

Creekside Community Church
"Transformed"
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Bear Fruit

Back in the 1980s, Dr. Robert Butler, the Founder of the National Institute on Aging, said "If exercise could be purchased in a pill, it would be the single most widely prescribed and beneficial medicine in the nation." Imagine a pill which controls weight, combats diseases like cardiovascular disease, stroke, metabolic syndrome, type 2 diabetes, depression, a number of cancers, and arthritis, improves your mood, boosts your energy, promotes better sleep, strengthens your bones and muscles, reduces pain, maintains your strength and stability as you age, improves your skin and supercharges your brain and memory. Wouldn't you take that pill? The problem is, taking a pill is a lot easier than regular exercise. That may be why, according to Dr. Edward Miller, the dean of John Hopkins University medical school, 90% of patients who, following coronary bypass surgery, are warned that if they don't change their diet and begin exercising, they will die, refuse to change. 90% of people would rather die than change. 90% prefer shortening their life than exercising regularly. I'm not telling you anything your doctor hasn't told you. What you may not know is that what exercise is for our physical and mental health, active involvement in Christ's mission in this world is for our spiritual health; and that's what I want to talk with you about today.

Today we finish our *Transformed* series about the New Testament path to personal transformation and how that path shapes everything our church does. Creekside's goal is changed lives – people becoming more and more like Jesus – and we understand the path to becoming like Jesus in terms of four verbs: believe, belong, become and bear fruit. We become more and more like Jesus as we believe in Him and in the gospel more deeply; as we live together in community with other disciples of Jesus; as we stay connected to Him each day through studying the Bible and prayer; and - as we'll see today - we labor with Him in this world and bear fruit which we understand as making more disciples of Jesus. My job today is to convince you that it is impossible to become *like* Jesus without regular involvement *with* Jesus in His work in this world. Laurie and I have never been pet owners. We don't particularly dislike dogs or cats; we were just never interested in belonging to one. But when our kids were young, we briefly flirted with the idea of getting them a dog and I became fascinated with Border Collies. I figured that if we were going to have a dog, we might as well get a smart one who could help the kids with their homework. Border Collies are beautiful animals, athletic, loyal, very fast and highly intelligent. Most important of all, they make their owners look cool. So we're just about to buy a Border Collie puppy when I talked to someone with experience with this particular breed who said, "You don't want a Border Collie. They're working dogs and they need to be herding sheep or cattle, not hanging out in your backyard. The dog will go crazy and will drive you crazy." So we bought a gold fish - who eventually committed suicide. Christians are like Border Collies. We're designed to work, to be useful and to serve God's purpose in this world and when we don't, we're miserable. I came to Christ in my early 20s through Campus Crusade for Christ and because Cru believed in involving new Christians in sharing their faith from the beginning of their walk with Christ I was sharing my new faith less than a month after Christ came into my life and as a result, I thrived. I saw the same thing happen over and over during my years working with Cru. Christians who were regularly involved in serving Christ grew. Christians who weren't serving Jesus did not.

Have you ever asked yourself why you are here right now and not in heaven? If our sole purpose is worship, we will be better worshipers when we stand together before God's throne than we can ever be here. If our sole purpose is to know Him better, we will know Him far better when we see Him face to face than we do now. If our sole purpose is to grow in love for one another, we will love each other perfectly in heaven because then we'll be a lot more lovable. The only thing we can do here better than we can do it in heaven is to tell people who don't know Jesus about Him. The church is the way Jesus works in this world. That's why He says in John 20:21, "*As the Father has sent Me, so I also send you.*" Jesus sends His disciples on the same mission His Father sent Him. In fact, the words "mission" and "missionary" comes from this word, "send." A missionary is one who is sent and since Jesus sends all His disciples on the same mission God sent Him, every Christian is a missionary. So what is that

mission? The mission flows out of the gospel; the good news of what God has accomplished for us through Christ. God sent His Son from heaven to earth to do for us what we could not do for ourselves and to secure the salvation of everyone who believes in Him; and our mission is to deliver the mail just like Jesus did, proclaiming the good news of God's love for us in Christ. However, Jesus didn't just preach good news, He was good news. He went about doing good, befriending the poor, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, setting the captive free, and preaching the good news of the kingdom of God. So what's our mission? Good works, good words; preaching good news, being good news; telling the story and living the story; loving our neighbor and making disciples – doing what Jesus did. That's our mission and every Christian is a missionary. That's why at Creekside, we will never be content until we're all engaged in Christ's mission in this community. Now I know this will be a hard sell for some of you. Each step on the path toward transformation involves a little more sacrifice and a little more faith. "You mean, it's not enough just to believe the gospel? I also need to get into a community group?" Well, if you really believe the gospel, you'll see why you need other believers. "It's not enough that I joined a community group, I have to read my Bible daily and pray too?" If you really believe the gospel, you'll want to know Jesus and become like Him and that only happens by staying connected to Him through His word and prayer. "It's not enough for me to believe the gospel, join a community group and read my Bible daily; now I have to be a missionary?" If you really believe the gospel, you'll agree that the greatest thing that ever happened to you was coming to know Christ and that the most important thing you can do for anyone else is to introduce them to Christ. I know this last step on the path to Christlikeness is a big one. Some of you think, "I don't have time to serve Christ." Some of you think, "I'm not capable of serving Christ. I'll fail miserably. Believe me, the kingdom will be a lot better off without my help." I'll try to answer your objections. Let's look at "Why should I bear fruit?" And then, "How do I bear fruit?"

Fireplace: picking teams: Why should I bear fruit? Why should I get involved in Christ's mission in this world? Why should I take the time to risk doing something I will most likely fail in? You are a Border Collie. You were made for Christ's mission. Border collies weren't made for the back yard and Christians weren't made to sit in a pew. Look at John 15:16. Jesus tells His disciples, *"You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and {that} your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you."* We didn't pick Jesus. Jesus picked us and because He picked us, we chose Him. So why did Jesus pick you? He says He picked you to appoint you to go and bear fruit. Jesus has a purpose for every person He saves. What does Jesus mean by fruit? Fruit is the way a plant reproduces itself. Apple trees bear apples which contain the seeds for more apple trees. Orange trees bear oranges which contain the seeds for more orange trees. John 15 is about how Jesus works through His disciples and He uses the picture of a grape vine and its branches. The vine produces fruit through the branches and so what is the fruit Jesus produces through us? He reproduces Himself; His character and His ministry; who He is and what He does; little Jesuses. Throughout the Gospel of John, fruit always refers to people who have been born again and have become God's children with Christ's nature. That means every Christian is born to reproduce their relationship with Jesus in someone else because that's what Jesus is doing in the world; making more disciples through His disciples. Why bear fruit? Bearing fruit is what Christ saved me to do. That's why Jesus says in John 15:8, *"By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and prove to be My disciples."* A disciple is someone through whom Jesus bears fruit which is why we included fruit bearing in Creekside's path to discipleship. Jesus didn't save us to leave us on the bench. He saved us to get us into the game and to participate with Him in what He's doing in the world: reproducing Himself in people.

So how do we bear fruit? Last Sunday Jeff talked about how our primary job as disciples is to stay connected to Jesus through regular conversation, listening to His voice in the Scriptures and talking with Him in prayer; or as Jeff said, "Attend and depend." We stay connected to Jesus by bringing Jesus into every area of our life, paying constant attention to Him and depending on Him to work through us, because as Jesus said in John 15:4, *"Abide in Me, (stay connected to Me) and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither {can} you unless you abide in Me."* I don't bear fruit for Jesus, Jesus bears fruit through me and so my primary responsibility is to stay close to Him and then do what He tells me to do. So what does He tell me to do in order to bear fruit? Let's look at John 15:16 again. *"You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and {that} your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you."* Don't miss the word, "go." Jesus appointed us to go and bear fruit. The bridge between

abiding and bearing fruit is go. I don't bear fruit by waiting for Jesus to do something through me. I bear fruit by going, by taking the initiative to make disciples, trusting that Jesus will work through me. Remember, "As the Father sent Me, I send you." "Go" means every Christian is to live like someone who's on a mission and thinking like a missionary. "Who has God sent me to reach?" Our mission field is defined by our location, our vocation, and our recreation: where we live, where we work and what we do for fun; since these are the most likely places we will connect with people who need Christ. So thinking like a missionary means taking the initiative to do good works and to speak good words where we live and work and work out; in order to give Jesus the opportunity to work through us in someone's life. Do you know what the largest religious group in Alameda County is today? The Nones: people with no religious affiliation. We live in one of the most non-religious counties in the country. The vast majority of people we live next to and work and recreate with will never darken the door of a church. We are the only Bible most people in the Bay Area will ever read and their only point of contact with the Jesus of the Bible. So how do we bear fruit? How do we make more disciples of Jesus? How do we live as people sent on a mission by God? Think three simple steps: connect, explain and demonstrate.

First connect. It is very unlikely that a total stranger will stop you on the street, notice the glow of light around you and ask how they too can become a follower of Jesus. The gospel spreads through relationships and as every missionary knows, the first step in making more disciples of Jesus is forming relationships with people who don't yet know Him. Of these three steps in bearing fruit and making more disciples of Jesus, connecting is the one I'm personally weakest in. I'm pretty good at explaining the gospel and at demonstrating the gospel. I have a message. I just don't have an audience for that message because I haven't made the effort to connect, so here's what I'm doing. I'm focusing on the people in my neighborhood and on my swim team. First I want to learn people's names. Are there people in your neighborhood you wave at or say hi to, but don't know their name? I am amazed at how many folks I've seen for years but never bothered to introduce myself. So I'm trying to learn the names of everybody on my block and everybody on my swim team; and I introduce myself at every opportunity. And I'm keeping a list of all those names and praying for each of them daily. So last week I was changing clothes after swimming next to an older gentleman; and so I said, "I'm John. I've seen you for years but I've never gotten your name." He said he was Dave and had been on the team for 30 years which explained why I had never gotten to know him since I've only been on the team for 20 years. Here's the point. There is a much better chance that I will connect with people whose names I know than with those whose names I don't know. Every time I say hi to Dave at practice now increases the odds of a more substantive conversation in the future; which is the next step in connecting; talk to each other. Jesus asked the woman at the well, "Can I have a drink?" Philip asked the Ethiopian who was reading the Scriptures in his chariot, "Do you understand what you're reading?" We connect with people by talking with them and this usually means we need to initiate that conversation. Going doesn't mean waiting for somebody to come to me, it means going to them; and in my experience, bearing fruit always involves going. I asked my friend, Brian Howard, what he does in his neighborhood to connect with people and he told me, he says yes to everything. One of the guys has neighborhood poker games in his garage and so when Brian was invited, he went, even though he didn't especially want to spend his Friday night in a garage playing cards – but it was a great opportunity to get to some of his neighbors. When one of his neighbors invited him to attend a Dodger game, Brian went and suffered for Jesus. Plus Brian says he and his wife try to hold some event for the neighborhood at their home fairly regularly; a BBQ or a potluck – which in most neighborhoods these days is rare. On the fourth of July, he just set up a BBQ and a few lawn chairs on his driveway and started cooking hotdogs. Soon a bunch of neighbors were sitting around eating and talking. The first step in bearing fruit is simply taking the initiative to connect with people. Christ works through relationships and so the first step in seeing Him work through us is to have a relationship with someone who needs Him.

The next two steps in bearing fruit are to explain the gospel and then to demonstrate the difference the gospel makes in our lives. You can reverse those steps to demonstrate and then explain. However, I've discovered after years of trial and error that there is a greater downside of trying to demonstrate the gospel without ever verbalizing it than explaining the gospel and then living it out. I find that the longer I wait to tell someone that I'm a follower of Jesus, the more difficult sharing the gospel becomes. It's like I've been hiding a very important area of my life from them and so when I finally do talk to them, it almost came across as phony. "If this is so important to you, why is this the first time in 10 years I've heard about it?" I find the earlier in a relationship I can let a person know I'm a follower of Jesus, the better. That doesn't mean explaining in the whole Bible in one session, it just means beginning the conversation. So I'm going to start with explaining and then talk about demonstrating. At our men's retreat, Kyle Driggers shared the four sound barriers we all face when it comes to explaining the gospel to someone. The first sound barrier is initiating a conversation which we just talked about. The second sound barrier is talking about spiritual things; moving the conversation from school or sports or movies to a deeper level. So how do we do that? One way is to share our stories with each other. Most people will tell you the story of their life if we just ask and then really listen. "You know, we talk all the time but I really don't think I know that much about you. Tell me about yourself." I like to use the word FORM to help me to remember what to ask about. F is for family. Tell me about your family. Do you have brothers or sisters? Are your parents living? Where did you grow up? O is for occupation. What do you do for a living? How did you get interested in that field? Those two questions alone will open up a ton of information and other paths to pursue in getting to know someone's story. R is for religion. Do you have any kind of religious background? How large a role does faith play in your life? M is for mission; what's your mission in life, your purpose for being here? What gets you going in the morning? Remember, we're there to listen, not talk. Get to know the person. What are their hopes, dreams, hurts, problems and interests? Once you've heard their story, not only will you have a much clearer idea of how the gospel applies to them personally, they will be far more interested in hearing your story; which gives you an opportunity to tell how knowing Christ has made a difference in your life. I encourage you to write it out and share what your life was like before you came to know Christ, how you came to know Him and the difference He has made since then. It shouldn't be any longer than one to two minutes. You're not explaining Christianity – just declaring yourself a follower of Jesus and seeing if they are interested in hearing more. Don't speak Christianese or use religious terms; just talk normal. If you sense they're not interested in hearing more right now, don't push it. Move on to other topics. If they seem to be interested in hearing more, share the gospel. Again, we're talking sentences here, not paragraphs. This is a conversation, not a lecture. The third sound barrier we face in explaining the gospel is actually explaining the gospel and here's a quick and simple way to share the good news of the gospel. You might say something like, "I've found that a lot of people confuse religion with real Christianity, but the whole message of the Bible can be summarized in a single verse, Romans 6:23 (and I like to write it or have it on my phone so the person can read it with me. "For the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." The message of the Bible is that we have a problem. We all die and the reason we all die is because we all sin. I don't know anybody who thinks they do the right thing all the time. We all do things we think know are wrong. Nobody lives up to their own standard of behavior, let alone God's standard of behavior and that failure is what the Bible calls sin. Death in the Bible means separation. Because of our sin, we are separated from God – which is why God is not more apparent to everyone. Many people believe there is a god but few people can say they know beyond a shadow of a doubt there's a god and so if God exists, there must be some separation between Him and us. The Bible says that our sins separate us from God and that is why we die since God is the source of life. (diagram). Throughout history, people have sensed this separation and have tried to find God and to bridge this separation through religion, philosophy and good deeds but because we're imperfect, our efforts are imperfect and fall short. That's the bad news. The good news is that God loves us and does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. "The wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Eternal life is not something we can earn because all our efforts are infected with sin. Eternal life is a

gift which God gives us through Christ. Throughout the Old Testament God promises over and over to send a Savior who will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. The Son of God becomes a human being – that’s what we celebrate at Christmas – and lives the sinless life that we are unable to live so that God credits His perfection to everyone who believes in Him and dies the death we deserve to die, bearing the punishment for our sins on the cross so that God can forgive everyone who believes in Him; and then rises from the dead so that all who trust Him can live forever with Him. Who receives this gift of eternal life? Everyone who receives Jesus into their life as their Lord; rather than continuing to live for themselves because they are convinced of His great love for them. In the Bible, eternal life isn’t just a quantity of life, it is a quality of life: a life of joy and purpose, the life that Jesus lived and now lives in us. That’s the message of the Bible. Do/done. The final sound barrier is inviting the person you are sharing with to become a follower of Jesus. I like to ask, “Is there any reason you wouldn’t want to ask Jesus into your life today?” They often say they are not ready which I assure them is fine, since this is a very important decision. But I am grateful that the people who shared the gospel with me asked me that question because I knew there was a decision that I needed to eventually make. Challenge non-believers.

The third step in bearing fruit is demonstrating the difference the gospel makes in your own life. Paul writes in 1 Thess. 1:5, *“For our gospel did not come to you in word only but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.”* Paul says the power of the gospel was seen in the kind of people he and his friends were – which is why in 1 Thess. 2:8 he writes, *“Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you, not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.”* Paul didn’t just preach sermons. Paul loved those he brought the gospel to and opened his life up to them so they could see the difference Christ had made in him. People don’t come to Christ because of church services. They come to Christ as they see the love which their Christian friends have for them and for one another; as they see honesty and high moral standards and selflessness – as they see Jesus in us. Good words and good works are like two wings on a plane. The plane can’t fly without both wings and we can’t bear fruit without both explaining and demonstrating the the gospel. By the way, that’s a good reason to introduce your non-believing friends to your Christian friends. When the girl I had dated for four years became a Christian, I didn’t realize how much she had changed until she started taking me to meetings of Christian college students and I saw the same things in them that I saw in her and begin to realize how much she had changed. If I had only known her, I could have rationalized those changes away but in seeing the same changes in others, I begin to see a greater power at work. So invite your friends to church and to your community group. It doesn’t have to be to something that’s spiritual. If you’re doing something fun together, include both believers and non-believers.

Bearing fruit is not an individual event; it’s a team sport because the mission takes all of us. When Jeff takes over as senior pastor in January, I will devoting all my time to further developing our community groups and my hope is that our groups will learn how to be more engaged together in the mission Christ has sent us. I’ll close with this. If you just had bypass surgery and your doctor told you, “Exercise or die,” what would you do? Would you be part of the 90% who refuse and die or the 10% who change and live? That’s really the choice we have today as disciples of Jesus. Will you excuse yourself from involvement in Christ’s mission in the world and never become His true disciple; or will you begin to take steps – even baby steps - toward bearing fruit and being useful to His kingdom?