline ourselves to meet with God, not because of legalistic duty, but because we long to know God personally. There is always enough time and energy to meet with God when He is your first love.

6. What might undermine your Devotions? What excuses might tempt you to not pray or read your Bible? How can you stand firm in your commitment?

Christianity is not about behavior modification, a new set of rules, or a new set of facts. It is about a new relationship, where God is our Father and we are His children. As we immerse ourselves in that relationship, He changes us from the inside out. No wonder the Christian message is called, good news!

Have your *Transformations* Coach sign that you completed your Personal Study:

SIGNED: _____
