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LENT NOTES 2012 FROM THE LEPROSY MISSION

Transformation - personal

*All quotations from NIV translation unless specified*

**Introduction**

Here is the key verse for this series of studies on 'transformation':

**"Do not conform any longer 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**

This week we consider how God desires to transform us (and others) from where we are to what we can and should become.

We'll look at God's 'Top Ten' in personal transformation. These are not in any kind of order of priority and you might like to choose particular ones to discuss. There is there is no need to tackle them all!

**From sin to forgiveness**

'Sin' is a very big concept in the Bible to describe our human condition. We '**fall short**' of what we should be (the Greek word *hamartia* comes from archery where an arrow falls short of the target). Sin is also depicted as a power over which we have no or little control. Jesus came to save us from sin. Matthew 1:21

**Activity** Read the following Bible verses (if you have a Bible you might want to read the passage where the verses occur to get the context).

'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' Romans 3:23

'For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.'  
Romans 7:19

'Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.' Romans 8:1-2

Discuss the following:

- How would you define sin? What is it exactly?
- What damage does 'sin' do to us and to the world? Why is it damaging?
- Do we feel forgiven or constantly oppressed? (The apostle Paul describes his own struggle in Romans chapter 7.) How can we achieve a healthy Christian attitude towards our failures?
- Will we ever be free from sin in this life? If not, how should we regard sin and our struggle against it?

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***From oppression to liberation***

It's interesting to consider that in the situation where Israel was in bondage (slavery) in Egypt, sin was not the problem. The Israelites needed **liberation**, not forgiveness.

**Activity** Read the following verses from Exodus (again, you might like to consult your Bible if you have one, to get the context).

'The Lord said, I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.' Exodus 3:7-8

To discuss:

- What oppresses us today?
- What do we need liberating from in this addictive and consumerist society? How can we be more free?
- What oppresses others in the world? and what do they need liberating from? What could we do to help them?
- What do we need to be free **for** rather than free **from**?

***From exile to return***

In the Babylonian exile of the Jewish people, sin played a part (some Biblical texts proclaim that the exile happened because of sin, 2 Chronicles 36:15-20 for example). This is different from the situation in Egypt – in Babylon the people were forcibly removed from their land, and they needed a way to return home. This happened when Persia came to power in 539 BC.

**Activity** Read the following (in your Bible if you prefer)

'The ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.'  
Isaiah 51:11

Reading Luke 15:11-32 might also be useful.

Questions:

- What can "exile" mean for us today?
- How can we end up in the "wrong place"?
- Where is "home" for us, and what does it mean for us to return? How can we make that homeward journey?
- How does the world's refugee situation relate to this?

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**From infirmity to wholeness**

If we are sick, infirm or wounded, we need healing and wholeness. Among the benefits bestowed by the 'suffering servant' of Isaiah 52:13-53 (which is understood to find its fulfilment in Jesus) is the promise that 'by his wounds we are **healed**' Isaiah 53:5d

**Activity** Think about this for a moment: The hymn writer Fanny Crosby (1820-1915) composed such hymns as 'Blessed Assurance' and 'To God be the glory'. She became blind as an infant but never complained; in fact, at the age of eight she composed these words:

Oh, what a happy soul I am, although I cannot see;  
I am resolved that in this world contented I will be.  
How many blessings I enjoy that other people don't;  
To weep and sigh because I'm blind, I cannot and I won't!

Read this verse from Mark: 'For he (Jesus) had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him.' Mark 3:10

Discuss the following:

- What is the Christian way to respond to difficult circumstances?
- Does God "heal" today? If so, how?
- Might "wholeness" be different from the health we desire?
- Is death the ultimate "healing"?

**From fear to faith**

Fear seems to be a characteristic of life in the third millennium. There is a fear of terrorism (since 9/11), we might fear becoming poor in a climate of recession, we can fear losing our health or our memory, or we might be fearful of 'global warming', particularly for our children's children.

The phrase 'Do not be afraid' occurs 365 times in the Bible, one for each day of the year – although, of course, 2012 is a leap year!

**Activity** Read the following verses that all contain the phrase 'Do not be afraid' -

Luke 1:13 – the angel's words to Zechariah

Luke 1:30 – the angel's words to Mary

Luke 2:10 – the angel's words to the shepherds

Matthew 28:5 – the angel's words to the women at the empty tomb

Matthew 28:10 – Jesus' words to the women at the empty tomb

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And read these great verses from Matthew's Gospel –

Matthew 6:25,33 – 'Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear' ... 'but seek first his (God's) kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.'

- What do we fear or worry about?
- What might the answer be in each case?
- How can faith (trust) in God make a difference?