



stories of  
**TRANSFORMATION**

**Discussion Questions**

**January 10 - 24, 2021**

## Discussion questions for week 1: Change through Practice and Patience

1. Take a few moments to think about how you feel right now, early in a new year. Briefly share with one another: on a scale of 1 to 10, how hopeful do you feel in general about 2021, and why?
2. Read Galatians 5:22-23 in the Message version of the Bible. Do any of these “gifts” or “fruit of the Spirit” particularly resonate with you? What changes do you want to see in yourself in 2021 (and beyond)? How hopeful are you that you can change in this way?
3. Read Romans 12:1-2 in the Message version of the Bible. What do these verses tell us about the change process? How do they impact your sense of hopefulness, if at all?
4. Theologian and author Richard Foster wrote: “[*Spiritual*] disciplines are the main way we offer our bodies up to God as a living sacrifice. We are doing what we can do with our bodies, our minds, our hearts. God then takes this simple offering of ourselves and does with it what we cannot do, producing within us deeply ingrained habits of love and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

Look at the illustrative list of spiritual disciplines below. Which of these (or other disciplines you are aware of) might help you to change in the way you would like?

Meditation	Simplicity	Confession
Prayer	Solitude	Worship
Fasting	Submission	Guidance
Study	Service	Celebration

5. Think of an area in your life where you know you have changed for the better. How did that change come about? Share this example briefly with the group as a way of encouraging one another that change is possible.
6. Spend some time praying for one another as you seek to grow good “fruit” in your life.

### Practice for the week

If there is a spiritual discipline on the list above that seems appropriate to you, begin this week to practice it in a small, but sustainable way. You can read more about these disciplines [here](#).

Alternatively, take 5 minutes each day to practice centering prayer.

- Set a timer for 5 minutes so you will not be concerned about how much time has elapsed.
- Choose a simple, non-distracting word (e.g., love, Jesus, peace, etc.) as the symbol of your intention to welcome God’s presence and consent to God’s transformative work within you.
- Sit comfortably, with your back straight, feet on the floor, and your eyes closed. Take a couple of deep breaths, exhaling fully.
- Say your chosen word a few times slowly in your mind, and then be still. As you find yourself engaging with your thoughts, gently say your word again, and let the thoughts drift away.
- Remain in this posture of surrender to God’s presence until the timer goes off. Thank God for being with you, and sit quietly for a moment as your thoughts return.

For more on centering prayer, click [here](#).

## Discussion questions for week 2: Change through Pain and Disruption

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. Share an experience of pain and disruption in your own life. In what way was it transformative for you? Would you say it had a positive or negative impact on your life overall?
3. From the story of Joseph that we briefly reviewed, with whom or what did you most identify and why? Read Genesis 50: 15-21. What kind of transformation do you see in Joseph? What about in his brothers? How does this passage inform your own journey with pain and disruption?
4. The speaker on Sunday suggested that we tend to manage our emotional pain through behaviors like denial, anesthesia (distractions, addictions, blame, etc.) and avoidance. To which of these (or other compensations) do you think you are most prone?
5. In the interview on Sunday, Roger Sandberg shared from his own experience of the need to be present to pain—present to our own pain and having others who are present with us in it, too (our need to “feel felt”). From what he shared, how might you be more able to embrace and walk “through” your own pain?
6. If God is love, then God must suffer because love inevitably means vulnerability to loss, rejection and grief. The speaker on Sunday suggested we view God’s role in our pain as empathetic rather than causative. God is by definition “presence” to us and “solidarity” with us in our pain—as epitomized by Jesus. In what ways might this perspective help or hinder your own practical struggle with pain?
7. Take some time to pray for one another as we journey together with pain and disruption.

### Practice for the week

In this exercise we are going to practice being present to our pain in an intentionally compassionate way. Take a few minutes to do this each day.

Begin by reading the following scripture:

*Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (Matthew 9:35-36)*

Sit quietly and comfortably and try to imagine being Jesus looking at all the people. Imagine the pain of the people you are seeing. Some of their pain is not their fault and beyond their control. Some of it is because of things they have done and mistakes they have made. Some of it is just accidental and circumstantial. Allow understanding and compassion to well up in you.

Now try to look at yourself in the same way and with the same understanding and compassion. Focus on your breathing for a few moments to center yourself and be mindfully present to yourself. Reflect on

the pain you are feeling or have felt in the past. Be conscious of your thoughts and feelings about yourself. Do you judge or blame yourself for the pain? Do you blame others? Do you blame God? Don't evaluate or judge these thoughts and feelings, just recognize that they are real. Don't withdraw from this discomfort but continue to be present to yourself in it. Now consciously and intentionally be compassionate towards yourself as you would a friend in your situation. Each time you feel judgmental or less than compassionate, consciously return to compassion. Invite God to be present in this pain with you. Let go of any thoughts or feelings that God is judging or evaluating you and your pain, and just absorb God's empathy, solidarity and acceptance of you. Rest in this posture for a few minutes before ending.

## Discussion questions for week 3: Change through Curiosity and Exploration

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. How have your views and beliefs changed over the years? Share a little about the journey you have been on. What has been liberating about that? What has been difficult?
3. Read Genesis 12:1-5. The speaker on Sunday suggested this is a defining origin story for our faith tradition in which God is constantly calling us into new territory. How does this passage make you feel? How do you think you would have responded? Have you ever experienced anything like this yourself?
4. Read Mark 10:17-22. In what way does Jesus affirm this man's religious practices? In what way does Jesus challenge them? How has following Jesus been disruptive to your own religious life? How has it changed your previous religious practice and beliefs and why?
5. What struck you most strongly from the interview with Ethan and Rebecca on Sunday? With what did you most identify about their stories and why?
6. Both Rebecca and Ethan talked about the importance of relationships on their journey. How has your own changing spiritual journey caused strain with friends and family? What has been helpful to you in navigating that? Have there also been people in your life who have been safe confidantes as you've journeyed? How were they helpful? How might you be a safe companion like this to someone else right now?
7. Take some time to pray for one another as we journey together through curiosity and exploration.

### Practice for the week

Take time this week to be intentionally curious. Make a point of asking people questions and listening to their answers with the intent of being a safe person for them and understanding them rather than contradicting. Each time you encounter someone with a different viewpoint to you, take some time to honestly wrestle with their view rather than dismiss it. What might it have to offer you? What are some positives of that view and how might they help you grow as a person? What might God be saying to you through this unexpected source?