



## Week Seven | Small Group Guide



# Transform Our Future

**Review:** Have each person share their 60-90 story from week six. Take a moment and pray for each person after they share.

## Week 7

**Opening:** We wrap up this Transform sermon and study series by focusing on Transform Our Future. With Isaiah 43 as the backdrop throughout this series, we have promoted the theme that God is up to something new. Can you see it? During this series, several people have shared stories of being transformed. Some have been captured on video and will be shared in the next several months. Have you seen movement in your life from an area of difficulty or struggle to hope or transformation?

**Overview:** Throughout the study series, we have seen that God is up to something new. Over and over in the history of Israel, He doesn't give up on Israel but finds a new way to lead them from slavery to freedom, from exile back to their homeland, from idolatry to worshipping Him. The New Testament shows us how God does another new, fresh, miraculous way, which He planned from long ago, to redeem and transform us. This "something new" comes in the form of Jesus Christ. Jesus leads us from slavery to sin to freedom, from death to life. As we will see in this study, God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is still up to something new for us — knowing heaven is our home, He transforms our future. Celebrate this scripture passage as you read.

### TRANSFORMER Fans:

Transformer films illustrate conflict between the preferred future of the AutoBots and the Decepticons.

Which of the movies has the best story line about this difference of preferred futures?

When preferences are in conflict, the transformers transform to their "best" selves to fight.

Which Transformer character's transformation is the most interesting or impressive to you?


## Transform Our Future

*Read Isaiah 43:18-19*

*"Forget the former things;  
do not dwell on the past.*

*<sup>19</sup> See, I am doing a new thing!*

*Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?  
I am making a way in the wilderness  
and streams in the wasteland.*



Our forward-looking, future-oriented God wants us to live for Him and through Him in our present circumstances for our good and His glory. He loves to take our current circumstances and do new things that only He can do. Since He holds our future in His hands, our current reality will never be our future reality. Can you see that He is up to something new?

As we have read in Isaiah 43, God spoke to people in the Babylonian exile through Isaiah. He also spoke through the prophet Jeremiah who told them they would be in exile for 70 years. While in exile, they should build homes, plant vineyards, marry and have families. While they were discouraged and just wanted to go home, Jeremiah, speaking for God, said after these 70 years, "I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again. For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me."(Jeremiah 29:10-13 NLT).

God's plans for those He calls His own are for good, not for disaster. They are plans that give a future and hope. Proverbs 3:5-6 teach us God will lead us to take paths toward the future He has planned for us.

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart;  
do not depend on your own understanding.  
Seek his will in all you do,  
and he will show you which path to take. (NLT).*

When we apply what we have learned in our transform journey, we might write the above verses as follows, "With a Christ-transformed heart and mind, do not be afraid. Instead, commit all your ways to the Lord, and do not rely on your former way of thinking. Lean on Him and trust Him and be confident in Him as He directs your paths to the future He has planned for you."

## **Section 1 - Discussion Questions**

1. Do you have a clear view of your future? What do the notes in the first section tell you about God's interest in your future?
2. What do you think God is up to in your life? What hopes or expectations do you think He has for you?
3. What do you think God is up to at White River Christian Church?

## Something Amazingly New

Read: Revelation 7:9-10

<sup>9</sup>After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,<sup>10</sup> and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"<sup>11</sup> And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living beings. And they fell before the throne with their faces to the ground and worshiped God.<sup>12</sup> They sang,

"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom  
and thanksgiving and honor  
and power and strength belong to our God  
forever and ever! Amen."

<sup>13</sup> Then one of the twenty-four elders asked me, "Who are these who are clothed in white? Where did they come from?"

<sup>14</sup> And I said to him, "Sir, you are the one who knows."


Then he said to me, "These are the ones who died in the great tribulation. They have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and made them white..."

Watch this YouTube video of Cochren and Co "One Day..." This song shares the hope of something new one day! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljUzTMTgSEc>

Without question, the book of Revelation is one of the most difficult books of the Bible to interpret, but it is also one of the most theologically rich. In this passage, the writer, John, has a vision. An exciting vision. A vision of triumph and victory and hope. John can "see" the future as if it were in an IMAX movie theatre with Dolby surround sound. John's triumphant language bursts off the page as he sees a "great multitude" of Christians from *every nation* standing before Jesus.

Let's follow this *every nation* theme briefly through the Bible.

Remember, the famous promise that God made to Abraham, "I will make you a *great nation*...and *all* the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:2-3). Maybe you remember after Jesus ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit came down on the people from *all nations* (Acts 2:5). And now God's promise is completely being fulfilled in John's heavenly vision of faithful Christians from *every nation* in verse 9.



God's plan to reconcile humanity to Himself has happened! The white robes representing victory attire and the palm branches representing military triumph highlight John's message. Do you remember the palm branches the people used when welcoming Jesus's triumphal entry in John 12? It's like that! In this case it is the faithful Christians AND angels praising God. The plan is complete. Heaven is the destination. Wow! This is really something new!

## Discussion Questions

1. What makes an impression on you from this vision of heaven and the throne room of God?
2. How do you feel about it taking God 2100 years to keep His promise to Abraham to make him a great nation?

Victory, but at what cost. Let's not get ahead of ourselves. The type of victory John sees looks nothing like the kind of victory that most of us have come to know. In America, victory often means one thing ... winning. Winning a basketball game, a political debate, or even a game of euchre with the family. The kind of victory John is talking about is greater than winning even a world war — it is a total and eternal triumph. The triumphal scene describes what victory will cost some believers.

*Right after the "Amen" in the short hymn of praise in verse 12, John continues:*

<sup>13</sup> *Then one of the twenty-four elders asked me, "Who are these who are clothed in white? Where did they come from?"*

<sup>14</sup> *And I said to him, "Sir, you are the one who knows."*

*Then he said to me, "These are the ones who died in the great tribulation..."*

Great tribulation? What? That is certainly not what we are expecting. It is easy to think that God is our helper. He helps us succeed, win, triumph and have victory. He blesses us! It is also easy to think that if we are going through a trial or tribulation that somehow God has forgotten us, or He does not want to bless us, or we have "fallen out of favor." John's message doesn't agree with that perspective. Many of the people John is talking about are martyrs — an army of martyrs. These people experienced victory not because of the absence of trials; they experienced victory BECAUSE of the trials, tribulation and persecution. In God's economy, victory is not about winning; victory is about suffering — just like Jesus. Victory is perseverance. It is keeping and deepening faith and trust in the midst of situations that don't make logical sense.

Suffering brings victory. Maybe an individual close to you has broken your heart, lied to you, or abandoned you. Could the suffering that comes through an act of genuine forgiveness bring you victory and new life? Maybe a close relative is physically or emotionally sick and not doing well. Could the suffering of sitting alongside and holding the loved-one's hand release you from focusing on yourself just long enough to bring a new perspective, a little life? Maybe you are tyrannized by wanting what you don't have or wanting to be someone you are not. Could the victory come through the suffering/grieving of letting go of getting your way? Maybe you are aware of believers in other parts of the world who face persecution and death only because they are Christian. Could victory come through your disciplined and diligent intercessory prayer and fasting for their perseverance?

John brings a message of good news. In God's economy, in God's way of doing things, suffering brings victory that transforms your life and gives us hope and a future!

### Discussion Questions:

1. What do you take away from this passage?
2. Why do you think we have to endure this kind of suffering?
3. Can you think of a time when you or someone else experienced a time of suffering or trials and God did something new transforming apparent defeat into victory?
4. Do you realize that brothers and sisters in Christ are still being persecuted and martyred throughout the world in both Muslim-dominated and Communist countries? In heaven, we will worship with these brothers and sisters, why not

Grishma (her eyes are covered to protect her identity) came to faith in Christ in 2016 after some teenage friends invited her to church (in Nepal). She had never known who her father was, and her stepfather abused her. When he learned that she had become a Christian, he beat her and threatened to stop paying her school fees. Then, when Grishma continued going to church, he kicked her out of the house. Desperate for money, Grishma took a job as a dancer, where she suffered further abuse. She also stopped going to church. After nearly three years, however, she remembered the peace she had found in Jesus and decided to return to church. When her employer found out, he fired her. Today, Grishma is studying at a discipleship training school. "She wants to follow Jesus throughout her whole life," one of her pastors said, "and she wants to work for a ministry and serve Him." Thank God for Grishma's faithfulness, and pray for her next steps.



<https://www.icommittoprayer.com/request/1995/grishma>


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Check out **Voice of the Martyrs**

<https://www.persecution.com/>

for more ways to pray and support Christians around the world. Or, Open Doors

<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/>



start a relationship now. Check out these websites →



*PART 2: Revelation 7:11-12*


*<sup>11</sup>And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, <sup>12</sup>saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." (NLT).*

The angels are standing around God's throne. John sees it. It's crystal clear. But John doesn't just "see it," he is actually inside the heavenly throne room. Can you imagine? John is in the same room as God! Before we get too far into this, let's step back a minute. The idea of being in the same room as God has quite a history. It all started in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve live in God's presence, in God's house, His temple, at least for a while.

God desires to live with His creation even after He kicks Adam and Eve out of Eden because of sin. He continues to pursue life with us outside the Garden. Harrison Ford in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* mesmerized many of us as we considered the idea that God lived with His people in the Ark of the Covenant. Well, not really *in* the Ark, but more likely, floating above the Ark. Nonetheless, the God of the universe was hanging out with His people. A little later, God lives with His people in the Jerusalem Temple. At this time, God resides with His people inside the deepest part of the Temple called the Holy of Holies. God absolutely loves living with, tabernacling with, hanging out with, and being in relationship with His creation.

God's desire to be with His people doesn't stop with the Temple. In fact, His plan of being *with* His people is just getting started. God's presence shows up in a most miraculous way by actually living with us in flesh and blood. God walked around with us! "The Word became flesh and dwelt (tabernacled) among us" (John 1:14). After Jesus is raised from the dead and ascends to heaven, God decides to hang out with us again. His tabernacling presence descends upon believers by actually indwelling us! God Himself, in the form of the Holy Spirit, lives within each and every one of His followers. It is hard to imagine having a relationship any closer or any more intimate than that. And now, finally, John, in this Revelation vision, sees the final manifestation of God's presence: John himself is with God Himself. Humanity started in the Garden with God, and humanity's final destination is in the throne room with God. No wonder they fell down on their faces and worshiped God!

Is this how you think of God? Do you think of God as your Creator who just absolutely longs to be with you, hang out with you, tabernacle with you, and dwell in you? N. T. Wright states, "Learning to think of *this* God (this tabernacling God) when we hear the word 'God,' rather than instantly thinking of a faceless heavenly bureaucrat or a violent celestial bully, is one of the most important ways in which we are to wake up from the nightmare and embrace the reality of God's true day." Can you imagine waking up every morning with a God like that?



Years ago, I asked a mentor about what it looked like to live with God. He explained that he viewed it like a playground when he was a child. Every morning he gets up and God says, “Let’s play on the swings.” And he and God would swing on the swings or slide down a slide or play on the teeter totter. “It is not that we do nothing,” my friend explained, “it is that we do life together.” God will transform each of our futures. Futures that are destined to live in God’s presence within His amazing throne room. However, right now we get to experience a glimpse of that future every day on the playground *with* God.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. How does this view of heaven create optimism and hope?
2. What does it mean for you to live life *with* God?
3. How does this differ than living FOR God, UNDER God, AGAINST God,
4. How does this glorious view of heaven give you hope for today and transform your view of your future?

In these past weeks, we have talked about Why Transform? Transform Our Hearts, Our Trust, Our Mindsets, Our Fears, Our Commitments and Our Futures. If you woke up every day living every minute knowing God is not just next to you, but He is *with* and *within* you, how does that change or challenge your perspective? How has or could this new perspective renew your mind and bring something new to your life everyday?

Stay with us on this Transform journey through Easter of 2022 and see how we transform a life, a church and a community.

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