

Spiritual Formation

SPEAKER	Leigh Adams
DATE	Sunday, October 20, 2024
PASSAGES	Philippians 1; Hebrews 12; Romans 1; Luke 4; Isaiah 61; 2 Corinthians 5; Romans 12; James 5
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:56:45 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Spiritual transformation is God’s idea, not ours — he designed us to run on him and promised to finish what he started. But he is not a violator. He waits for our consent to enter the deep places, and the healing he does there is usually slow, relational, and formational rather than instant.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Transformation is God’s design and God’s initiative — Philippians 1:6 puts the beginning and the completion of the work on him, not on us.
- ◆ We can attend church faithfully for years without ever inviting Jesus into our pain. Mental assent is not the same as an open heart.
- ◆ The pattern of deformation runs in a line: the heart gets wounded, the mind believes lies, the affections turn to idols, and we end up addicted and stuck.
- ◆ Addiction, in Leigh’s working definition, is simply doing the same thing again and again without forward progress — and the relief it gives is a Band-Aid on the cancer of the soul.
- ◆ Left alone, a wound stops being something that happened to us and becomes who we think we are.
- ◆ Instant healing is real, but making it the only category overpromises and leaves people disillusioned. Formational healing over time is the biblical norm — see Peter.
- ◆ Isaiah 61 does not stop at comfort. The healed are called oaks of righteousness who rebuild ancient ruins, so the restoration is never only about the individual.

- ◆ The three questions to carry out the door: are you connected, have you given him your consent, and are you confessing?

► 0:56:45

Leigh Adams stepped away from the podium — she can't see over it — and preached her first Sunday morning message at Hope Chapel to a thin room, most of the men being away at the retreat. She has been part of this church for twenty-two years and now co-directs community life with Sarah Combs. She chose, for a first sermon, not a light subject: the deep waters of the heart.

Transformation is God's idea, and he set the pace

► 1:00:34

God built the dependence into us. Leigh borrowed C. S. Lewis's picture of a car: it runs on gasoline, and if you fill it with vegetable oil it breaks down. "We're meant to run on God, and that's how we run well." The breakdown that follows from running on anything else is exactly where she wanted to spend the morning.

"And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

PHILIPPIANS 1:6 ↗

And yet the same Bible tells us to run. [Hebrews 12:1–2](#) lays aside every weight and runs the race set before us with endurance. God sets the path; we still have to run it. There is a partnership here, and Leigh spent the rest of the message on where it breaks down.

Joy or bitterness, and not much in between

► 1:04:03

At twenty she heard a story she has never let go of. A young pastor's wife, volunteering at an assisted living facility, was told by a woman in her eighties: tell those girls to stop spending so much time on their outsides. "Look around in here — no matter what we've done on our outsides, everyone in here is eighty." But on the inside, the older woman said, we are quite different. On the inside there is either joy or bitterness, and there is not a lot in between.

Leigh was careful with it — humans are complex, it is not a formula — but the story surfaced a face. A family member she had been terrified of as a child, a woman who wore bitterness and unforgiveness like a cloak, whose wounds gave her permission to be hateful to nearly everyone. On her deathbed that woman had an encounter with Jesus, and Leigh hopes she is in glory. “I see her life as a very beautiful way to die” — the thief on the cross, essentially. But Scripture offers another way to *live*.

► 1:08:14

Which is where the warning lands: we can shut the door. “He is so kind, and he will never violate or force his way in.” Unhappy, joyless Christians exist, and everyone outside these doors knows it. “We can do a lot of Christianity without having a deep, life-altering relationship with him. We can even white-knuckle our way out of a lot of sin — until we can’t.”

Romans 1 as a picture of deformation

► 1:09:45

Leigh read Romans 1:21–25 as a warning aimed at people who already knew God — which is what makes it usable here rather than merely about someone else.

“For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

ROMANS 1:21 ↗

Before anyone hears an angry, excommunicating God in the phrase “God gave them up,” Leigh headed it off: he is loving, just, holy, and he made us with free will. “He is not a violator. If people want to walk into impurity, eventually God will let them, because they want to.” The exchange in verse 25 — truth for a lie, creature for Creator — is the hinge. That is deformation rather than formation.

How it actually plays out

► 1:12:49

Borrowing language from pastor Jon Tyson, and ideas familiar from Dallas Willard and John Eldredge, Leigh laid the sequence out plainly.

The heart gets wounded. Lost relationships, disappointments, the promotion that didn’t come, family of origin, toxic relationships. “Every single human heart has been wounded by sin. Some of us are better at hiding it than others, but don’t be fooled — everyone around you is carrying wounds.” She

named Hope Chapel's own last few years, when loss and grief have been the congregation's companions.

The mind believes lies. *I'm alone. No one comes through for me. I don't have what it takes. He's never there when you need him.* Lies find their beginning in a wound, and they get held for years.

► 1:14:54

The affections turn to idols. Leigh was gentle here and included herself. For Christians who love God, this is rarely stiff-necked rebellion. "Most of us turn away not because we don't want God — we're just looking for a little bit of help. We're looking for relief in the places of our pain." The hard day, the door, the food, the Netflix, the second glass of wine. Not all of it sinful in itself; all of it capable of numbing a spirit.

And then addiction, and then stuck. Her definition is broad on purpose: "doing the same thing again and again without forward progress." The relief is real and it lasts until tomorrow. "These things are like putting a Band-Aid on the cancer of our souls." From the stuck place we take on an identity built out of a wound and start living from sin and shame — and, without meaning to, we get toxic to the people around us. Just like her relative.

Jesus announced himself as the plan

► 1:18:38

In Nazareth, Jesus took the scroll of Isaiah and read a prophecy spoken more than five hundred years earlier, then told the room it was fulfilled as they listened.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

LUKE 4:18-19 ↗

Leigh guarded the point immediately. Hope Chapel steers away from a just-me-and-Jesus gospel, because a Jesus who exists to make you happy is a genie, not a savior. Each of us is one part of the body, and he came to save nations.

► 1:20:53

His hearers knew the rest of Isaiah 61 by heart — comfort for all who mourn, a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit.

“It begins at the head and comes down, clothing the whole person in his healing.” And then the prophecy says why:

“...that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified. They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.”

ISAIAH 61:3–4 ↗

The original hearers were exiles home from Babylon with hearts formed by slavery and cities in rubble; both had to be rebuilt. Healed people rebuild. And the one doing the healing is the one in whom all things hold together — which surely includes us.

Two kinds of miracle

► 1:23:46

Leigh sorted the healings in Scripture into two categories, insisting both are miraculous. The first is instant: demons out, blind eyes open, twenty years of trauma recovery done in a moment. Her example is the woman at the well, who came alone in the heat of the day because five marriages had made her unwelcome in the cool of the morning, and who left as, in Leigh’s phrase, the world’s first great evangelist. “Something inside of her was so transformed that the message of Jesus became a reality for others.”

She is glad for that kind and has received it herself. But she refused to make it the formula: “If we think it’s the only way that God heals, we can easily overpromise and very much underdeliver.” And when Jesus healed that way in Scripture, the context is usually bigger than the individual — a moment when his power was meant to be seen.

► 1:26:46

The second kind — formational healing — is slow, steady change in one direction, and it is by far the norm. Peter is the case study. Three years of putting his foot in his mouth, a new name that did not fix him, a denial, a return to fishing, an encounter with the risen Lord, then insecurity showing up again in comparing himself to John. Pentecost, the great sermon, and still a public rebuke from Paul later for shrinking back. “Over time Peter learned to trust who Jesus was, and it changed him.” He is counted among the faithful and gave his life for the Lord.

Leigh admitted formational healing feels more vulnerable: God is radically committed to changing us, and we have no control over the timing. “He doesn’t give us a formula, because I’m sure if he gave me a

list I would go about it in my own human effort, trying to check it all off. Instead of giving us a formula, he offers himself in relationship.”

Not passive, and not a checklist

► 1:29:57

If Christ does the transforming, do we sit still? By no means. We get tripped up, she said, by being accidental about spiritual growth in a way we would never be about training for a marathon.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17 ↗

Too familiar, she thought, to be heard properly. The new creation belongs to the end of the age, and Paul’s claim is that it is available now — hope from the future, righteousness from the future. “We can live from our future in the unseen kingdom to come, and not from our past.”

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”

ROMANS 12:1–2 ↗

Present the body — the work, the inside and the outside, all of it. Leigh noted with obvious delight that brain science has only lately caught up: new neural pathways, rewiring, all of it discovered in the last couple of decades. “But Paul told us that a long time ago.” Point by point, the old identity is replaced: where there were wounds, he binds up the brokenhearted; where there were lies, the truth sets us free; where there were idols, we worship the Creator; where there were addictions, he opens the prison doors.

Three questions

► 1:35:48

Connection. Outside of Bible study and corporate worship — which are good and should continue — how is the one-on-one? “Are you taking time in your life to let all the dust settle and just be with him?” She asked whether anyone had ever asked God how he feels about them. He is crazy about you. She is

building a mentorship program and believes in counseling, has done a lot of it: “But if they are not pointing us to the one who can heal, it is a Band-Aid.”

► 1:38:29

Consent. The stretch of the three C’s, and the heart of the message: *God, I give you my whole self, with full permission to heal the deep places.* Advice lands differently when you asked for it. Posture yourself before the Father as though everything he has to say is living water — an oasis in a desert where you are dying — and Scripture reads like a personal letter. “No longer dutiful servants, but friends.”

► 1:40:46

Confession, and not only of sin. First, confessing who God is — Leigh said it changes her every week when Matt closes the service by landing the room on Jesus: the world needs a savior, and you’re not it. Second, confessing what God has done: Israel was told to remember the exodus, and Passover is still kept thousands of years later. Third, speaking God’s word over a life where lies have been believed — “it reminds me of how small my story is and how large and epic God’s story is.” And finally, repentance for where we have been chasing relief outside God’s design.

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”

JAMES 5:16 ↗

“I truly believe it’s in that hidden place, in the darkness, when we leave things in the darkness — that’s where we get stuck.” [Ephesians 5:8](#) says we were once darkness and are now light in the Lord. Confession sounds frightening if it isn’t practiced, and yet holiness is a relief. Coming into the light is healing.

Leigh closed by handing the room back to God rather than to herself, inviting the Heart Ministry team forward and asking everyone to sit for a few minutes with one question: *Lord, what are you saying to me?*

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [Philippians 1:6](#)
- [Hebrews 12:1–2](#)
- [Romans 1:21–25](#)
- [Romans 1:21](#)
- [Luke 4:18–19](#)
- [Isaiah 61](#)
- [Isaiah 61:3–4](#)
- [Colossians 1:17](#)
- [John 4:7–30](#)
- [2 Corinthians 5:17](#)
- [Romans 12:1–2](#)
- [John 8:32](#)
- [James 5:16](#)
- [Ephesians 5:8](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. The older woman in the story said that on the inside there is either joy or bitterness. Where do you see each of those forming in you right now?
2. Trace the sequence for yourself — wound, lie, idol, addiction. Which step is easiest for you to name, and which one do you tend to skip past?
3. Leigh described turning to relief rather than to restoration. What do you reach for at the end of a hard day, and what is it standing in for?
4. Have you ever given God explicit consent to work in a deep place? What has kept you from it, or what happened when you did?
5. Of the three C's — connection, consent, confession — which one is God asking you to act on this week, and what would that look like on Tuesday?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Leigh Adams is Hope Chapel's Community Life Director. She graduated from Texas State University and has been at Hope since 2002. She and her husband Felipe have three children. Leigh is passionate about seeing people grow into deeply devoted followers of Jesus — supporting small group leaders, mentors and families, and leading Hope 101, the dinner for newcomers.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnRdbLTFNFM&t=3405s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.