WEEK 8 Chapter Eight

God Transforms

A branch does not strain to make grapes. It stays attached.

The God Narrative Challenge

The narrative we have been handed	**The narrative Jesus tells**
Either I am who I am and I am not going to change, so I should stop hoping, or I can change myself if I finally get disciplined enough. Both stories leave God out of it. One despairs and the other grits its teeth, and both of them wear people down.	*We are being transformed, and Paul's verb is passive and ongoing. The work is God's and it is not finished. But the sentence begins with something we do, which is to look. What we can choose is not the fruit. What we can choose is the attachment.*

The challenge this week: This week, stop trying to produce the fruit and pay attention instead to whether you are staying connected. Ask what actually keeps you attached, and do more of that.

Quotes for Reflection

"Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning. Effort is action. Earning is attitude."

– Dallas Willard, The Great Omission

"Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you. All things are passing; God never changes. Whoever has God lacks nothing; God alone suffices."

– Teresa of Ávila

"I am no longer my own, but yours. Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will."

– The Wesleyan Covenant Prayer

Scripture for the Week

Read: John 15:1–8, 2 Corinthians 3:18, and Galatians 5:22–23

And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

2 Corinthians 3:18

Paul’s central verb here is passive and continuous. We are being transformed. The work is not ours and it is not finished, which ought to relieve most of the pressure we put on ourselves. But notice that the sentence starts with something we do. We look. Unveiled faces turned toward glory, which is to say attention deliberately placed. The vine image in John says the same thing from the other side. A branch does not strain to produce grapes and it does not read books about grape production. It stays connected, and fruit turns out to be the natural consequence of the connection. What we can choose is the attachment. Wesley called the ways we stay attached the means of grace, and he was insistent that they earn us nothing. They simply put us where the grace is already moving. A sail does not make the wind. It catches it, and that is not a small thing to do.

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Questions for Conversation

1. What have you tried hardest to change about yourself? How did that effort go?

2. Where do you sense you are being changed in ways you did not engineer?

3. Which of these weekly practices actually did something in you, and which one did you resent?

4. What is one means of grace you could keep after this class ends?

THE PRACTICE THIS WEEK: Solitude

Solitude is not loneliness. Loneliness is the ache of being unwanted; solitude is the deliberate removal of every voice that tells us who we are, so that we can finally hear who God says we are. Most of us have never been alone without a screen. It is more uncomfortable than it sounds, and more necessary.

- One extended stretch alone this week. An hour if you can manage it, twenty minutes if you cannot.
- No phone, no book, no music, no task, no notebook. Nothing to produce.
- A park bench, a quiet room, a chair on the porch. Anywhere the interruptions cannot find you.
- You will be bored, and then restless, and then something else. Stay past the restless part if you can.
- Say nothing to God unless you want to. Being there is the practice.

Notice what surfaced when the noise stopped. That is usually the thing God has been trying to get a word in about.

Notes and What I Noticed

Bring back one honest sentence. Not a report card. Just the truth.