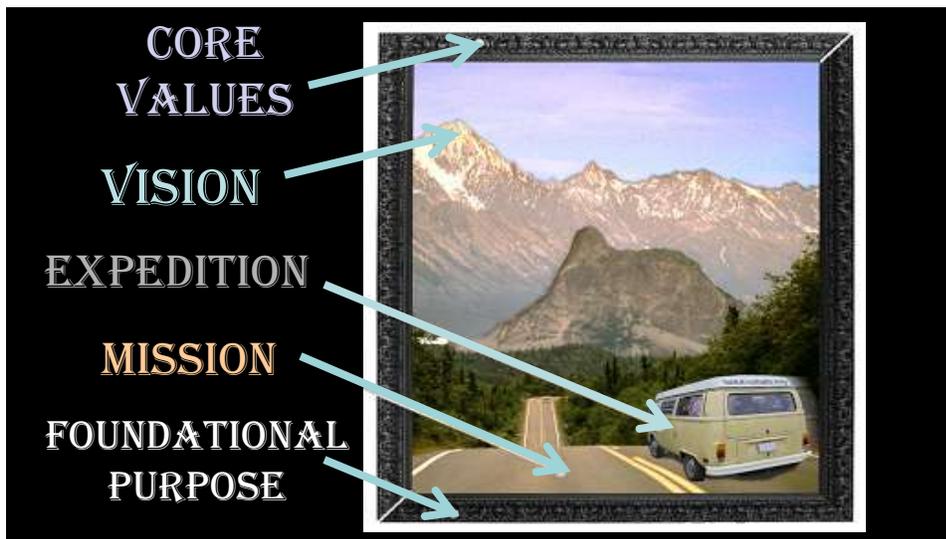


## iFocus...on Vision

### Introduction to Series

Today we begin a new seven-week series titled: *iFocus*. Are we going somewhere or are we just spinning our wheels? Together we are going to focus on who Knollwood is, where we are going, and how we're going to get there.

The image I want you to have in your mind during this series is a trip up to the mountain top. We are going to climb this mountain together.



At the top of this mountain is our *Vision*. This is a compelling and vivid picture of the future. It describes the view from the top of the figurative mountain we are climbing.

*Mission* is what we do in order to achieve our vision. It is the road we take to climb the mountain in our picture. That mission includes plans, strategies, and equipment necessary to progress towards the top.

*Core Values* are the frame around our adventure. They shape all we are going to do on the road to the top.

Our *Foundational Purpose* is the bottom-line reason why our church exists. It is also part of the frame, encompassing our journey. It is the ultimate “why” of what we do, and must govern all that we do.

Finally, I want you to see that it is an *Expedition*. It's not a lone hiker or biker. It's a van that we all pile into. This journey towards the vision is not just for the church corporately; it is also for each individual who joins us in the van.

So, this is the roadmap for the next seven weeks:

**Vision**: To see lives changed by Jesus Christ

**Mission**: Helping people grow into disciples of Jesus Christ

**Core Values**:

- 1) Passionate about Truth
- 2) Pursuit of Excellence
- 3) Committed to Grace
- 4) Involved in Community
- 5) Engaged in Ministry

The foundational purpose of our church, our lives, is the glory of God. All that we do needs to be to his glory, his honor, his praise.

This morning, we are going to explore our *Vision*. There are four aspects I want us to focus upon: Problem, Prescription, Process and Product. We are going to pretty much camp in Paul's letter to the Romans, so turn in your Bible to that New Testament book.

## **I. Problem**

What's the problem? Why do we need change? We need to think on two levels here. First, Paul goes to great length in the opening chapters of this book to describe the big problem.

Most of all, we need change because of sin. Paul concludes his explanation of the presence and universality of sin with these words – **Romans 3:22-23**.

Every one of us has fallen short of God's standard, and his standard is perfection. One of the words used in the Hebrew Scriptures for sin is a picture of an arrow falling short of its target. We have fallen short.

The consequence of sin is terminal – **Romans 6:23**. God judges every human being and declares them “guilty.” We all fall under the judgment and condemnation of a holy God.

But, God, in his mercy, does something amazing. The Eternal Son took upon himself human flesh, suffered and died in our place that God may be able to forgive and restore.

This is change on the macro level. It involves a change of direction on our part. This is what the Bible means by the word *repentance*. Repent-ance means to turn away from self and any other attempt to save yourself, and turn to God in faith, trusting in the finished work of Christ on your behalf.

Paul writes in chapter two:

Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? – *Romans 2:4*

When we turn to God through Christ, there is then a change in destiny.

Look at **Romans 5:8-11**.

Our eternal destiny is changed through Christ. Okay, that’s change at the foundation, change that makes all other change possible.

What about ongoing change? When we believe the gospel – the good news of salvation, and put our trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, God adopts us into his family as children; he places us into Christ, forgives our sins, promises eternal life, and places his Holy Spirit within us. One of the purposes of the indwelling Spirit is to bring about change in our lives.

You are born into God’s kingdom, but he does not intend nor desire for you to remain in diapers. A ten-year-old girl went with a group of family and friends to see the Christmas light displays at various locations throughout the city. At one church, they stopped and got out to look more closely at a beautifully done nativity scene. “Isn’t it beautiful?” said the little girl’s grandmother. “Look at all the animals, Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus.”

“Grandma,” replied the little girl, “It really is nice. But there is only one thing that bothers me. Isn’t the baby Jesus ever going to grow up? He’s the same size he was last year.”

This little girl saw with perception the reality of so many Christians. They have not changed from one year to the next.

The Apostle Peter ends his second New Testament letter with these words:

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
– *II Peter 3:18*

Paul writes in Ephesians four:

Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ. – *Ephesians 4:15*

This means change. Go on to Romans, chapter twelve. The world conspires against such change.

### **Romans 12:1-2a**

“Don’t be conformed to this world.” The word *conform* means:

To assume an outward appearance that does not come from within, nor accurately represents what is inside.

It carries with it the idea of masquerade. Kenneth Wuest writes:

Paul says, “Stop assuming an outward expression which is patterned after this world, an expression which does not come from, nor is representative of what you are in your inner being as a regenerated child of God.”

The Living Bible paraphrases it this way: “Don’t let the world squeeze you into its mold.” The “world” is a general term for the way this present age thinks and acts.

Paul says that God wants change in your life, not according to the world, but in accord with his will, change that is spiritual in nature. So, here’s the *Prescription*.

## II. Prescription

### Romans 12:2

To be changed in the spiritual realm is to experience transformation. The Greek word is: *metamorphoō* – “to be changed into another form.” We get our word “metamorphosis” from this. We see this process in nature in the change from the caterpillar into a butterfly.

*Metamorphoō* is change within – on the inside. Paul writes to the Corinthians:

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. – *II Corinthians 3:18*

The mirror is a symbol of the Written Word of God through which we see the Living Word of God. In this passage, as well as in Romans 12, the verb is in the present tense. It is an ongoing process. The change within, results in change without.

W.E. Vine, in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, defines transformation this way:

The obligation being to undergo a complete change, which under the power of God, will find expression in character and conduct.

Now, a word of caution. Transformation is not simply conforming outward actions to a standard with no inner change. We are not just talking about a cosmetic make-over on the outside. As well-meaning Christians, as churches, our tendency is to focus on the external, our behavior. Larry Crabb, in his book *Inside Out*, writes:

Churches tend to reward their members who more convincingly create the illusion of intactness by parading them as an example of what every Christian should be.

We do it as parents when we place the highest premium on external expectations with little concern over internal growth. We do it with ourselves as we measure the quality of our walk with God on the basis of what is happening externally, not internally. It is the danger of having Christ-like behavior without Christ-like character.

We often accomplish this by seeking conformity to a rigid dogmatism and legalism, which focuses on the external while neglecting the internal. Why do we do that? Because it is observable, controllable, manageable. So we get Christians who have become masters of appearance and image, but who struggle on the inside – lonely, in pain. The real issues are never dealt with. Crabb writes:

Perhaps much of what passes for spiritual maturity is maintained by a rigid denial of all that is happening beneath the surface of our lives. We simply rearrange rather than change! We focus on the external rather than the internal. We measure and evaluate what is going on on the outside rather than on the inside. But that is precisely where God wants to work!

It is an inside job that manifests itself on the outside – a change in character that produces a change in conduct. This leads then to the *Process*.

### **III. Process**

We should note, first of all, that the change God wants to make in your life is according to his eternal, divine plan. Paul states that in **Romans 8:28-29**.

Notice that Romans 8:28 doesn't say that all things are good. All things in life aren't good. There's a lot of bad in the world. It doesn't say that all things work out the way I want them to be good. It doesn't say that all things end good. It doesn't say all things have a happy ending here on earth. Some things end quite badly – humanly speaking.

It says that God works all things for good. This is the assurance that there is nothing that happens to you that God is not able to use for his ultimate purpose in your life – to conform you to the image of Christ. God works everything according to purpose. That means there are no “accidents” in God's plan.

There was a cowboy who applied for an insurance policy. The agent asked, “Have you ever had any accidents?” After reflecting for a moment, the cowboy responded, “Nope, but a bronco did kick in two of my ribs last summer. And a couple years ago, a rattlesnake bit me on my ankle.”

“Wouldn't you call those accidents?” asked the puzzled agent. “Naw,” the cowboy said, “They did it on purpose!”

God really does have a plan for your life – a plan that is rooted in and will be worked out according to his eternal purpose.

With the end in mind, then we can begin to see the process by which God is conforming us into the image of his Son, Jesus. It is not by God making robots of us by taking away our human will, temperament or personality. It is by working in our lives so that our character is more and more like Christ.

*The Screwtape Letters* is a delightful satire written by C.S. Lewis. It is a series of letters written by a senior demon (Screwtape) to his nephew, a junior demon, instructing him on the way to handle the “charge” assigned to him, a charge that he loses to “the Enemy” – that is, God. In one letter he writes:

One must face the fact that all the talk about His love for men, and His service being perfect freedom, is not (as one would gladly believe) mere propaganda, but an appalling truth. He really does want to fill the universe with a lot of loathsome little replicas of Himself – creatures whose life, on its miniature scale, will be qualitatively like His own, not because He has absorbed them but because their wills freely conform to His. – *The Screwtape Letters*

When we come into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, he begins his work in us – this process the Bible calls *transformation*.

Look again at **Romans 12:2**.

The primary arena in which transformation occurs is a renewed mind. W.E. Vine says of “renewing” that it is:

The adjustment of the moral and spiritual vision and thinking to the mind of God, which is designed to have a transforming effect upon the life.

Every one of us has a belief system comprised of core values. The renewing of our minds takes place at this level of our core values – in our belief systems – in the way we understand and interpret facts and truths. Until we change at this level of our being, we are not going to have profound change in character. It begins in the mind.

As a man thinks within himself, so is he. – *Proverbs 23:7*

Behavior grows out of our thought life. The old, well-known verse goes like this:

Sow a thought, reap an act; Sow an act, reap a habit; Sow a habit, reap character.

This is the arena in which the truth of God through the Word of God by the Spirit of God must penetrate and shape our thinking.

This process of transformation is a partnership of the individual believer and God. Paul writes about this joint effort in his letter to the Philippians.

...Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. – *Philippians 2:12-13*

This means that we have a role to play in the change God wants to produce in our lives. But our efforts are always in the context of and encompassed by God's working through his Spirit to bring about such change. Paul writes to Timothy:

Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. – *I Timothy 4:7-8*

So, our vision is to see people's lives changed by Jesus Christ. It will be through the process of transformation as believers are renewed in mind through the power of the Holy Spirit. It means we set out minds to know God, to understand his will for our lives, and then to commit our wills to his through joyful obedience.

If change is happening, what does it look like? How will change be evident in your life?

#### **IV. Product**

Go back to Romans 12 again. After talking about God gifting each believer for service, he turns his attention to practical guidance on the effects of transformation in our lives. These are some of the things that will be evident in outward conduct because of inward change.

#### **Romans 12:9-21**

Is your conduct increasingly lining up with these things? Another measurement of spiritual change within which leads to change without is the fruit of the Spirit. Paul writes to the Galatians and says:

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.  
– *Galatians 5:22-23*

If your life is being changed, what does that look like within your family, at home, in your character and conduct? Are you more loving, seeking the best for others? Are you more patient with others? Are you more kind towards others, even those who rub you the wrong way? Do you find that you can control your emotions and actions in a way that reflects the way God would want you to respond to people and situation? This is where the proverbial “rubber meets the road” test comes into focus.

So, how do these things become more real in your life? What’s the journey that will lead to change? It’s the journey of discipleship – of becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ. That’s the focus for next week.