



Week One | Small Group Guide



Why Transform?

Where have you seen God at work this week?

Where would you like to see Him at work?

What about the transformation of a person, place or thing is appealing?

Just for Fun! Since our theme is Transform, each week we will have a special sidebar for TRANSFORMER Fans:

According to Facebook “31,966,850 people like this” from Facebook page for the Transformer Bumble Bee movie released Christmas of 2018. With that much attention, why not have some fun and ask?

If you are into Transformers, which Autobot character would you like to be?

Which Decepticon can you, at times, most be like?

What advantages does transformation provide for one or two of your favorite characters?

The theme verses for our Transform series come from Isaiah 43. Keep in mind the storyline of God’s relationship with the people of Israel: The nation began as God’s chosen people when God chose Abraham and his wife Sarah to be the parents (progenitors) of Israel in the 2000’s BC. Over the centuries, the relationship between God and His people has had numerous ups and downs. Isaiah 43 was written in the 600’s BC at one of the “down” times. Isaiah offers hope to the nation while very difficult circumstances.



The Circumstances of Transformation

Read Isaiah 43:14 – 17

This is what the Lord says—your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:

*For your sakes I will send an army against Babylon,
forcing the Babylonians to flee in those ships they are so proud of.*

*I am the Lord, your Holy One,
Israel's Creator and King.*

*I am the Lord, who opened a way through the waters,
making a dry path through the sea.*

*I called forth the mighty army of Egypt
with all its chariots and horses.*

*I drew them beneath the waves, and they drowned,
their lives snuffed out like a smoldering candlewick.” (NLT).*

In the passage above, we are joining the nation of Israel in the middle of their own story of transformation. God is speaking, through His prophet, to His people living in exile in a land called Babylon. God chose the nation of Israel to be His own. Early in their history, God instructed His people, “You must not have any other god but me. You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image...” (Exodus 20:3-4a NLT). God also instructed His people, “And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5 NLT).

However, as the decades and centuries passed, many of the leaders of Israel and many of its people did not love God with all their heart, soul and might. Again, and again, they turned to false gods and to idols, instead of God. The worship of false gods and the worship of idols (idolatry) meant they gave higher priority to and put their hopes in something other than the Lord God (Yahweh). God chose Israel to be His own, to love them and to bless them, but He hated their idolatry. As Isaiah speaks in these passages, the people have been exiled, removed from the promised land – think modern day Israel. Through the circumstances of exile, God sought to transform the nation by renewing her faith and reestablishing His allegiances with her. We see the twin purposes of God as work, truth and grace or justice and love.

God uses crisis. The truth is that God has every right to allow or cause crisis to correct either Israel or us. Through faith, the hard experiences help us see or understand that there must be a better way. These kinds of circumstances guide our faith development and transformation. Crisis brings us to our knees and reminds us to go to God: we need Him to redeem us, we need Him to heal us, and we need Him to fight for us. Crisis or hard times show us our limitations and inadequacies. Proverbs 3:12 says, “The Lord corrects those he loves.” (NLT) and He disciplines those he loves (Hebrews 12:6). Sometimes love chooses or allows a hard path.

God loves people. The truth also is that God loves us and desires our transformation. In Isaiah 43, we see God making a promise to His people that for their sakes, He will send an army to fight against their oppressors. However, so that His people do not put their hope in this army



(remember this people was prone to putting hope in things other than God), He reminds them who He is and what He has done. As with Jesus Christ, love makes a way.

Section 1 Discussion Questions

1. Choices have consequences. Besides “because they were human,” why do you think Israel had so much trouble consistently choosing to “not have any other gods before Him” (Ex. 20: 3) or to “love the LORD God with heart, mind, soul and strength?” (Deut. 6:5).
2. Put yourself in the shoes or sandals of the Israelites, you are not where you want to be, and now these words of hope come. What would you have heard Isaiah saying to you?
3. How do you see crisis and love working in your life?

The Strategy of Transformation

In Isaiah 43:14-17, first, God reminds His people of who He is. He is “your Redeemer” – “The Holy One” – “The Lord” – “your Holy One” – “The Creator” – “your King.” And He reminds them of what He did for them in the past, in delivering them and setting them free from slavery in Egypt. (This is the story of Exodus.) The Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the strategy of transformation.

Let’s connect the dots from this prophecy in Isaiah to those that have put faith in Jesus. Israel’s deliverance from the slavery of Egypt and being returned from exile are pictures of the hope of our deliverance, and being set free from the slavery of sin or captivity. Have you believed and trusted Jesus? Then you have been delivered; you have been set free. In this freedom you can discover who you are and your purpose.

As we consider our relationship with the Lord Jesus, let’s ask ourselves some questions: Are our lives consistently marked by freedom? Or are they sometimes, perhaps too often marked by idolatry, failure and oppression? We have been set free, but are there any parts of our lives that continue in exile?

Is your home life marked by sadness or joy? Does the work of your hands bring trouble or blessing? Is your thought life polluted or pure? Are your finances a source of burden or peace? Is your spiritual life an obligation or generally producing kingdom fruit?

If the answer to any of these questions leans more toward the first option, then there are parts of your life that continue in exile, and like the people of Israel in Babylon, these areas of your life need transformation. The good news is that our God is a God of transformation. And His plan of transformation is very similar to the plan He had for Israel in the days of Isaiah.


4. Every verse in Isaiah 43:14-17 begins with “I” and includes either a name or characteristic of God, or a previous Israel-benefitting action done by the LORD. Which of these descriptions impacts you the most?

5. How do you describe your life?

Is it marked more by the word phrase on the left or right?	-2 often	-1 some	0 combo	+1 some	+2 often
chaotic /too busy or planned/reasonably paced?					
failure or success?					
sadness or joy?					
polluted thought life or pure thought life?					
financial burden or financial peace?					
obligations or producing Kingdom fruit?					
work to pay the bills or work as a place of mission?					
strained relationships or supportive ones? (may need to think about just one or two of the most important ones)					
fear or trust					
anger /frustration or at peace/calmness					
indifference or commitment					

Read Isaiah 43:18-19a:

“But forget all that—
it is nothing compared to what I am going to do.
For I am about to do something new.
See, I have already begun! Do you not see it?” (NLT)



Here we see a sudden shift from the past to the future. God says, “forget all that.” The New American Standard Bible (NASB) translates this, “Do not call to mind the former things, or ponder the former things.” God’s message here is very clear. “Remember Me, forget the things of the past. Don’t get lost in the nostalgia of how I worked in the past, I am about to do something new – and if you are always remembering and thinking about the good old days, you will miss it. And you don’t want to miss what I am about to do. Oh, and by the way, I have already started working on it, and let me tell you, it’s going to be good!”

Paul offers similar words, forget and look forward, in Philippians 3:12-14 (NLT):

I don’t mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus is calling us.

While we can’t ignore the past, we can’t live there either. We are to learn from our experiences; and yet, Isaiah’s challenge and Paul’s instructions are so similar, “Forget the past and look forward.” This concept is so important that Paul says, “because I have not yet achieved full transformation (perfection), and because I want to achieve it very much, I am going to make this my one focus.” That is pretty intense! God wants all who follow Him to adopt this same mindset in their pursuit of Him. Pursue Me. Pursue not just the next thing, but the new life with God as King and Jesus as Lord. God wants every person at White River Christian Church right now to say, I am going to forget what is behind me and as I live out the rest of my days – in my relationship with God, in my family, in my church, and in my community – I will make being transformed in and through Christ the one thing I do, my one focus!

Section 2 Discussion Questions

6. Which one of the items listed in question 5 (the grid) would you like to move from the left to the right? Why?
7. What are one or two steps you could take to move this to the right?
8. Which aspects of your life relationships do you need to forget or leave in the past, so that God can have the freedom to do something new?
9. How does the promise that He is doing something new encourage you?



The Bringer of Transformation

Read Isaiah 43:19b-20 (NLT)

"I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland. The wild animals in the fields will thank me, the jackals and owls, too, for giving them water in the desert.

Yes, I will make rivers in the dry wasteland so my chosen people can be refreshed.

I have made Israel for myself, and they will someday honor me before the whole world."

We cannot transform ourselves, not in spiritual matters. Here the prophecy speaks of transformation in nature, as a metaphor for how God will transform us. He says, "I will make a pathway" and "I will create." God is speaking to a people living in the most powerful kingdom of the time. Even though the people are in exile and are under the oppression of Babylon, they were not living in the wilderness or in the desert. Why does God speak of nature then?

The wilderness and the desert represent where the people of Israel were in their relationship to God. We know that God sent them into exile because of their many idolatries. Those that put their hope in idols rather than God are like a dry wasteland, a desert.

Notice the promise for the people in "the wilderness" is different than the promise for the people in "the desert." The promise to those in the wilderness is, "I will make a pathway." When you find yourself in a wilderness, you naturally start working on creating a way out, a pathway. When God leads us into a wilderness, He wants us to remember Him to keep our focus on Him. He will make a new pathway, and He wants us to walk in that pathway.

Not every person who lived in Babylonian exile was an idolater. Remember Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and Esther? They lived during the exile and they chose to hope in God. These five people, all risked everything: their food, their safety and their position. They even faced death to stay true to God. People such as these during the exile were described as living in "the wilderness."

For those in the desert, God speaks of water three times and this water will give refreshing. A desert is not a good place to find yourself in your relationship with God, but if we are all honest, there are times when our walk with Him feels dry, like a barren wasteland. And from this place, it can be hard to really believe that God will send refreshing. This is why He repeats Himself. He knows our hearts are discouraged. When we are in a desert, He knows we have lost hope in Him and we have begun hoping in things other than Him. And like the people of Israel, He is calling to those that find themselves in a desert. "Remember Me! Forget the things of the past! I am about to do something new. Look, I have already begun! For those in the wilderness, I am making a pathway. For those in the desert, I am sending refreshing."

Section 3 Discussion Question

10. Are you in a season of life that is best described as a wilderness, a desert, or being refreshed by the river? Why?



Why Transform?

Read Isaiah 43:21

*I have made Israel for myself,
and they will someday honor me before the whole world.*

This one sentence answers the question “why transform?” God made Israel for His glory. Do whatever it takes to honor God and bring Him glory. That is why we have been created. Why transform? Because God is working for our good, for His glory, so that as many as possible might be saved and challenged to live out their commission to make disciples who make disciples, which is for their good for His glory.

Section 4 Discussion Questions

11. What new thing would you like the Lord God to do in your life? One way to discern this is through prayer and reflection, and through seeking input from others.
12. Think about question five again and ask someone in the group to help you think through and work on that need.

*At the end of each week’s session, please take a few moments and fill out the brief, but important, [survey](#) on the **WRCC app or website**. We encourage your participation in this survey about our beliefs, practices and values as it will help in planning future small group materials. Printed copies are available.*

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