

“Well-formed, or Informed?”
 Pastor Sam Richards
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 Texts: Eph. 4:1-16; Romans 12

“Our focus must be on walking with the poor, seeking to change the identities and vocations of poor persons, and helping them in restoring their relationships with God, creation, community, others, and self. Only transformed people (poor and non-poor alike) will transform our city!” Jacob Bloemberg, 2011, a review [Walking With the Poor](https://micn.org/walking-with-the-poor/) (<https://micn.org/walking-with-the-poor/>)

When my son William gifted me with this book by Bryant Myer, I was introduced to the idea that poverty is a personal/relational matter. The poor suffer from a diminished social network, social isolation, or, basically, a lack of friendships. So, it is not about money, or welfare as much as it is about connectedness to family, neighbors, the market place and, yes, community. This insight has stuck with me. It has made me informed. But it is not enough to be informed, we are to be well-formed and in order to be well-formed I have to be transformed. Paul says, by the **renewing of my mind** and through the **indwelling Holy Spirit**. Poverty is an enormously complicated issue—tending towards overwhelming. And the same can be said of personal transformation, or spiritual regeneration. Agreed? But here’s what the Lord has prompted me to consider: what if applying ourselves to personal transformation is the most effective thing that we can do about poverty? I think there is great encouragement in the fact that if we become well-formed in the likeness of Christ, we will become “a highly redemptive personality.” And by a highly redemptive personality I mean someone who is marked by the same redemptive resolve as that which characterized our Redeemer/Savior Jesus Christ! If that occurs we will be changing the world as well as ending poverty through spiritual enrichment. Personal growth is a precursor to church growth as we imitate Jesus, choosing to walk among the poor. Jesus not only befriended the poor, he walked among the poor. If we are His, we will do that as well. I am not sure if anyone else has addressed that matter with the specific term “**aspirational association**,” but I intend to do so. 1 Cor. 11:1 **Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ**; or **Imitate me as I imitate Christ**—the Greek word here and in 4:16 is *mimētai*—or, to mimic: **Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ . . . in walking amongst the poor!**¹ By the [aspirational association](#) we befriend others as Jesus befriended us in order that they would pay it forward and winsomely win others to Christ. Yes, through salvation we come to regeneration and from there to sanctification—there are persons whose holiness, personal sanctity and Christlikeness flashes off them like static electricity on a cold winter’s night.

Is transforming myself really the key to the transformation of others? Yes, indeed, and this personal transformation is possible anywhere, any time because you are always the neediest soul improvement project nearest you!

¹ As disciples of Jesus, we are called to follow His example and become like Him ([John 13:15, 34](#); [Matthew 11:29](#); [Romans 8:29, 13:14](#)). We can be helped by imitating other mature Christian servants who have provided spiritual encouragement to us (see [1 Thessalonians 2:14](#)).

The author of Hebrews wrote, “We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised” ([Hebrews 6:12](#)).
<https://www.gotquestions.org/imitate-me-as-I-imitate-Christ.htm>

I would be so like Jesus so that you would so like to be like me! “And, as we imitate Christ and become more like Him in all we do, we are genuinely free (Romans 12:1–2; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 4:14–16, 22–24). The apostle John affirmed, “And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world” (1 John 4:17, NLT). —Got Questions. org. If we pursue this thought, we would define transformation as “improvement, growth, becoming better, or proficient, whole, healthy, nobler and free”—attaining Christlikeness. From this position, we affirm that friendship is mutually beneficial. We express our excitement in such expressions as “*I am so enriched by meeting you . . . by getting to know you!*” That is right up there with “Shall we dance?” Or “Can I have the next dance?” at your high school senior prom! And if you consider that as too “adolescently romantic,” the scriptural mandate lies here: **Take care to share hospitality with strangers, for many have entertained thereby angels unaware.** Heb. 13:2.

Only transformed people can transform the world. Does that mean, by extension, only those who have experienced the forgiveness that Christ offers, can embody such grace as is prerequisite to social healing? I suspect that to be so. And if only the transformed can transform the world, then we all need transformation because we are all, relatively speaking, “poor.” What do I mean by “poor?” Eph. 2:12-13 comes close to explaining this spiritual state:

12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Sin brings a great impoverishment! “Sin has caused distortions in mankind’s relationships with God, creation, community, others, and self. We need to realize that “in God’s sight all human beings are poor” (Myers 2011). This includes the so called ‘non-poor’ who also suffer from a marred identity in relation to God’s image.” . . . “The goal, then, is to transform people through recovering identity and vocation, and restoring relationships with God, creation, community, others, and self. The poor need to believe they are **created as God’s children in God’s image, given gifts to contribute, and called to be stewards of God’s creation.**” — Jacob Bloemberg.

So, once again, the key to changing thee, is changing me! And you have treasure to offer: namely, the opportunity to become a Christian. And I am the advance promotion for that opportunity. The kind of person you are is, perhaps, the first gospel that any unbeliever is going to read! Good fellows make for good fellowship . . . good friends make good comrades and good comrades are what Christian disciples are supposed to be openly. *It should be a pleasure for me to meet you . . . and vice versa, a pleasure for you to meet me!* Both! Simultaneously.

I wonder sometimes if inviting a person to church isn’t problematic. What if instead of church we said, I would like you to meet my spiritual life group. I get together weekly with some of my best friends—I can’t wait for you to meet them! And we visit, talk, share, worship and pray together! They are such awesome people. We are seekers, and searchers, and truthful (honest, reliable, fun-loving) folk who have agreed to get together for personal growth, self-improvement and spiritual growth. My spiritual support group encourages me to spend more time in the word, to persevere in personal

devotions and to grow in love. My sessions give me a different interface with the world and with friends and family. I practice here, make mistakes here and find forgiveness all in the same place. We are all committed to making Jesus known and I even have a life coach—some of us call him “Pastor,” others of us call him by his first name. We are all works in progress, all remodeling in some part of our being. We have been turned on so as to turn up . . . we turn up so as to turn out—promoting love, hope and joy to counteract the hate, despair and sadness. And we really like what we are doing.

There are several places in scripture that capture, in biblical terms what I just laid out in relational terms. Eph. 4:1-16 is one of them. **Walk in a manner worthy of your calling—humble and meek and forbearing in love—keeping the unity of the Spirit (one body, one Spirit) in peace; one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father over us all, through us all and in us all.** (vv. 2-6) Fortunately this is not “church Speak,” nor “Christianese.” Paul is urging us to engender creative, loving and godly relationships with others through warmth, genuine interest, attentiveness (akin to a tree growing in the best sense of care and nurture). *We transcend tolerance in acceptance and hospitality, appreciativeness* (understanding and even awe). We seek to express respect and honor instead of shaming, judgment, rejection (suspicion, resentment and/or hostility). We stay positive even when we disagree, or disapprove of certain behaviors/or views because we believe that censure and review should be invited into a space where trust has been established. We have all admitted our sinfulness, and our foolishness and choose to speak out of forgiveness—there is a lot to approve of, and a lot to praise even as we stay honest and open. We do not go silent, or hide behind masks with our friends. We do our utmost to disagree without being disagreeable—which tends to be divisive, fracturing. And we avoid coming across (be humble) as superior, condescending and condemning—often these are self-inflicted wounds that solicit tender responses. Staying inclusive is an active work because of the tendency to be judgmental and exclusive. So our approach disaffirm our alliances with each other; we phrase things in terms of what we are for whenever we can. Our tone is kind, affirming, appreciative, interested, encouraging and, yes, loving. This result of this choice is that we are drawing, and attracting—not pushing, shoving or driving compliance—or, coercive actions. Trusting, wooing and winning are our favored postures.

Social reform is best actualized by those who are friendly and like-able—it emerges out of transforming without forcing. We believe that health, growth and healing can and do happen, flourish where friendship is in place. Everyone needs tender tutors, kind teachers and gentle mentors who nourish us with ulterior motivations like exploitation.-

Romans 12 is another place where we find direction. **Walk worthily** becomes **present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable which is your reasonable service.** Here we are urged to **retransformed by the renewing of your mind—proving the good, perfect and acceptable will of God for us.** This comes across as a stronger dose of exhortation but there are very similar echoes, **Be humble** (very obvious), **sober in self-estimation** and make sure that your sense of self is in synch with **your measure of faith—we are members of one body.** v. 3 and **employ your gifts** (PROPHECY, MINISTRY, TEACHING, EXHORTATION (KEEP IT PLAIN AND SIMPLE), GENEROSITY (CHEERFULLY), GOVERNANCE, MERCY AND LOVE THAT HAS INTEGRITY). Then after urging us to **abhor evil and cling to that which**

is good, Paul writes, **be kindly affectionate, honoring, businesslike and industrious—in all things serving the Lord. Rejoicing in hope, being prayerful, patient in tribulation/affliction. . . blessing (not cursing) our persecutors, hospitable, sympathetic with the sorrowful and those who weep, keep unity (be of one mind), not conceited, or prideful (in knowledge), repaying no evil for evil, be honest, peaceful, avenge not yourselves, feed your enemies and give them drink. Win them with love and kindness, with graciousness in the face of cruelty and hatred. We must be the love that overcomes the world! *This is how we change the world, this is how we redress grievances, alleviate poverty, and enrich (bless all nations); as we embody the change we hope to see.*** Let no one justly accuse you of degrading anyone, misleading, exploiting or harming anyone. Turn from greed, cheating and lying! ***And if you do, you will be creative, experience and engender creative relationships—you will have entered the kingdom of heaven on earth which would be the new creation— to the glory of God.***

Amen.