

'Tis the Season of TRANSFORMATION



by Pastor Robert M. Reid

'Tis the time to decide to change something about ourselves.

That seems to be the thought when we usher in a new year. Somehow a notion sets in that a new year provides a new start in life. When we discard last year's calendar in the waste can, our minds somehow believe that we can magically dispense with all of the past year's disappointments and failures—keeping, of course, the joys and the successes—and start with some sort of clean slate on which to design a new life in the new year. So with great enthusiasm we make resolutions to transform our bodies, break bad habits, develop new disciplines, maintain better attitudes, and even eat less ice cream.

Then comes February, the month of dirty snow and dark days, the month that painfully awaits the transformation springtime brings. The wind blows cold across your face as you walk to your ice-encrusted car, wondering where the notion of miraculous transformation went. You haven't seen the inside of the gym since the second week of January. Habitually you are still spending too much time on the Internet. The time you were going to spend in personal worship and prayer hasn't materialized—where is my Bible anyway? That guy in the office still drives you nuts and you fantasize about the various plagues that could possibly cause his demise. Your freezer is packed with four half-gallons of Turkey Hill's ice cream flavor of the month, one half gallon with only two small scoops left. As usual, January has passed and so has the notion of lasting change. Well, there is always the next new year.

There are those who are exceptions to this scenario. They have seen change in their lives, at least outwardly. They have lost six pounds. They are going to bed at a decent hour. They are walking two miles each day. They have been able to talk civilly to the obnoxious cur that harassed them in the office last year. They've saved \$25 by not buying ice cream for 42 days (but who's counting?)

These exceptional creatures assume that real change has taken place. But has it? Often, self-improvement is measured by things we do rather than by the people we

are. Are we really any different because we have produced certain outcomes? Or, are we still the same on the inside, merely enveloped in a wrapper of self-improvement? Engaging in certain practices can make us believe we have really changed, when the change has been merely external.

The Bible indicates that real change, lasting change, comes from the inside out. Too often we define change by some sort of external self-effort that conforms to the expectations of others or to our personal aspirations. Real transformation comes because we are under new management.

The driving force in our lives must not be us, but a new master, Jesus Christ the Lord. He has real power, and he offers that to us. Paul expressed this when he wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). Paul understood that lasting transformation comes from the inside as Christ works in individuals. As they live by His power they are "transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18). This process of yielding to Christ's power, which is working in us, allows us to "not conform any longer to the pattern of the 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).

It was A. W. Tozer who wrote, "It is not what a man does that determines whether his work is sacred or secular, it is why he does it." When God is free to adjust our motivation in life, real transformation can occur. A genuine transformation from the inside out occurs because, "...It is God who works in you both to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Philippians 2:13). If you really want a transformed life this year, you need to yield Christ, who lives in your life, allowing Him to work in you and really produce lasting change.

Excuse me, but is that ice cream on your chin?