



Transformed
into God's image
WOMEN'S MINISTRIES 2017



Transformed into God's image

The shared theme of Women's Ministries throughout the world in 2017 is 'Transformed into God's Image'.

In Psalm 139 the psalmist writes: *You have searched me, LORD, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways ... For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well ... Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (vv 1-3, 13-14, 23-24).*

This year's Bible studies will encourage you to reflect on how the Lord transforms your life, other people's lives and how, through the Spirit working in you, others may be transformed.

These studies are designed to be flexible and allow for the addition of material that is relevant to your culture and context.

Each study includes four sections which can be explored with your group, as follows:

- 1. What the Bible says** – where you explore 'What does the text actually say?'
It is important that you read the Bible carefully and allow it to speak to you and guide the content of your study.
- 2. Our lives today** – considers such questions as:
 - What does the Bible reading tell you about your lives?
 - Does it highlight any problems in society?
 - What challenges are there for the way you live your life?
- 3. Discussion questions** – depending upon where you are using the studies, you may choose to select one or two that seem most suitable for you, or ask different groups to discuss other aspects and possibly, if you have time, share what they have been speaking about.
- 4. Living as transformed people** – this is designed to give you something to take away and do before you next meet.

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Transformed into God's image

Bible reading – 2 Corinthians 3:7-18

*And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory,
are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory...
(v 18)*

What the Bible says

In order to understand our key verse we need to read verses 7-18, which explain the fading glory of the old covenant and the surpassing glory of the new covenant.

Paul reminds us that Moses wore a veil when he descended from his Ten Commandments encounter with God, '... so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was ...' (v 7). Paul goes on to explain that 'in Christ' such a veil is no longer required. A veil which hides the face of those who turn to the Lord; one which dulls the mind and covers the heart, preventing us from understanding the mystery of the gospel (the new covenant), is removed (v 14). This is made possible through Jesus' death and resurrection.

Jesus delivers a new freedom through the Spirit (v 17) which he promised in John 8:36: '... if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.' He removes the limitations of the 'old covenant' enabling 'the whosoever' to have access to God.

As we gaze on the Lord 'with unveiled faces' (v 18) his glory shines on us, transforming us into his likeness. Such a transformation begins when we initially turn to the Lord (v 16) and continues as we commit ourselves to spend time with our heavenly Father, allowing his glory to encompass us and his Spirit to enable us to become more and more like Jesus.

Our lives today

Be inspired and encouraged by the fact that through Jesus you can have a personal relationship with the Creator of the universe. No longer is such a relationship restricted to specific individuals like Moses, but it is now available to all who 'turn to the Lord' (v 16).

As disciples of Jesus we follow his teaching and example. We aspire to be like him. Our key verse assures us that this aspiration can become a reality as we spend time in God's presence and meditate on his Word, exposing ourselves to his light and glory.

We reflect the light of God as through a mirror. In biblical times mirrors were made of metal rather than glass and therefore required constant polishing to enable them to reflect a better image. The same applies to us today. As we allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives – cleaning and polishing – the image we reflect becomes more Christ-like.

There are no perfect Christians! Each of us is 'a work in progress'. Sometimes we fail to reflect the light of God as we should. Only when we are in Heaven will our transformation be made perfect. But, for now, we must fix our eyes on Jesus '... the pioneer and perfecter of faith' (Hebrews 12:2), allowing his glory to transform us and reflect out into the world in which we live. People should be able to see



that we belong to God and that his light shines on and through us, not unlike Moses, whose face was radiant after spending time in the presence of God!

Reading the Bible will help us to consider how God desires to transform our mind, our thoughts, our whole being so that we can become more like Jesus. Our task is to be in his presence, allowing his glory to shine on us. We believe, as outlined in our international vision statement, that the transforming message of Jesus brings freedom, hope and life. It truly does!

Discussion questions

1. What practical steps do you need to take in order to contemplate the Lord's glory in your daily life?
2. How can you share and discuss your experience of being in the presence of God?
3. How can the glory of God transform you?

Living as transformed people

During the next week, commit yourself to spend time in God's presence. Start and finish the day at his feet and next time you meet as a group, share what you have learned. Let the light of God shine through you into this troubled world.

Commissioner Silvia Cox – IHQ, from Switzerland, Austria and Hungary Territory (having served in Zimbabwe, Finland, Southern Africa and the United Kingdom with the Republic of Ireland)

As World President of Women's Ministries my aim is to be increasingly transformed into God's image and, during my travels around the world, to share this message of transformation with everyone I meet.

Transformed in Our Heart

Bible reading – Ezekiel 36:26; Proverbs 4:23

*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you;
I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.
(Ezekiel 36:26)*

What the Bible says

The word 'heart' occurs more than one thousand times in the Bible, which indicates its importance to Christian living. It is used not just to refer to the large, muscular pumping 'thing' in our chest that keeps blood flowing, but has a much wider and deeper meaning.

The Bible tells us that the heart is the seat of our personality, emotional state, intellectual actions and will. Your heart is who you are. It is the part of your being where passions, actions, desires and decisions come from. The heart is the very soul or core of a person. It is the only place where God desires to live and make his home. Just as bodily health depends on a healthy physical heart, so moral health depends on a healthy spiritual heart.

The Bible refers to all kinds of spiritual heart problems. There are hard hearts and troubled hearts. There are selfish, divided, boastful, unrepentant, lying, callous, doubting, lustful and slow-to-believe hearts. Mark 7:21 clearly reminds us: 'For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come ...'

1 Samuel 16:7 tells us that God does not look at our appearance, but at our heart. When David confessed his sin (Psalm 51), he realised his greatest need – a transformed heart. Ezekiel refers to a spiritual heart transplant (Ezekiel 36:26). We cannot do this for ourselves. But God can and will. Our heart of stone must be changed into a heart of flesh that beat with new life and a love for God and others. The key to living a life of holiness and purity is found in embracing spiritual heart transformation. Jesus says, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul ...' (Matthew 22:37).

Our lives today

Everything depends on the focus of our heart. Just as the state of a person's natural life depends upon the soundness and vigour of the heart, so the state of their spiritual life depends on the good or evil condition of their heart. King Solomon summed it up in words of wisdom that we need to embrace (Proverbs 4:23). We need to cultivate a heart of wisdom, living with Christ at the centre of every breath we breathe, every decision we make and every step we take on this journey of life. The heart must be made new by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

We need to '*guard our heart*' because it is our greatest treasure. It is the core of our being, where our dreams, desires and passions live. It is the part of us that connects to God and other people. God has graciously given us a new heart and it is our responsibility to keep it clean and in proper condition.

We need to '*guard our heart*' because it is our life source. Our heart overflows into thoughts, words and actions. If it is unhealthy this has an impact on everything else, including our work, family, marriage and legacy.



We need to ‘guard our heart’ because it is under constant attack from the evil one. We have an enemy who is focused on our destruction. He opposes not only God but also everything aligned with him – including us. The enemy uses all kinds of weapons to attack our heart. These often take the form of circumstances that lead to disappointment, hurt, discouragement, despair or disillusionment. The flow of the wellspring of life in our heart can be stopped by lack of faith, unwillingness to forgive, materialism, pride and evil acts of any kind. Guarding our heart involves the energising of our life with the transforming truth of God’s love and his Word. He has chosen us to know his heart, have his heart and share it with others.

Discussion questions

1. Do you think God is interested in the condition of your heart? What feelings does that provoke? What do you think you need to do differently?
2. When was the last time your heart was attacked by the evil one? How did you respond?
3. What are some of the ways you can embrace the ‘guarding’ of your heart?

Living as transformed people

During this month, make an intentional effort to ‘guard your heart’ by practising the presence of God in your daily life, meditating deeply on God’s Word, praying specific prayers, embracing acts of kindness and cultivating the art of forgiveness and grace.

Commissioner Rosalie Peddle – IHQ, from Canada and Bermuda Territory (having served in New Zealand, and the United Kingdom Territory with the Republic of Ireland)

As World Secretary for Women’s Ministries, I take the spiritual condition of my heart seriously as I have the opportunity to impact and influence the world for Jesus – the transformer of hearts and lives.

Transformed in Our Mind

Bible reading – Philippians 2:1-18

*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.
(v 5)*

What the Bible says

The mind is very powerful. Controlling our thinking, speaking and actions, it can be a powerful force for good, giving inspiration, encouragement, strength and healing to other people. On the other hand, we all know what can happen if we speak or act without thinking. The consequences can be far-reaching, causing hurt and harm.

Paul was very much aware of this when he wrote to the Romans describing how he found himself doing the exact opposite to what he knew God wanted (Romans chapter 7). He concludes this by saying, '... I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin' (v 25). He acknowledges the struggle involved, even when his mind was trying to obey God's law!

Paul's letters also help us to see why, in our key verse, he urges the Philippians to have the same mindset as Jesus. He writes in 2 Corinthians 4:4: 'The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.'

Those who have accepted Jesus as Saviour have a new mindset or attitude. This is clear in Romans chapter 8 where Paul makes a distinction between those who live according to the flesh and those who live according to the Spirit: '... those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires' (v 5), and '... the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace' (v 6). This is the mind that all Christians should desire – the mind of Jesus that produces life and peace! God grants us his peace when we focus our minds on him: 'You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you' (Isaiah 26:3).

Jesus himself told one of the Pharisees, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind' (Matthew 22:37). The Pharisees had closed minds. They were not open to considering the true identity of Jesus. We are called to have open minds, ready to accept Jesus, to think like him and to act like him.

Our lives today

How can we even begin to have the same mind or attitude as Jesus? The Holy Spirit is our guide. He will help us as we pray, read God's Word and reflect upon the thoughts, words and actions of Jesus.

Have you ever gone to sleep with a tune going through your head and then woken in the morning singing the same tune to yourself? Perhaps the first picture or thought that comes to your mind in the morning relates to a television programme you watched the night before. This illustrates the power of the mind. The information and images fed into our minds remain there. They might not surface straight away but they are there, and they influence us for good or bad.



We are faced every day with the challenge of keeping our minds pure. How do we do this? How do we help our children and grandchildren enjoy and benefit from the wonders of modern technology whilst at the same time avoiding its evils? The Holy Spirit will help us to feed our minds with all that is good. 'Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things' (Philippians 4:8).

Our new mindset is brought about by transformation. 'Do not conform 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' (Romans 12:2).

Discussion questions

1. Do you think it is possible to have the same mindset or attitude as Jesus?
2. How do you seek to reflect the mind of Jesus in your daily living?
3. What needs to happen so that you and the members of your Bible study group, corps or centre, better reflect the mind of Christ?

Living as transformed people

During this month, consider how your mind is affected by what you choose to listen to, watch and read. Do you need to make changes to your reading material, television viewing, use of social media, or even the friendships you keep?

Commissioner Dorita Wainwright – from the United Kingdom Territory with the Republic of Ireland (having served in Kenya, Zimbabwe, Zambia and as Zonal Secretary for Women's Ministries, Europe Zone.)

All through my ministry I have seen the lives of men, women and children transformed by God's power. In all I think, say and do, I am constantly seeking to reflect the mind of Jesus. This is a work in progress with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Transformed in Our Speaking

Bible reading – Ephesians 4:29-31; James 3:1-12

*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen ... Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.
(Ephesians 4:29, 31)*

What the Bible says

We have all experienced the power of words – times when someone’s words have helped us and times when words have hurt us. We can also recall times when God has spoken to us, whether as a still, small voice or an unmistakably powerful force.

The Bible contains beautiful dialogues between God and people – between Heaven and earth. He speaks to Job out of a storm; he converses face to face with Moses and calls Samuel in the night receiving the faithful response, ‘Speak, for your servant is listening’ (1 Samuel 3:10).

In the New Testament we see Jesus speaking words to individuals that reveal how intimately he knows them and us. He speaks words of instruction to the woman at the well (John chapter 4), words of forgiveness to the woman caught in adultery (John 8) and words of revelation to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16).

Like these individuals we can recognise his voice because we belong to him. He is our Good Shepherd who says: ‘My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me’ (John 10:27). As children of God and followers of this Good Shepherd, let us respond, live and *speak* as people worthy of these identities. Our mouths hold potential for good and for evil and the challenge of taming the tongue is a daily one.

While our words have the power to proclaim that ‘Jesus is Lord’ (Romans 10:9), they can also deny him repeatedly as Peter did. We can worship God and encourage others or we can bring destruction, cause pain, and diminish and depress others. James highlights this paradox when he says: ‘Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing’, asking ‘Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?’ (James 3:10-11).

The word ‘unwholesome’ in today’s reading is more literally translated as ‘rotten’. Just as eating something rotten corrupts and contaminates our physical body, depriving it of health, so rotten words cause our spiritual health to deteriorate.

If the words that flow from our lips are rotten, it is an indication that the source – the heart – is impure. What we speak is a reflection of the state of our heart: ‘For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of’ (Luke 6:45). This is why the Psalmist writes: ‘May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight’ (Psalm 19:14).

Our lives today

Speaking with God – What an awesome reality that God speaks to us personally, and that in turn



we can speak to him! Job's desire to 'speak to the Almighty' (Job 13:3) is a privilege we enjoy today through prayer. Let us not take this opportunity for granted but engage in conversation daily with the Lord. Just as to the woman at the well, Jesus also says to us that 'he is the one speaking with you' (John 9:37).

Speaking with others – James 3:9 states: 'With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness.' Words of encouragement, love, forgiveness and guidance can be life-changing, offering hope and breathing new life into situations. In contrast, complaining, gossip, lies and words spoken in anger can echo in people's hearts and minds long after they are said. It is not difficult to accept that 'The tongue has the power of life and death' (Proverbs 18:21). Let us therefore speak as people who have been saved, according to the needs of others and exercising the same compassion and patience that Jesus shows to us.

Speaking with ourselves – I love the idea from the Bible that we can speak to ourselves – to our very souls – words of encouragement and faith. Psalm 43:5 asks: 'Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.' In the same way that we can encourage others, we can encourage ourselves. Instead of speaking judgement, inadequacy and failure to our hearts and souls let us meditate on how much we are loved for 'The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit' (Proverbs 15:4).

Discussion questions

1. When did someone's words have a positive impact on your life?
2. How do we take up the challenge to bless those who curse us (Luke 6:28)?
3. Are there situations in which it is wiser to listen than to speak?

Living as transformed people

This month let us make a conscious decision to be transformed in our speaking and ask God to set a guard over our lips. Let us strive towards the characteristic of the wife of noble character, of whom Proverbs 31:26 states: 'She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue.'

Ms Irini Pantelidou – from Italy and Greece Command (having worked as Administrative Secretary for the America and Caribbean Zone - IHQ.)

Realising the impact of speaking encouraging words to others has been a wonderful transformation for me; it is a gift of great value and no cost.

Transformed in Our Lifestyle

Bible reading – Romans 12:1-2, Colossians 3:9-14, Ephesians 4:22-24, I Peter 1:14-15

Do not conform 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.
(Romans 12:2)

What the Bible says

When Paul wrote to the Romans in chapter 12 he urged them to have a change of lifestyle. In Roman culture it was normal to seek pleasure so as to feel good about themselves. But Paul talks of being transformed by the help of God. Not settling for who they were without Christ, he encouraged them to change their lifestyle – to be transformed in their thinking, speaking, attitudes and behaviour. He urged them to be transformed to a new lifestyle in Christ.

Paul spoke not only to the Romans about transforming their lifestyle, but also to the Colossians (3:9-14). He taught them how they should behave as they now lived in Christ. They should not lie to each other and should not practice things that were not according to God's will. No matter what nationality they were, now they belonged to Christ they should behave with the virtue that God himself had placed in them.

He also spoke to the Ephesians (4:22-24) and told them they should not take on the lifestyle where they lived. They should no longer be as their former corrupt selves, but they should change their minds, becoming the new creatures they were meant to be, created for righteousness and holiness.

Through Paul, God exhorts us to change our lifestyle and be completely transformed by the grace of God.

In his first letter (1:14-15), the apostle Peter reminds us that as obedient children we must no longer conform to the evil desires of our flesh, but we should live according to the holy calling of God.

Our lives today

Change for the better is not always easy, but when we make a decision to transform our lives, we change our habits according to the holy example of our Saviour. Our God calls us to change our old way of life. Even if we have been believers since childhood, our natural human tendencies still lead us to ungodly character, thoughts and attitudes.

God calls us to live a different life, a lifestyle that differentiates us from a world that does not know him and has no interest in him. As obedient children, we must transform our lifestyle so we become a reflection of Jesus Christ. That is, *if* we say that we walk with him and we are his, then we must be like him.

The Holy Spirit will help us to transform our minds, speech, actions and behaviour. Our lifestyle must give glory and honour to the Father.



English novelist Charles Reade wrote: 'Sow a thought and you reap an act. Sow an act and you reap a habit. Sow a habit and you reap a character. Sow a character and you reap a destiny.'

As obedient children filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, we can change our lifestyle, thoughts, actions, habits, character and destiny. Change for the better is possible with the help of our Saviour and friend Jesus.

Discussion questions

1. According to the Bible verses in this study, why is it necessary that God transforms our lifestyle?
2. According to the illustration of the potter in Jeremiah 18:3-6 and Isaiah 64:8, what will our Father do to transform us?
3. What does Psalm 32:8 teach us when we decide to be obedient and allow the Lord to transform our lifestyle?

Living as transformed people

During this next month reread these verses and ask:

- God, what do you want me to change in my lifestyle?
- With your help, Lord, what should I change regarding my thoughts, actions and habits?
- Do I need to change my lifestyle and my character?
- Be assured that with God's help you can change your destiny by transforming your lifestyle.

Major Agripina Gochez – IHQ, from Latin America North Territory (having served in Guatemala, Panama, Colombia, Dominican Republic and Costa Rica)

As an officer and as Under Secretary for the Americas and Caribbean Zone, my Lord Jesus has been a constant friend. Even though I am not always constant in my desire to obey God, the Holy Spirit is my guide and speaks to my heart, transforming my thoughts, actions, habits, character and destiny.

Transformed in Our Love

Bible reading – John 13

*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.
(v 35)*

What the Bible says

To understand our key verse more clearly we need to reflect on the whole chapter. It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to his Father. There was no time to lose, so Jesus took the opportunity to foretell his death and communicate important truths. He washed the feet of the disciples and, when Judas departed, Jesus declared: 'Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once' (vv 31-32). Jesus explains that he glorified his Father by finishing the work the Father gave him to do (John 17:4).

He addressed his disciples as children because they were part of his family, had experienced his grace and were in a relationship with him. Jesus' new command was a way to give glory to the Father by loving one another. Jesus declared: 'A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another' (v 34). Jesus issued a command for you and me to love one another. Why does Jesus call it 'a new commandment', when love was an old commandment (Deuteronomy 6:5)?

Love is more than a characteristic of God – it is his character. In 1 John chapter 4 we read: 'Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God' (v 7). When you love others you allow God to love through you. 'No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us' (v 12).

Jesus said: 'As I have loved you, so you must love one another' (John 13:34). Jesus has shown us the standard of love to follow. He loved everyone and showed his love even to those who mocked, disbelieved and betrayed him – and he wants us to do the same. The words of Jesus found in our key verse confirm that love is the real sign of Christianity.

Our lives today

In the busyness of this world we forget to follow this command and we have limited this love to those who love us. However, this command indicates that we need to love everyone, not just those who love us because, as Christians, we belong to the family of God – we have been given his name. We know that it is not easy to force ourselves to do something, but have you ever tried to force yourself to feel love toward someone? It is almost impossible, but when we belong to God we abide in him and his love automatically flows through us, reaching out to others.

Love is defined as a strong affection, desire or devotion. Love is not only about feelings – it is about action. As disciples of Jesus we put him first in our lives and follow his teaching. This inspires us to be like him and it is then that his Holy Spirit works in us and makes us able to love one another unconditionally. This love shows others that we are a follower of Jesus. We prove our faith in Christ by showing love to one another.



We love because we are his disciples, but in order to show love we must be connected to Jesus and follow him, always longing to be like him. It is God who enables us to share his love with others and glorify his name. These words of General John Gowans encourage us:

*To be like Jesus! This hope possesses me,
In every thought and deed, This is my aim, my creed;
To be like Jesus! This hope possesses me,
His Spirit helping me, Like him I'll be. (SASB 328)*

Discussion questions

1. How can we develop this kind of love in us?
2. Do you have anything hindering you from following Jesus' command to love each other?
3. What steps will you take to follow this command?

Living as transformed people

God lives within us. He wants us to respond to him earnestly. We need to reflect and daily spend time in prayer, asking God to help us reflect his love to others. We must desire to be like Jesus and ask the Holy Spirit to enable us to love one another and then encourage others to obey this command.

Captain Summra Nemat – IHQ, from Pakistan Territory

It is my privilege to work as Assistant Under Secretary in the South Asia Zone. Being transformed into his image is an ongoing work and I find this command to love one another is what Jesus requires from me. The Holy Spirit enables God's love to flow through me to others in my daily life.

Transformed in Our Service

Bible reading – James 2:17

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.
(v 17)

What the Bible says

The New Testament is rich with biblical texts that highlight the subject of faith. There exist several texts that explicitly outline about having faith and living by faith, to the extent that one can easily think, 'All I need is faith'. However, in his writing James expresses that faith goes hand in glove with works and the two are intertwined. He writes that faith is inadequate, if not accompanied by action. In his letters to the Galatians (2:16) and Romans (3:28), Paul gives the impression that faith by itself is enough and yet from James's perspective it appears to be different. Do Paul and James differ in their understanding of faith? The context of Paul's understanding rests within the Jewish setting in which being circumcised and obeying the law was considered as good enough for being saved. When you compare the readings, you will notice that the life setting of the people to whom Paul and James were presenting their teachings are totally different.

Paul then tries to teach the Romans that circumcision or keeping the law was not adequate for them to be called 'saved people' but they needed to have salvation by faith. James, on the other hand, was writing to correct the misconception that faith alone without works was adequate and that they could still live in ways that displeased God. He also addresses the misconception surrounding the understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith, from which others thought that works were no longer important. James speaks to them about how the two should be combined to bring about transformation. James gives examples from the Old Testament about the actions of Abraham and that of Rahab, whose faith was expressed in action.

Our lives today

Society today is looking for transformed Christians to serve the world. We cannot claim to have faith if it is not accompanied by action. Faith comes first and it causes a change in what we do – our deeds. Deeds, according to James, are love and obedience. Our acceptance of Jesus Christ should effect our whole being. Christians have an opportunity to demonstrate God's love to people in need, and I count it a privilege to be able to witness to others by living out what is inside me. The Jews thought circumcision, keeping the Jewish law and having faith were all that a Christian needed to do. If we take opportunity to put our faith into action, we will have not only threatened the devil but also become a living witness to Jesus' continued work and love. It does not have to be something big – perhaps a hospital visit – but unless faith is demonstrated by works, it is irrelevant.

Galatians 5:6 states: 'For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.' This therefore means that there is nothing like true faith without works. Faith enables good works to happen. In other words, your actions reflect the kind of faith within you.

In Ephesians 2:10 we read: 'For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.' We do 'works' as a sign of how much we love God.



They demonstrate that we are saved. It leaves us challenged as to how best we can display his love to others.

Illustration: If salt remains in the salt cellar it will not cause any change to the taste of our food. Instead it needs to be sprinkled to cause some change. We should act so that we make a difference in the world. Unless we have love as a reflection of our faith, then our faith alone will not save us. Our deeds should speak about what we are within. We should strive to serve as a way to show our faith.

Discussion questions

1. How can we tell if our faith is true?
2. Using your own words, how would you translate the phrase 'faith unaccompanied by actions is dead'?
3. Is it possible to be a Christian of faith but no works?

Living as transformed people

Pause for a while and think how best you can help someone who claims to be a Christian but seems to show no evidence of it in their lives.

Major Tracey Kasuso – Zimbabwe Territory (having served in Southern Africa and at IHQ)

As chaplain at IHQ I had the opportunity to speak about and share my transformed life with people who came into the building. Now as Territorial Secretary for Women's Ministries in Zimbabwe I have the privilege of seeing lives transformed by Jesus.

Transformed in Our Suffering

Bible reading – Romans 8:17-28

Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.
(v 17)

What the Bible says

In Isaiah 53:2-4 Jesus is portrayed as suffering personified. He gives suffering a face. For this reason, for centuries a crucifix could be found in hospital wards to indicate to the patients that they were not alone in their suffering.

Throughout his earthly life Jesus experienced suffering for various reasons, including:

- Rejection from his own people – the believers of his time (Matthew 13:53-58)
- Lack of understanding from his family (Mark 3:21)
- Suffering because of compassion (John 11:33)
- Persecution (John 5:16)
- Illness and injury (although the Bible does not explicitly mention these, Jesus must have experienced illness and, as a carpenter, we may assume that sometimes he was injured. The gospels report the unusual occurrences in Jesus' life, not the common ones).

Jesus understands all the various suffering which mankind encounters. There is nothing he did not experience himself in one way or another. Jesus not only understands, but he also sets an example (Isaiah 53:7) and gives advice (Matthew 5:39-42).

We live in a fallen world – a world marked by sin (Romans 3:11-18). We live in a world that has an expiry date stamped on it – we just do not know the exact date (Revelation 21:1). As Christians we are not taken out of this world (John 17:15) but, like Jesus who came from Heaven to earth and lived among the people, we are called to continue to live among the people of this world.

Our lives today

Ever since Adam and Eve left paradise there has been suffering on the earth. Ecclesiastes 1:9 says: '... There is nothing new under the sun.' Jesus willingly accepted suffering as part of his humanity. As his followers, we should not expect to walk through life without experiencing suffering at different times. There are many types of suffering relating to all parts of our lives – body, mind, soul, emotions and spirit – and there is no such thing as a scale that measures suffering from not so bad to worst. We should be careful not to judge our suffering against that of other people or devalue their suffering.

The world we live in requires instant solutions. The expectation of immediately resolved suffering is very much present and can influence our thinking. Sometimes I am not sure why people want suffering to end. Is it because of the person (a family member?) going through a time of suffering? Or is it because they themselves cannot cope with the situation? To identify the nature of our suffering is important, as it influences our praying.



An immediate resolution is rare and at times not possible. Perhaps we have to learn anew how to have 'staying power'.

The theme of suffering is not alien to me. Much of my officership has been spent in social institutions where injured people were cared for. I experienced a dark time in my soul, but I can testify that our Lord is greater! He wins the battle (Isaiah 31:4-5).

In times of suffering one Bible verse has encouraged me over and over again. Romans 8:28 states: 'And we know in all things God works for good of those who love him.' This verse does not mean that as Christians we will only encounter good things, but that God can transform the bad things in our life (suffering) into something good for me and for others if we allow him to do so – not always as easy as it might at first seem. Giving God 'permission' means that he has the say in everything related to suffering. But, it does not mean that suffering will definitely be taken away, nor does it mean that suffering should be used for our own purposes, for example to attract attention.

Although we cannot avoid suffering, we should not actively seek it for the sake of it. Suffering reminds us that our life on earth is not for eternity. Something much better, more fantastic is yet to come.

I am convinced that the way Christians handle suffering is a much-needed testimony to our society where immaculate appearance (including mental as well as physical health) is applauded.

Discussion questions

1. How do you react to suffering?
2. Can you give examples of how suffering has been or can be transformed into something good?
3. Do I allow Jesus to transform my suffering into something good?

Living as transformed people

During dark times of your life hold up to God whatever you are facing and allow him to transform it into something good. Let him be the wings beneath your feet and the assurance for victory to come.

Major Heidrun Edwards – IHQ, from Germany, Lithuania and Poland Territory

Working as Assistant Under Secretary in the Europe Zone, I not only get a glimpse of the amount of suffering worldwide (refugees, natural disasters, persecution) but I also get to know what can happen when Christ's transforming power is claimed and absorbed.

Transformed in Our Acts of Social Justice

Bible reading: Proverbs 31:8-9

*He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God
(Micah 6:8)*

What the Bible says

Our key verse of Scripture is often considered one of the most comprehensive statements on what God asks of us in the Bible. In this statement Micah asks the simple question: What does God require of us?

At the beginning of chapter 6, we see that the people of Israel had not yet come to understand that the authentic and true way to come before the Lord is personal conversion and not through blood sacrifices. In verses 6 and 7 of this chapter we read that the Israelites believed that they needed to make material sacrifices in order to enjoy God's delight and a personal relationship with him. They are struggling with the question of what will please God and they believe the answer is found in their material sacrifices. Yet Micah points out that even though they may have made the most extravagant sacrifices over and over again, they were not living the rest of their lives the way God wanted and therefore their sacrifices became pointless. They had come to a place where outward shows of religion had become more important than their actual relationship with God.

Although Micah poses the question: 'What does God require of us?', he is aware that they already know what is expected of them – it is written in the Word and has been pointed out many times before. In verse 8 Micah reminds them that what God really desires of them is a change of heart, a change in attitude and a heart toward both God and their neighbours. Micah desperately wants them to understand that a relationship with God is personal and involves a heart transformation, not material sacrifices or extravagant shows.

Our lives today

What does it mean to act justly? It means to demonstrate fairness, honesty and integrity in all our dealings. It means we do what is right and fair and we fight for what is right on behalf of others. We must bravely face the various injustices facing people around the world and be prepared to act justly on their behalf. As we read in Proverbs 31:8-9: 'Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.'

What does it mean to love mercy? One definition of mercy is: 'Compassion or forgiveness shown towards someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm' (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*).

In the world we daily see men, women and children who are being harmed by others. It is not just important that we speak up for them but that we also pray for mercy for those who cause harm. How often do we pray for the perpetrators? For those that sell or buy women and children, for those that abuse or inflict harm upon people? It is hard to show mercy to those people, but if we want to see God's justice come about in this world we need to pray both for those being harmed and those



doing the harm. When we stand 'in the gap' (Ezekiel 22:30) and show mercy and pray for mercy, victory after victory is won.

What does it mean to walk humbly with our God? To walk implies movement; it means your relationship with God is not stagnant but growing and developing. To walk humbly with God means to be in submission to God and to be willing to walk where he wants you to walk. When it comes to issues of justice it means walking with God amidst opposition and injustice yet continuing to move forward towards justice because you know he is walking alongside you.

Isaiah 41:10 says: 'So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.'

Discussion questions

1. Can you name one form of injustice being faced by people around the world today? When you have done so, write down how you will act justly on their behalf.
2. Thinking of that same form of injustice, how will you show mercy to the perpetrators?
3. How do you think acting justly and showing mercy can transform your walk with God?

Living as transformed people

Read Proverbs 31:8-9 each day this month and then ask God to give you opportunities to act upon it.

Captain Sandra Pawar – Southwark Corps, UK, from USA Southern Territory

Issues of social justice are close to my heart. I have seen how showing justice and mercy to people has brought about incredible transformation in my own walk with Jesus and has changed the way I minister.

Transformed in Our Spiritual Journey

Bible reading – I John 1:7

*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another,
and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.
(v 7)*

What the Bible says

Whether we are aware of it or not, we are on a journey. It is not a journey by car, but if it were, everything we need to know about operating and maintaining the vehicle would be found in the owner's manual. The manual for our spiritual journey is the Bible.

The Bible describes two kinds of lives and two ways to live. You are either in the flesh or in the Spirit (Romans 8:9) and walk according to the flesh or according to the Spirit (Galatians 5:25). The unbeliever lives in the flesh and walks according to the flesh. The Christian walks in the Spirit and ideally walks according to the Spirit. Walking after the old ways of the flesh is abnormal for a believer. It is like a butterfly which thinks and acts as though he was still a caterpillar.

We are a new creation from the day we accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Spirit of God creates something new – he takes out of us the heart of stone that rebels against God and puts into us a new heart which trusts God and follows his ways. Ezekiel 36:26-27 affirms: 'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; ... I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.'

Our spiritual lives mature as we walk the journey of life. We seek to follow the example of Jesus and form our character to be more and more like him in thought, word and deed. Spiritually, Jesus grew strong and in the favour of God. Jesus looked to God in perfect obedience, and God nurtured him in his perfect favour. Socially, Jesus grew in favour with men. He was friendly, loving, caring, helpful, unselfish, pure, honest and humble. Other families within his community welcomed him.

Our lives today

Just as physical food becomes part of our physical body, what we feed on for our spiritual journey becomes part of who we are (1 Corinthians 3:2).

To walk in darkness is to live and act against God. We should remember that Jesus put on flesh and blood and died to cleanse us from our sins. He bought us with the price of his own blood.

Once I was living in sin – not knowing where life's journey would end – but when I received Christ he gave me true sight and a sense of what sin is. I am now a child of God. His Spirit leads me on life's journey.

Today, we see how few children of God follow the example of Jesus, and therefore how few really grow spiritually. Too many follow the crowd, ignoring the challenge of Jesus to stand up for him. But as children of light, we are to progress by faith and increase in spiritual light and knowledge. We are to walk in faith in Christ, the Light. We are to walk in the light and truth of the gospel.



We are to have fellowship with one another and with God. Without having fellowship with God there can be no true Christian fellowship with one another. 'But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin' (1 John 1:7).

How do we walk in the light? Walking in the light is what we do when the desires produced by the Spirit are stronger than the desires produced by the flesh. Therefore, walking in the light is something the Holy Spirit enables us to do by producing in us strong desires that align with God's will.

Discussion questions

1. What does it mean to walk after the Spirit?
2. Are there any examples of this in the Bible?
3. How do we walk in the light?

Living as transformed people

The fruit of the Spirit is seen in our life when we walk in the light. We learn from Luke 2:52 that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in divine and human favour. As disciples of Jesus, we need to imitate Christ and grow in the grace and knowledge of him on our spiritual journey.

May we take the time to realise for ourselves how the Spirit is leading us by producing godly desires. The commands of God become a joy, not a burden.

Lieut-Colonel Eva Danso – IHQ (having served in Ghana)

In all my appointments, and currently as the International Literature Programme Coordinator, I want to be as one transformed in my spiritual journey with Jesus.

Transformed in Our Witness

Bible reading – Matthew 5:13-16

*Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds
and glorify your Father in heaven.
(v 16)*

What the Bible says

In this passage Jesus describes the roles and functions of his followers in the world. The first role is to be salt. One of the functions of salt is to preserve. The follower of Jesus should help prevent the world from becoming worse – with our lives being an example to others who struggle between godly and worldly living – seeing the possibility of overcoming worldly or immoral living.

People like to enjoy delicious food and so another function of salt is to give flavour. Jesus talks about salt in Mark 9:50 and says: 'Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other.' In Colossians 4:6 Paul uses salt to remind his readers that a conversation should be 'full of grace' and to bring harmony in our relationships with others. It echoes with the teaching of being peacemakers (Matthew 5:9).

The second role of the disciple is to be light. Jesus says very explicitly that the function of light is to help people praise God for the good deeds of his people.

Matthew used these two illustrations following the teaching about persecution to Jesus' followers. At that time the disciples were in difficult circumstances, but Jesus' teaching of being salt and light reminds them how they should react to pressure. They should maintain their godly nature, otherwise they would be like salt that has lost its flavour.

Our lives today

These two illustrations present a dilemma to Christians today – being invisible and visible. Stephen Dray describes the basic nature of salt as adding flavour and becoming invisible (*Discovering Matthew's Gospel*). Invisibility is not due to shame about our identity – some people would like to hide their Christian identity because of peer pressure. It is also not owing to the fear of exposure, especially when we look around the international situation today. These two reasons obviously do not glorify God as Jesus expects.

Invisibility means our good deeds should direct people's attention to God, not to ourselves. People may firstly see our witness but later come to understand the motives behind what we do. The focus of their attention then changes.

On the other hand light makes things visible. When we hold a lamp, we are visible to others. However, if we stare at a light source such as the sun, we cannot see the surroundings clearly. To a certain extent, we are invisible too. When we are light to the world, we are not so much attracting people to us as helping them to see clearly what is happening in the world. When we carry out our social responsibility, we light up the world to reveal injustice, exploitation, discrimination and other kinds of human weaknesses leading to the problems of the world.



Whether we are visible or invisible, we are entrusted by Jesus with the responsibility to witness for God in the world. When we face all kinds of pressure or unfavourable situations, our response will show others what God is like. Our response may not agree with the world's standards but it proves to the world that there are alternatives for people who want change. And this change comes from the power of God.

Discussion questions

1. What issues are there in your community that you think are unjust and need to be corrected?
2. Do you have anything hindering you from witnessing about God in public?
3. How do we witness for God to the people who have hurt us?

Living as transformed people

In this month, pray for your 'enemies' every day.

Major Sara Tam – IHQ (having served in Hong Kong and Macau, and Taiwan)

Currently I am the Assistant Under Secretary for the South Pacific and East Asia Zone at IHQ. It is an on-going challenge to witness for God amidst my daily hectic desk work, but I experience his power of transformation in my daily devotions.

Transformed in Our Unity

Bible reading – John 17:22-23

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.
(vv 22-23)

What the Bible says

Before Jesus prayed to his Father, there was a deep conversation with his disciples as recorded in John chapter 16. Jesus was trying to explain that he was to die and rise again. 'In a little while' (v 16) he would be leaving them and going to his Father, and soon they would no longer see him. This caused the disciples to be curious and ask: 'What does he mean by "a little while"?' (John 16:18). We read in the opening verses of John chapter 17: 'After Jesus said this, he looked towards heaven and prayed.' As we look into the content of his prayer for all believers, we are amazed by Jesus' passionate desire for all believers to be brought to complete unity (vv 22-23), as he and the Father are united. He stated that he had given to the believers the glory the Father had given him – that they are united in this glory. Jesus declares, as he and the Father are one, the disciples and the believers are also one. Ultimately, Jesus longs to see the unity of believers testifying to the rich and sustaining love of God that unifies the Father, the Son and those who believe in him (v 24).

Surely Jesus knew the necessity for believers to be united, as soon the disciples would be scattered because they feared their enemies. Jesus had already warned the disciples that there would be persecution, and that the Jews and authorities would reject the believers. Therefore, we can understand how important unity is among believers. As represented in the Trinity, unity is a characteristic of God. Thus, believers are called to unity.

Our lives today

The prayer of Jesus is monumental, amazing, powerful and touches our hearts. Even more, his love is so great that he even prayed for us – the believers – to be united in order for his glory to be revealed. Jesus knew the need of the believer after being saved to live in unity of fellowship. This reminds us of the first church in Jerusalem that regularly met in united fellowship, praising God and sharing resources with all the people (Acts 2:41-47).

The passage reminds us of an important lesson for life, where believing and the state of being saved are not good enough to testify to our salvation, unless they are real in our daily actions and in the way we accept and embrace each other. How can we testify about the love of God to this broken world, unless we allow this love to bind us together, despite our differences?

This is the message that our world and churches need to hear and put into action. In the midst of competition, individualistic secularism and hatred, we are called to demonstrate the wonderful love of God that is powerful enough to unify people. When the people of God are united, they are spiritually stronger, richer and sustained in every situation. God's presence rests when believers are united!



I testify to the rich experience of attending the International College for Officers. It was a privilege to be part of a wonderful fellowship of officers from various countries. The differences in culture, language, skin colour and resources have not hindered us from enjoying fellowship. I can testify that it is the love of Christ that binds us together. When we acknowledge that we serve the same God and gladly accept each other, we are unified in Christ. I believe this was what Jesus longed for in his disciples and all believers – being one in spirit and mind, and bound by God’s love through Christ (Philippians 2:1-7). Surely, unity is not easy to put into practice. However, humility and putting the interests of others above our own are all essential in order to be united in Christ.

Discussion questions

1. What are the hindrances to the unity of believers or the Church?
2. In what ways can you encourage unity in your local context?
3. Are you prepared to bring transformation that would impact others to have unified fellowship in Christ?

Living as transformed people

Let us pray for the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit to bring transformation towards unity among believers, so that the fellowship becomes stronger and richer. You may also want to say: ‘Lord, I pray that it begins with me.’

Major Widiawati Tampai – IHQ, from Indonesia Territory

I am convinced that unity is paramount for all believers and that it can only be experienced through the love of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

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Transformed
into God's image
WOMEN'S MINISTRIES 2017