

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Practicing Wesleyan-Holiness
Spiritual Formation



SESSION 7

Transforming Moments:
A New Start With a New Heart

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Transforming Moments: A New Start With a New Heart

SESSION OVERVIEW

Testimonies of Christian Conversion

How God Found Me

The Transforming Encounter

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- understand the priority of the new birth in the spiritual life and learn how to help others find this transforming moment, this life-changing encounter with the Living Lord who can give us a new start with a new heart
- appreciate anew your own experience of the saving grace of God, and desire to serve Christ by sharing the Good News with others
- gain confidence in your own knowledge of scripture, the gospel, and your ability to use that knowledge to bring others to Christ
- demonstrate your faith and confidence by witnessing to others

Transforming Moments: A New Start With a New Heart

INTRODUCTION



Sandi pushed the doorbell again. No one came. She and her visitation partner, Karen, started to leave. Suddenly a middle-aged woman appeared in the doorway. She smiled at the teenage girls.

“Hello. We’re from the Church of the Nazarene. We would like to . . .” The woman was pointing to her ears and her mouth and shaking her head. The girls got the message—she could neither hear nor speak. Still smiling, the woman motioned for them to come on in.

They all sat down at the dining room table. The woman took out pads and pencils and gave each girl one. She introduced herself, “I’m Martha Franklin,” she wrote. “Nice to meet you.”

Sandi penciled back, “My name is Sandi Rouse and this is Karen Titus. We want to give you this Christian magazine and invite you to our church.”

As Martha Franklin read the note and wrote her reply, Sandi thought about her prayer preceding this visitation effort. She had promised the Lord that if anyone invited them in she would try to lead that person to Christ. After a few more pleasant note exchanges, Sandi wrote the vital question. “Miss Franklin, do you know Jesus as your personal Savior?” Martha did not write an answer. She just sadly shook her head, “No.”

“Would you like to know more about Christ? Do you want to know that everything is all right between you and God?” wrote Sandi. With an expression that blended eagerness and wistfulness, Martha Franklin quickly wrote, “Yes.”

Sandi then proceeded to lead her step by step through the Roman Road to Salvation. First, Romans 3:23 to show that all persons apart from Christ are lost sinners. “Do you realize that this means you too, Miss Franklin?”

“Oh, yes, yes,” came the scribbled reply.

Next, Romans 6:23 to show her the wages of sin. Then two verses to show her how to be saved. “Romans 5:8 shows God’s matchless love. Do you realize, Martha, that God loves you just as you are in spite of your sins?”

“I want to believe it,” she scribbled.

“It’s true, read this verse again.” Sandi then lead Martha to read Romans 10:8-9, 13 and Romans 6:23. “Now, Martha, let’s pray. Ask God to forgive you for everything you have ever done wrong. Ask Christ to give you a new start with a new heart. Will you?”

“Yes, oh, yes.” Martha replied.

Sandi and Karen reached across the table and took Martha Franklin’s hand. They bowed in voiceless prayer for a few sacred moments. Joy, peace, and gratitude poured over Martha’s face. Sandi wrote the vital question: “Do you know that Jesus Christ is your personal Savior?”

The letters in reply were big and bold, “YES.”

This session examines the transforming moment of Christian conversion, the experience of being born again. Unless God gives you a new start with a new heart, all the spiritual disciplines in the world will fall short of the spirituality and relationship with God your heart hungers for. Nothing less than a life changing, transforming encounter with Jesus the Savior can deal with the sin that defeats us at every turn.

TESTIMONIES OF CHRISTIAN CONVERSION



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BIBLICAL CONVERSIONS

The Bible records several conversion experiences. Read Acts 8:26-40 (the conversion of the Ethiopian officer) and Acts 9:1-19 (the conversion of St. Paul).

JOHN WESLEY'S CONVERSION TESTIMONY

The young John Wesley had struggled for years to find peace with God. He had become a priest, a missionary, and an Oxford professor in the process. Yet peace did not come—until May 24, 1738, when:

I resolved to seek it [salvation by faith alone] unto the end, by absolutely renouncing all dependence . . . upon *my own* works or righteousness; on which I had really grounded my hope, though I knew it not, from my youth up.

By adding to the constant use of all the means of grace, continual prayer for this very thing, justifying, saving grace, a full reliance on the blood of Christ shed for *me*; a trust in Him, as *my* Christ, as *my* sole justification, sanctification, and redemption. I continued thus to seek it, (though with strange indifference, dullness, and coldness, and unusually frequent relapses into sin) till Wednesday, May 24 [1738].

I think it was about five in the morning that I opened my New Testament on those words, “there are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, even that ye should be partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4). Just as I went out, I opened it again on those words, “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.”

In the afternoon I was invited to go to St. Paul's. The anthem was, “Out of the deep have I called unto thee, O Lord: Lord hear my voice.” In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: And an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. . . I then testified openly to all there, what I now first felt in my heart. From *Works*, 1:102-103.

Not included in this excerpt is the fact that four friends had called on Wesley about a heart-felt experience of religion. Thus, friends and their personal witness had a part in Wesley's conversion.

THE TRANSFORMING ENCOUNTER



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Here is a summary of *Really Living*, the children's version of the *Life Can Have Meaning* plan published by the Nazarene Publishing House.

1. God loves you and wants you to really live (John 3:16; John 10:10).
2. Oops! You can't—because of sin (sin is disobeying God). For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Say! That means you.
3. What can you do about it? Not a thing . . . by yourself (Eph. 2:8-9). Don't give up . . .
4. Jesus died for our sins (Rom. 5:8).
5. He offers the real life, true life (Rom. 6:23; 2 Cor. 5:17).
6. So if you really want to live . . . you must repent. What's that?
 - Admit you have sinned.
 - Feel sorry for your sins.
 - Be willing to quit sinning.
 - Ask God to forgive you (1 John 1:9).
 - Receive Christ as your Savior (Rev. 3:20).

7. NOW. It's your turn. Pray in your own words or make these words your own:

Dear Jesus: I admit I have sinned and I am sorry for what I have done.
Please forgive me.

I believe You died for me. I now accept You as my own Savior. Help me to obey You every day. Thank You for forgiving me and making me Your child. Amen.

Now you can start really living.

STEPS TOWARD THE TRANSFORMING MOMENT

God is God and His plan of salvation cannot be reduced to a mathematical formula or a recipe for salsa or chocolate cake. But by reading the Scriptures and examining human experience we humbly learn there are some steps we can take to put ourselves in the place where God's transforming power can work a miracle


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of grace. We cannot save ourselves. We cannot make one step in the right direction without God's grace. The transforming power is God's—every bit of it. But we can put ourselves in the waterfall of grace with these steps.

CONFESSION

“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way” (Isa. 53:6). I guess that includes you and me too, right? This is no time to call sin by a nice name. No pleading low self-esteem. No hiding behind maladjustment. No whining victim. Don't tell God your vicious and immoral behavior happened because Dad didn't take you fishing or because Mom did not read you stories. Don't point fingers at the system. Remember Adam. When confronted with his sin he first tried to blame others (“The devil and the woman made me do it”). But he finally confessed, “I ate” (Gen. 3:13). You and I are not exceptions to God's declaration, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

The New Testament word for confess is made of two Greek terms. One means same or alike; the other means word, speech, or idea. The compound word means to speak alike or to say the same thing. To confess your sins then is to speak out your agreement with God on the matter of your spiritual condition.

Forgive unconfessed sin? Not even God can do that! On the other hand, “If we confess our sins, he [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins” (1 John 1:9). Do not fear to confess yourself a sinner. Jesus died for sinners and no one else.

REPENTANCE

To repent is to turn away from your sins, to utterly renounce them and forsake them in godly sorrow. Oswald Chambers called repentance the threshold to the kingdom. John Wesley called repentance the porch that leads to a life of intimacy with God.

Repentance is not just the sorrow that you were caught, or that you made a mess of your life. Rather, it involves remorse for sinning against God, and against the very persons to whom you owed your best. The sin the repentant sinner once prized now appears revolting. This sounds frighteningly radical—and it is. But it is delightful and fulfilling too. For as you turn from self to God and others, you come to know what Jesus meant when He said, “Whoever wants [seeks] to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it” (Matt. 16:25).

When John the Baptizer preached the gospel of repentance, he challenged hearers to “produce fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matt. 3:8). One such fruit is repairing the damage our sin has done to others. If we have stolen money or



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property, we make restitution by paying it back with interest or damages. If we have abused others, brought suffering because of our addictions, or have injured the good name of others we ask forgiveness. We must try to repair the damage unless such efforts would do more harm than good.

TRUST IN JESUS ALONE FOR SALVATION

Recognizing your spiritual poverty, confess your sins, and repent sincerely. The next step is one of faith. Put all your trust in Jesus Christ. Believe He loves you as if you were the only one to love. Believe He died for you, and that God's saving grace is extended even to a sinner like you.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son . . . to condemn . . . but to save . . . Whoever believes in him is not condemned" (John 3:16-18).

This final step into right relationship with God is solid, firmly grounded in the gracious promises of God:

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and *believe* in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you *believe* and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Rom. 10:9-10, emphasis added).

"To those who *believed* in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12, emphasis added).

"Jesus said . . . 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who *believes* in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and *believes* in me will never die'" (John 11:25, emphasis added).

Will you be accepted? Jesus says: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If *anyone* hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in" (Rev. 3:20, emphasis added).

RECEIVE THE ASSURANCE OF THE SPIRIT

You will not be prepared for it. You may not know what to say or how to act. But in the process of confessing, repenting, and affirming your faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit will give you a deep inner assurance that your sins are forgiven and that you have been born into the family of God. Becoming a new creation in Christ can be a breathtaking experience.

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Our descriptions of it are often feeble compared to the experience itself. But once you have received the witness of the Spirit you will give the knowing nod of recognition whenever Rom. 8:16 is read at church: “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”

CLOSING THOUGHT

Joy Paday of Tennessee planned to visit her relatives in Daet, Philippines. Click, double-click, she was in touch with the missionaries of her denomination in the Philippines. She wanted to take her relatives there to a holiness church. Bad news, her denomination had no church in Daet.

Joy clicked away on the Net until she found out where her denomination did have churches. Joy and her husband, Nicasio, were not ones to give up easily. They brought Nicasio’s brother, Romie Paday, all the way to suburban Manila to attend a Wesleyan heritage church. The church members welcomed the visitors. The singing was happy, even if a little fast and loud. The prayers were fervent—as if they really thought God cared for them—and how the pastor preached!

Romie did not know what to call it, but the Spirit of the Lord came. The altar call found Romie—a man with serious drinking problems and acquainted with jail—pouring out his confession to Christ. The conversion took.

Romie went back home and started a Bible study in his house. Some 80 people attend. Romie tells them, “God gave me a new start with a new heart.” He helped turn his Bible study group into a new church. A recent graduate of Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary became the pastor of the church in Daet, Philippines.

Living in the Philippines can be dangerous given Communist guerrillas, Muslim terrorists, and creeping poverty, homelessness, rampant child prostitution, and rampaging tuberculosis and typhoid. But even in such circumstances Jesus Christ can give you a new start with a new heart. Praise His name.

APPLICATION



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1. Read Acts 8:26-40 (the conversion of the Ethiopian officer) and Acts 9:1-19 (the conversion of St. Paul). Compare and contrast the two accounts by answering the following questions:
 - In what ways are these conversion accounts alike?
 - How do they differ from each other and from your personal experience?
 - List at least four things we learn about how to find Christ and how to lead others to a transforming encounter with Him from Paul, Philip, and the Ethiopian.
2. Write your own story of how God found you. Be prepared to share it with your mentor. Use the following statements to complete your story.
 - I first came to know that I needed God when:
 - The person, experience, sermon, song, or book that showed me how to come to Christ:
 - The scripture that helped me most:
 - The person(s) who cared enough about me to help me find Christ:
 - The events of the day when I was saved went like:
 - My thoughts and feelings when I knew I had been born again:
 - The first person I told about my conversion:
 - Today, my love for Christ is:
3. Read the testimony of John Wesley again. Answer the following questions:
 - What part did music play? Scriptures? Prayer? Preaching? Teaching?
 - In what ways is Wesley's conversion experience like the ones in Acts 8 and 9? In what ways is it different?
 - In what way is Wesley's experience like your own? Unlike your own?
4. Gather all the soul-winning plans you can (i.e. The Four Spiritual Laws, the Roman Way to Salvation, etc.). Before you meet with your mentor, look them over. Be prepared to together the adequacy or inadequacy of these tools.

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5. Write an example of a sinner's prayer that includes confession of sin, repentance, affirmation of faith in Christ as Savior and Lord, and includes the acceptance of assurance of salvation.

JOURNALING

Note: Throughout your work in this module, it is suggested you keep a journal. This is an important tool in the study of spiritual formation. Journaling is a tool to help you slow down in your studies and listen to your heart, soul, mind, and most importantly to God.

Write a one-stanza song or poem of praise to God for your own transforming moment of conversion. If you need help to get started, sing or recite songs such as, "Why Should He Love Me So?" "Victory in Jesus" or "All That Thrills My Soul Is Jesus."

SUGGESTED READING

- Wesley Tracy, et al., *The Upward Call* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1994), 35-47.
- Wesley Tracy, et al., *Reflecting God* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City and Christian Holiness Partnership, 2000), 69-75.
- Wesley Tracy, *Reflecting God Workbook*, 44-50.
- Wesley Tracy, *Reflecting God Leader's Guide*, 19-20.
- Wesley Tracy, *New Testament Evangelism Today* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1973), 27-46.

EXAM



NOTES

1. We can save ourselves.
 - A. True
 - B. False
2. To repent is to turn away from sins, to utterly renounce them, and forsake them in godly sorrow.
 - A. True
 - B. False
3. God's plan of salvation cannot be reduced to a mathematical formula.
 - A. True
 - B. False
4. We must trust in Jesus alone for salvation.
 - A. True
 - B. False
5. Music, Scriptures, prayer, preaching, and teaching all played a part in Wesley's conversion.
 - A. True
 - B. False
6. To confess your sins is to speak out your agreement with God on the matter of your spiritual condition.
 - A. True
 - B. False
7. You CANNOT expect a deep inner assurance that your sins are forgiven.
 - A. True
 - B. False
8. The conversion of the Ethiopian and Paul is found in which book of the New Testament?
 - A. Mark
 - B. Philippians
 - C. Acts
 - D. Luke

 NOTES

9. Which of the following did NOT play a part in Wesley's conversion?
- A. music
 - B. Scriptures
 - C. preaching
 - D. confrontation
10. John 1:12 says, _____.
- A. "To those who *believed* in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."
 - B. "For all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God."
 - C. "I am the resurrection and the life."
 - D. "If *anyone* hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in."
11. Revelation 3:20 says, _____.
- A. "To those who *believed* in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."
 - B. "For all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God."
 - C. "I am the resurrection and the life."
 - D. "If *anyone* hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in."

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



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Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Share the story of how God found you with your mentor. Ask your mentor to share his or her story.
2. Discuss the various soul-winning plans you gathered. Go over each plan with your mentor and together determine the adequacy or inadequacy of these tools.