

“One Another” Transformational Conversations

Scripture Commands Us to Care for Each Other Individually

- Bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2)
- Speak truth to one another (Ephesians 4:25)
- Encourage and build up one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
- Stimulate one another to love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24)
- Pray for one another (James 5:16)
- Serve one another (Galatians 5:13)

As believers, we know we *should* care for one another, but we may feel *unprepared* to have the kind of “transformational conversation” that could really help. We fear saying the wrong thing, so we may avoid helping and only offer to pray.

What a “Transformational Conversation” Looks Like

But what if we could care for a person without feeling any pressure to fix or instruct them? How great would that be? **Transformational Conversations** are *unique* in that they are based on the use of caring questions rather than advice-giving, and they are *powerful* in that they enable real change in another’s life. These conversations involve a believer listening closely to another then asking thought-provoking questions to help that person think in new productive ways. The purpose of the conversation is to help the other gain a new *godly perspective* so they can form a new *godly vision* for the life they were given. With this new vision, the person can set new goals, create action steps, increase their motivation, and sustain their desired changes through support, encouragement, and accountability. If this sounds like life coaching, it is. If it seems like an intriguing means of discipleship, it absolutely is! The good news: many believers are capable of helping this way.

2 Peter 1:3 reminds us that **God’s divine power** “has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.” Christians, then, have already been granted knowledge of life and godliness – they just need someone to help them draw it out and put it into practice. When we do that for another believer, God gets the glory, the other person does the actual work, and we enjoy the fulfillment of helping.

Transformational Conversations are Vital for Personal Growth and Church Growth

Jesus had one-on-one conversations with individuals to let them know that he *saw* them and that he *cared* about them. He drew them out with thought-provoking questions and tested their willingness to change. His powerful question to one man was, “Do you want to be healed?” What an interesting question to ask a crippled person. When the man described his personal desperation in detail, Jesus challenged him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” So, his Savior followed up a thought-provoking question with a *challenge to take action*. That’s a great example of a transformational conversation!

Like the lame man, we all have challenges in life, but it’s difficult for our ministers to know about those challenges when we are not forthcoming about them. Spirituality can be a very “personal thing”, so we may not openly share about our life struggles or our spiritual reality. It’s like a patient saying to his doctor, “No, actually I’m just fine.” So, it is a blessing that our church programs and ministries have always done the heavy lifting where discipleship of the masses is concerned, but it does make you wonder if the one-on-one approach often taken by Jesus is something we should find a way to incorporate into our discipleship efforts. Fortunately, there is recent, revealing research on this very subject.

The Reveal Study: The best objective research we have on attendees’ personal spiritual maturity and what they say they desire in their spiritual growth comes from large-scale studies done at Willow Creek Community Church and follow-up studies of *one-thousand additional churches*. This research showed that the more involvement a person has with church programs the more they also desire an individual “coach or mentor” to help them with personal spiritual development. Please note that respondents did not say that traditional church programs are unhelpful – they said they are looking for something that is more personal. Sadly, the study showed that a significant number of mature believers are actually thinking of leaving their church, because they’re not growing the way they would prefer to grow. More on this at: <http://www.christiancoachingcenter.org/index.php/russ-rainey/coachingchurch2/>

One reason pastors and church leaders find it difficult to help individuals with personal and spiritual challenges is that ***Satan uses guilt and shame with great success in our lives. People hardly ever share things that make them look bad.*** But, when a believer is experiencing personal challenges, a safe and confidential, well-trained person could engage them in transformational conversations that would help them deal with the challenges before things get worse. And better yet, this trained believer could help them set and achieve personal spiritual growth goals that might prevent future dysfunction. Lives, and churches, could benefit if we had a way to offer “***spiritual coaches or mentors***” to those who are ready and willing to receive this kind of one-on-one discipleship.

[The Reveal Study](#) makes it clear that: 1) believers who are **new** to the Christian journey need to be *taught the foundations of the faith* (which is what traditional church programs have always done best); but 2) more **mature** believers want the kind of *individual, confidential, growth-oriented relationship* provided by spiritual coaching. Two different kinds of learners at two different stages of growth who desire two different ways to learn and grow – kind of makes sense, doesn’t it?

What Challenges are Believers Actually Struggling with in Life and Spirituality?

The following statistics give us a deeply concerning view of believers’ day-to-day reality – things they are not likely to share in a Small Group or Bible Study at church, but things for which they badly need spiritual coaching.

➤ **Statistics on Christian Marriage & Divorce**

First of all, many people these days are not even bothering to get married. Consider this recent study:

According to a new report by the [National Center for Health Statistics](#), marriage in the United States of America has never been less popular. Today, in the U.S. there are only 6.5 weddings for every 1,000 people, the lowest rate since we started keeping records just after the Civil War, and this despite the fact that millennials, who are the biggest generation in American history, are in their peak marriage years right now. They are often leading lives incompatible with biblical spirituality, a life-long relationship, and the raising of healthy children.

Then, there is divorce. A little good news first:

Couples who regularly practice any combination of serious religious behaviors and attitudes (i.e., attending church weekly, reading the Bible and spiritual materials regularly, praying privately and together, generally taking their faith seriously) do have significantly lower divorce rates than the general public and unbelievers. But...

Professor Bradley Wright, a sociologist at the University of Connecticut, explains from his analysis of people who *identify as Christians but rarely attend church*, that 60% of these people have already been divorced. But get this: Of those who DO attend church regularly, 38% have been divorced. ([Fact Checker: Divorce Rate Among Christians](#)”, Glenn Stanton of Focus on the Family)

➤ **Statistics on Sexual Issues Men Struggle With**

Men who identify themselves as “born-again Christians” have serious struggles with pornography and affairs. This is destroying individuals, marriages, whole families, churches, and communities. ([Statistics from Charisma News – a study by Barna](#))

- 95% of these “born-again Christian” men admit they view pornography.
- 31% have had a sexual affair while married.
- 18% admit being *addicted to pornography*, and another 9% think they may be – that’s 27%, over one quarter of all Christian men, who are giving Satan a throne in their lives and their families. They may even be church leaders.

➤ **Statistics on Alcohol Abuse**

One of the leading causes of family dysfunction is the abuse of alcohol, and almost no one who abuses alcohol admits that it is a problem for him/her. Sadly, 24% of those who claim to be “born again” Christians get drunk, and if the rest of the family keep this secret, their lives will be made miserable as well. ([Statistics from https://www.pastoralcareinc.com/](https://www.pastoralcareinc.com/))

➤ **Statistics on the Abuse of Women**

Estimates published by [WHO \(World Health Organization\)](#) indicate that about 1 in 3 (30%) of women have been subjected to either physical and/or sexual partner violence. We also know that the most violent husbands in America are nominal evangelical Protestants who attend church infrequently. Their wives, on the other hand, may be very religious but they are secretive about the abuse due to shame, and they may not feel comfortable talking about it to friends at church.

➤ **Statistics on Church Attenders Stalled in Their Christian Growth**

[The Reveal Study](#) and its follow-up study divided church attendees into four groups based on levels of spiritual formation. The bottom half of the continuum includes: 1) those who are “**exploring Christianity**” and 2) those who are “**growing in Christ**”. The top half of the continuum includes: 3) those who are “**close to Christ**” and 4) those who are “**Christ-centered**.” Results compiled from 1000 churches showed that:

1. Over 25% of all church attenders surveyed were either “**stalled**” in spiritual growth (and would say “I haven’t grown much lately”) or were “**dissatisfied**” in their spiritual growth (and would say, “I’m trying to grow, but my church is somehow letting me down”).
2. Those in the “**stalled**” category have low levels of personal spiritual practices.
 - a. 16% of all church attenders fit this “stalled” description
 - b. 25% of the stalled persons are considering leaving the church
 - c. Those in this group acknowledge that they have “significant barriers to spiritual growth”
3. Those in the “**dissatisfied**” category are actually regular attenders who are involved with church programs.
 - a. 10% of all church attenders fit this description
 - b. These people are active volunteers, evangelists, and donors, but they are prone to leave the church
 - c. This mature group of believers were dissatisfied because their church did not “keep them on track” and help them lead a deeper Christian life
 - d. This group was disappointed the church did not help them find a “spiritual coach or mentor”

NOTE: The “stalled” plus the “dissatisfied” groups make up the **top 26% of our most influential church attenders**. So, more than one-quarter of our churches most faithful attenders are asking for more personal spiritual development, and they would be ideal candidates for discipleship-oriented, transformational conversations. ([Summary of: “What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth”, The Reveal Study](#))

- ❖ **Question:** How would the church benefit overall if the top 26% of its attenders were receiving one-on-one discipleship coaching and overcoming their difficult life challenges?

➤ **New Research on the “Greatest Needs of Pastors”**

A 2022 well-designed study by [Lifeway Research](#) asked 1000 Protestant pastors to identify their greatest needs as a pastor. Separated into four categories, the needs are:

- 1) making disciples
- 2) overcoming *personal* discouragement
- 3) practicing *personal* spirituality
- 4) improving *personal* self-care

Note: Three of the four categories above are related to the pastor’s personal life. Pastors are just people, and like all of us, they have a need to deal with their own issues in a safe, confidential manner. And it would help if they could do so with a Professional Coach, working in church ministry for over 20 years, who works with pastors and church leaders only.

Sadly, this research helps us understand why so many of our pastors are leaving the ministry each year. Ministry can be overwhelming, and every pastor would benefit from having a confidential “thinking partner” outside the church. (See: **11 Reasons Every Church Leader Needs a Coach** at: <https://www.vanderbloemen.com/blog/church-leader-coaching>)

Conclusion:

A list of the 18 spiritual gifts (<https://www.tyndale.com/>) mentioned in scripture reminds us that the majority of them (discernment, evangelism, exhortation, faith, healing, helps, hospitality, knowledge, mercy, serving, and wisdom) are gifts given to believers willing to step up to the task of the care and feeding of other Christians. We can enable them do this by providing training in spiritual coaching to go along with their spiritual gifting.

Before he ascended to The Father, Jesus gathered his disciples and said “Go make disciples!” Probably, they didn’t feel quite ready to do this. So, Jesus chose Peter, their leader, and had this kind of transformational conversation with him:

“Do you love me?” Jesus asked Peter. “Then feed my lambs.”

“Do you love me?” Jesus asked again. “Then take care of my sheep.”

“Do you love me?” Jesus asked the now frustrated Peter. “Then feed my sheep.”

Jesus asked simple, thought-provoking questions and then challenged Peter to take action. With some training, many believers can do this for others by offering them opportunities to have transformational conversations.

Important Questions and Propositions for Pastors and Church Leaders:

- Question:** In your church body, are there well-trained church leaders who *make time* to have individual discipleship relationships with those who are struggling with difficult life issues and spiritual formation?
My proposition: I offer *12 hours of training* in **Transformational Conversations** for *12 pastors/leaders* for a one-time \$1,440 investment. This requires the full support of the Lead Pastor to implement.
- Question:** Is there a trusted Professional Christian Coach available for your church pastors and leaders when they need a confidential “thinking partner” for life, spiritual growth, and church ministry issues?
My proposition: I offer on-call, Christ-centered, Pastor and Leader Coaching for \$100 per session. Churches I consult are now offering this as a “value-added” employee benefit for the ministers they rely on the most.

Pastor, it would be my privilege to consult with you on this offer. I live in Raleigh, NC, but I can work by video if preferred. In the Service of His Kingdom and Your Church,

Russ

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