

Transformational Leadership



Transformational leadership. What do you think of when you hear the words . . . the term . . . *transformational leadership*. When I first heard it I thought . . . church leadership. General Superintendents. District Superintendents. Pastors. Board Members. Vision casters. Missions leaders. Kingdom workers. Disciples. Certain and specific people.



Transformational leadership. It has been defined as *a leadership approach that causes change in individuals and social systems. In its ideal form, it creates valuable and positive change in the followers with the end goal of developing followers into leaders.*

What? I think I need a definition for the definition!

Transformational leadership. It is *a style of leadership where a leader works with subordinates to identify needed change, creating a vision to guide the change through inspiration, and executing the change in tandem with committed members of a group.*

What? Same response! I think I need a definition of the definition for the definition!

These definitions seem to imply that there are leaders who have a dream or a goal and who get other people to buy into that dream or goal and they all work towards seeing that dream or goal met. People at the top working with people in the middle to change things at the bottom. I don't think that's the way that the church should operate.

In fact, the more I think about it, the more I begin to think that if transformational leadership is *a style of leadership where a leader works with subordinates to identify needed change, creating a vision to guide the change through inspiration, and executing the change* then we should not embrace it – we should avoid it! A leader. With subordinates. That's not the church.

Transformational Leadership



Unless . . . hold it . . . unless *the church itself* works under Jesus who is the leader, and fulfills His call to change the world. That could work. That should work. It's not specific leadership-type individuals that are supposed to be transformational . . . *all* of the church and all of her members need to be transformational. We all need to be difference-makers. The individual whole – the collective – transforming our world.

I can see that. We *did* see that. At the beginning.



Think back. Chaz Robbins writes that *The vulnerability of children in the Roman world started well before the children even took their first breath. While still in the womb, children faced their very first threat of existence: abortion. Abortion became a common solution to unplanned pregnancy after promiscuous sex, the inability to financially care for a child, or avoid splitting up the family inheritance.*

Here my limited French comes into play: *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. The more things change, the more they stay the same. What year – what century – are we living in, anyway?

Abortion became a common solution to unplanned pregnancy after promiscuous sex, the inability to financially care for a child, or avoid splitting up the family inheritance. Infanticide was also a common practice in the ancient world, endorsed by the likes of Plato and Aristotle. Seneca also considered the drowning of children at birth as a commonplace solution to take care of the unwanted birth.

The accepted practices of infanticide and abortion left the Christians of the ancient world with an incredible opportunity to advocate for a third option with unwanted pregnancies. [Remembering the Orphans] David Nowell points out that third option when he says that the orphan had only three possibilities in life: death, slavery, or Christian adoption [Dirty Faith] Orphans had only three possibilities in life. Christians had two options: ignorance or involvement. Or maybe complicity or compassionate activity.

What to do? James wrote Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world [James 1:17] The people not only heard the words of the apostles, they acted on them. Rescuing the abandoned children. Adopting the unwanted children. Being difference makers. Transforming their world.



Think back. Women were . . . well, they were chattel. Owned. When they reached marriageable age they had two options: to be married with manū, which meant she belonged to her husband, or without manū, in which she still belonged to her father and could inherit wealth for him or be repossessed by him. Roman women were expected to raise children, serve their husbands, and perform duties that slaves did. Without complaint.



Men . . . well, men had wives and concubines and mistresses. And despite Paul being labelled a misogynist, he was the one who spoke of equality: There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. [Galatians 3:28]

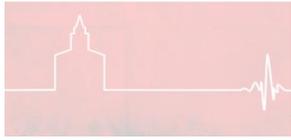
It was the Christian church that spoke for women. That spoke for the importance of commitment in a marriage – for one man committed to one woman for life – and against the ease of divorce which destroyed families.



Interestingly, in its early days the church was reviled and mocked for encouraging people to live by high moral standards . . . but the world changed – was transformed – because the church stood firm for these standards – standards based on God's love. And through the years hospitals were opened, slavery ended, education made available for all [not just for the rich], women were educated and encouraged to be individuals, outsiders and the marginalized cared for as the church led for change.

The Christians heard the words of James and John and acted. They heard the words of Jesus and lived like the sheep following the Good Shepherd, not realizing that they were doing anything special: When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?' Then the King will say, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me – you did it to me.' [Matthew 25:38-40]

How are we doing today? What do people see when they look at us today? What Jesus do people see when they look at us today?



We're invisible – or barely visible – to some people. Willingly invisible. Gladly invisible. A shadow, at best. We've taken Paul's words – *make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you* [1 Thessalonians 4:11] – to heart. We think *I'll do my thing; you do your thing; we'll ignore each other and we'll all get along*. We don't get too involved with people outside our own family or church circles. Call it *self-quarantine*.

That way we don't upset or annoy anyone. But we certainly don't make a difference.

Or in our invisibility we become swallowed by the culture around us. Instead of us making a difference in our culture, our culture makes a difference in us as individuals. In our attitudes. In our actions. We become – let's use the term *contaminated* – contaminated by our culture. Instead of inoculating our culture from what is wrong we ourselves have been contaminated by what is wrong. Instead of being change agents we are *changed* agents.

There is not much difference seen in the lives of those who are part of the church and those who are not; between the saints and the not-so-saintly. The divorce rate is the same between those who call themselves Christian and those who don't. Pornography usage is the same between those who call themselves Christian and those who don't. The church – we – used to speak out on social issues that affect people; now we are affected ourselves! Who is transforming whom?



On the other hand, some people see us as *overly* visible. We the church want to make a difference in our world, and we are going to make a difference to our world whether they like it or not! Some of our leaders – some who call themselves our leaders – some who are loud enough to make people think that they are our leaders – have been wielding a big stick with them and have been using it indiscriminately.

When something goes wrong in the world – or in their North American world – they say that it is God visiting His wrath on the population and that people had better turn to Him – *or else!* They say that what is needed is a return to God. That we need to once again be a Christian nation with a Christian leader [yes, even in Canada there are some calling for this] – and I think that they are looking in the mirror when they are looking *for* that leader! That we need to be a theocracy with godly God-fearing leadership and Christian morality [I can never figure out what and whose morality . . . Baptist? Catholic? Nazarene?].

And if it isn't going to be a leader who is righteous, we'll find a leader who seems religious. Such as Donald Trump, that paragon of virtue. And for Ontario: Doug Ford.

This is from Thursday's newspaper: *On the sprawling stage of Toronto's Prayer Palace mega-church, Doug Ford stood solemnly as Pastor Paul Melnichuk blessed him and his bid to be Ontario Progressive Conservative leader. "I'm sensing a deep and profound anointing," Melnichuk told his flock. Might I remind them that the Lord God told the people of Israel that they didn't need a king because they had Him and that man is bound to fail them . . . and might I suggest that we don't need a religious political messiah because that man or woman is bound to fail us?*

I can hear the chants. I can see the placards. *Make Ontario Christian again! Make Canada Christian again*



Someone needs to remind them that we can't legislate morality. But we can make a difference. We can be part of our society and we can bring about change. As theologian Richard Niebuhr says, Christ is the transformer of culture. And we are the means of bringing change about.



With that as an introduction we come to a difficult question: how? How do we transform our land? How do we transform our neighbourhood? How do we transform our culture? Turn to Matthew 13:33 with me. This is the shortest parable that Jesus told. And it has our answer.

Matthew 13:33

The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.

Matthew 13:33 says [this, the New King James translation] *The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.* The modern translation: *God's kingdom is like yeast that a woman works into the dough for dozens of loaves of barley bread – and waits while the dough rises.* [THE MESSAGE]

I'm not a cook. Or a baker. But I know that the parable describes what happens when a woman -- sorry, when a *person* – adds leaven (old, fermented dough usually containing lactobacillus and yeast) to a large quantity of flour (here, about 8½ gallons or 38 litres).



The living organisms in the leaven grow overnight, so that by morning the entire quantity of dough has been affected. You mix the dough, you add the yeast, you leave the small lump overnight, and it grows as the yeast works its way through the dough.

I also know that yeast can lose its effectiveness. Fridays used to be our family pizza night. We would make individual pizzas. We'd have the toppings out . . . cheese and olives [ugh] and mushrooms [ugh] and pepperoni [ah] . . . and *I* would make the crust. From scratch. Believe it or not!

Easy enough to do if you have the recipe in front of you. Water and flour and salt and sugar and yeast. Mix them together. Let it rise a bit. Roll it out. Voila – pizza dough!



One day the dough didn't rise. It just . . . sat there. We wound up making those pizzas but they were terrible! Tasty toppings on cardboard crust. I couldn't figure out what had happened. Until we looked at the best before date of the yeast. It was a year past that date. No wonder it didn't rise!

We can be like good yeast or we can be like bad yeast. Good – active – yeast yields good results. Bad yeast yields bad results. We need to be active if we are going to make a difference – if we are going to be transforming agents in our world. If we are going to lead in the changes that are rapidly taking place.



They [I'm never sure who *they* are] say that the church is usually about twenty years behind the times [one Italian Cardinal said that the Catholic Church is "200 years behind" the times!]. We used to be leaders. Leaders in compassion. Leaders in mercy. Leaders in love. Now we react to the things that are going on around us. We are reactionary followers instead of being thought-provoking leaders.

Earth Day. Climate change. I'm no tree-hugger as you know, but think that every Christian should be an environmentalist. After all, this is God's creation, and we should be taking care of it and being an example to others in doing so. Instead it's grumbling about carbon tax [hey, I don't like it either!]. Reactionary.

International Women's Day. Feminism [which isn't what it once was] was originally a Christian idea. It was on "the basis of Christian thought" that 19th-century suffragette Elizabeth Cady Stanton "pushed forward the notion that women were created equal" . . . and again, there's that verse in Galatians that *there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus* [Galatians 3:28] again. But what do we hear? Grumbling about a woman that isn't the Queen on the new ten dollar bill. Reactionary.

I could go on. We shouldn't have to be dragged kicking and screaming to do what is right. We shouldn't automatically complain about and react against events going on in the world before we even sit down and think about what we are saying and doing . . . and then realize how far behind we are. We are called to lead, not to follow. To lead with care and compassion and love and mercy and grace.

Wouldn't it be great if people complained about what we were doing because we were making a positive difference in our world? Listen to this: it's from Acts 17. Pay attention to the reason for the complaint.

[Paul and Silas] took the road south . . . to Thessalonica, where there was a community of Jews. Paul went to their meeting place, as he usually did when he came to a town, and for three Sabbaths running he preached to them from the Scriptures. He opened up the texts so they understood what they'd been reading all their lives: that the Messiah absolutely had to be put to death and raised from the dead – there were no other options – and that "this Jesus I'm introducing you to is that Messiah."

Some of them were won over and joined ranks with Paul and Silas, among them a great many God-fearing Greeks and a considerable number of women from the aristocracy. But the hard-line Jews became furious over the conversions. Mad with jealousy, they rounded up a bunch of brawlers off the streets and soon had an ugly mob terrorizing the city as they hunted down Paul and Silas. They broke into Jason's house, thinking that Paul and Silas were there. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too". [Acts 17:1-6]

When was the last time you or I were charged with *turning the world upside-down*? When was the last time that you or I really made a difference in our world, in our culture . . . in our neighbourhoods? When was the last time we stood up against injustice? And why haven't we? Are we that afraid of what people might think of us?

William Faulkner challenges us: *Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed, he said. Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world...would do this, it would change the earth.*

Transformational leadership comes from transformational leaders. Transformational leaders are people who have been transformed themselves. That should be you and me. That *is* you and me.

These who have turned
the world upside down
have come here too.
(Luce 1994)

What are you doing
to turn YOUR world
upside down?

And so now, the final question: how are we doing? How are *you* doing? How am *I* doing? God forgive us for being bad or unused agents of change for Him in this world.