

LAZARUS, COME FORTH!
SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION FOR ORDINARY PEOPLE

1. Introduction.

2. I am Lazarus: Finding yourself in the story.

John 11.1: “Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany...”

We are all soul-sick and in need of transformation, of renewal. Transformation does not come from earning love. It comes from being loved.

Only Jesus can offer us the life we long for.

The story of Lazarus is the story of the Christian life.

Q: What are you living with that you wish you could change about yourself?

3. The lingering Jesus: Waiting for His presence.

John 11.6: “when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was.”

Sometimes Jesus doesn't come when we need Him the most.

Waiting for Jesus to arrive is part of the process of transformation.

Transformation involves working through our disappointments & disillusionments in life.

We have hope in our transformation when we realize that we see today, while God sees eternity.

Q: How has God disappointed you, let you down, failed to meet your expectations?

When has he not "been there" for you?

How did you feel? Do you still feel that way?

4. Trapped in the tomb: When life comes to a dead end.

John 11.17: “So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days.”

The tombs of our lives—the dark places of failure and pain—are where transformation begins.

People often fail to recognize the reality of tombs.
Enter our own tombs helps us face our need for God.
God uses the tombs of our lives to reveal His true identity.

Q: Can you identify a time you were in the tomb? Are you in one now?
How do you typically avoid difficulties in life (that is, how do you self-medicate or avoid reality)?

5. The voice of love: Hearing your Savior call you by name.

John 11.43: “ He cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come forth!’”

In the story of Lazarus we learn three of the most important words of the spiritual life.

Our lives change when we realize that God loves us as persons more than He loves the whole world.

Only love transforms.

Q: What are the three most important words for you?

6. The stench of transformation: The messy realities of spiritual change.

John 11.39: “Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days.”

Sometimes, transformation stinks.

Many people don't know this and so they wittingly or unwittingly reject the person in the midst of transformation.

Real transformation happens when we expose the stench of our sins and shame to God.

Even when others turn away, Jesus stays with us.

Q: How badly do you smell?

What stench in particular can you not stand, in yourself or in others?

7. Stepping toward life: choosing to stumble out of darkness.

John 11:43: “The dead man came out.”

Transformation is a step-by-step journey.

Sometimes stepping into light is unsettling because it is new.

Transformation is more about ordinary stumbling than dramatic moments.

The most important thing is to be moving toward Jesus.

Q: Are you moving toward Christ?

Who is trying to stop your progress, to put you back in the tomb?

What is it about the tomb that is calling you back?

8. Naming the grave clothes: recognizing the things that bind you.

John 11:44: “The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.”

When we emerged from the tomb, we still wear the outer reality of what is left to be transformed.

Naming what is holding us back from Jesus will help us take steps toward him.

Many Christians struggle with self rejection, fear, guilt, blame and shame, and disappointment. Only God can help us lighten the load of those grave clothes.

Q (not for open discussion): Can you identify your grave-clothes?

9. Removing the grave clothes: embracing the help of a loving community.

John 11:43: “Jesus said, ‘take off the grave clothes and let him go’.”

We need others to help us in the process of transformation.

We cannot expect community to give what only Jesus can give.

Yet, Jesus did not do what community is created to do.

A transformational community is a resurrected community.

Q: Can you remember a time when someone helped you take off your grave clothes?

How about a time when you helped someone else with theirs?

Is there someone in the church who can help you today with the grave clothes you still have?

10. Living in the light: the power of your transformation.

John 12:1: “Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived.”

A transformed life is a life of intimacy with Jesus.

A transformed life is a life of gratitude and generosity.

A transformed life is a life of danger.

A transformed life is a life of influence.

11. The Lazarus life: experiencing transformation for a lifetime.

John 11:25: “Jesus said, ‘I am the resurrection and the life’.”

Takeaway question: Is the life you’re living the life you want to live?