



*Steve Diehl*

I have ministered to youth and adults for over forty years, serving as pastor of Walnut Creek Friends Church for twenty of those years. I hold a bachelor's degree in biology from California State University Hayward. I have memorized over 135 chapters of the Bible, including most of the books of the New Testament. As founder of Forgiveness Ministries, I travel extensively giving seminars on forgiveness, and I have written the book *Developing a Lifestyle of Forgiveness*. I am also the host/teacher for the *Focus on Forgiveness* radio program. My wife, Becky, and I have been married since 1980 and have six children. We live in Concord, California.

*BIBLE READING: Romans 8:28; 12:2 (NASB)*

Many presentations of the gospel begin with the question, “Do you know where you are going after you die?” The gospel is then presented as the way a person can live in heaven instead of hell. I call this a gospel of location. This kind of gospel turns evangelists into real estate agents, and it is not the gospel presented in the New Testament. The real questions people need to confront are: “What kind of person do you want to be forever? Do you want to stay the way you are or allow God to transform you into the character likeness of Jesus Christ?”

God’s purpose in salvation is to reunite us with God in his love—love that naturally conforms us to the image of Jesus. This transformation is no small undertaking. It is a lifelong process that is as dramatic and miraculous as metamorphosis—the transforming of a caterpillar into a butterfly or a tadpole into a frog! And it is a process that requires our cooperation, which is why the apostle Paul states in Philippians 2:12-13, “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”

How do we do this? Over the next six days we are going to look at the six activities of life transformation—how to become more like Jesus. If we compare the human soul to a computer, each activity has a corresponding computer analogy that may help you to better see how God transforms a human soul into the likeness of Jesus Christ. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

*SONG: Change My Heart, Oh God (Eddie Espinosa)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, I want to become just like Jesus. Please make me so. Amen.*

—Steve Diehl

*BIBLE READING: John 8:31-32*

God's eternal purpose has been to create human beings in his own image, after his own likeness. The invasion of sin into humanity did not change God's original purpose, but it did drastically alter the process at great cost to God and to us. Among other things, sin damages the human soul: its ability to see truth, choose love, and feel good. How does God *save* (transform) a human soul? If we think of the soul as being like a computer, then one of the things God must do is install better software.

Truth is to the soul like software is to a computer. Computers cannot function well, as they were designed to function, without the right software. The human soul cannot function well, as God designed the soul to function, without truth. Satan has been downloading and installing bad software into the world and into our souls. Jesus said that Satan is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). Lies are bad software.

Since the information in our souls is integrated together, lies are not merely isolated bits of misinformation; they are viruses that disrupt the proper function of the entire soul. They bring us into bondage to sin. This is why Jesus said that truth, the truth that we know, will set us free.

If we really want God to transform us into the likeness of Jesus then we need to expose ourselves to (download) and assimilate (install) truth (better software). All truth transforms, but the most important truths are in the Bible.

*SONG: Breathe (Marie Barnett)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, thank you for the Truth you are and have given to me. Please move me to actively download and install more of your truth into my soul. Amen.*

—Steve Diehl

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 18:21-23, 32-35*

When Peter asked Jesus “how many times” do I *have to* forgive someone who sins against me, it revealed that Peter did not really know *why* he needed to forgive. Jesus perceived this about Peter and gave an answer that focused on the *why* of forgiveness.

Jesus told a story about a man who had been forgiven an incomprehensible financial debt, but did not forgive a significant debt (one hundred days’ wages). In the end of the story the man who did not forgive was thrown into prison to be tortured. Then Jesus said this is what his Father would do to us when we do not forgive. Wow! What does this mean?

First, let’s remember that this is a story designed to answer the real question Peter asked, “Why do I have to forgive?” Second, the story is a picture. Pieces of the story *represent* other things. If we remember that sins always damage everything they touch, including the human soul, we will be on the right track. Injuries, whether physical or causing damage to the soul, always have two general symptoms: pain and restricted freedom. Torturers cause pain. Prisons restrict freedoms. Sins cause damage to the soul resulting in pain and limited freedom. Jesus is saying that one of the main purposes of practicing forgiveness (receiving it from God, forgiving others, asking others to forgive us) is so that God can heal our soul.

If our soul were a computer, practicing forgiveness is how God fixes the damaged hardware of our soul. And Jesus told Peter that without forgiveness the soul stays broken. Even the best software cannot work in a broken computer.

*SONG: At the Cross (Randy Butler and Terry Butler)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, teach me to practice real forgiveness so you can heal me. Amen.*

—Steve Diehl

*BIBLE READING: Ephesians 6:10-18*

If we think of the human soul as being like a computer, and assimilating truth like installing better software, and practicing forgiveness the way God fixes damaged hardware, where would demons be in this picture? When I ask this in seminars people quickly yell out, “viruses.” But no, viruses are bad software. Demons are fallen angels, spiritual persons. Demons are like “hackers.” Demons are always trying to break into the system to disrupt good processes, steal valuable information (Matthew 13:18-19), and install bad software.

Peter says that Satan is like a “roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Demons are also like leeches, not necessarily deadly in themselves, but they carry deadly diseases. Leeches live in swamps. If you don’t want leeches, stay out of the swamp. Sins are like swamps in which demons thrive. This is why it is always good to “evict” the workers of Satan whenever you confess a sin or forgive someone. Practicing forgiveness removes the reason why a demon can influence you, but demons sometimes need to be evicted.

We do not fear demons because Jesus’ powerful name has defeated them, and that name gives us power over evil. But demons are like unwanted visitors in your house. Repent and confess your sins to God. Receive his forgiveness and evict out loud the workers of Satan. Forgive the people who sin against you and by the authority of Jesus command the demons to leave. “The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

*SONG: Victory in Jesus*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Heavenly Father, thank you for your victory over Satan through Jesus! May I live fully in your authority and freedom. Amen.*

—Steve Diehl

*BIBLE READING: Isaiah 6:1-8*

If God were to bring you into his heavenly throne room to see him face-to-face and to hear his voice, how long do you think you would need to be there to be in some way permanently changed? A week? A day? An hour? How about a few seconds? I think you'd agree that it would be much closer to just a few seconds; just long enough for you to realize who you were looking at and that it was all real! Having a personal experience with God transforms the human soul. In our computer analogy, experiencing God is how God uniquely "customizes" us according to his desire.

Sometimes God just shows up in our lives unexpectedly, as he did with Moses in the burning bush. However, most of the time God is waiting for us to show up. He wants to meet with us. He wants us to experience him, but we are too busy, or distracted, or disinterested, or...

I believe God has established about two dozen special activities that we can do together with him whereby we can experience him. Historically these are called the spiritual disciplines. You know what I mean: prayer, Scripture, service, worship, silence, solitude, giving, fasting, etc. I call these "dating locations." I date my wife Becky so we can experience each other. Of course we can experience God anytime and anyplace if we look for him, but it is as if God is saying to us, "If you want to know me, experience me, then come to these places and I will be there waiting for you." And perhaps it is because each dating location allows us to experience God in a different way.

*SONG: I Want to Know You (Brian Doerksen and Cindy Rethmeier)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, how can I experience you today?*

—Steve Diehl

*BIBLE READING: Ephesians 4:15-20*

I vividly remember the day I became a thief. I was in sixth grade and we had just moved to Yardley, Pennsylvania. I was new to the school. I was lonely. I was desperate for friends. Some of my new schoolmates and I were in a small convenience store when one of them said, “Hey, let’s steal some candy.” I was terrified, but as I said, I was desperate. I stole several packs of Razzles that day and became a thief. However, I didn’t become a thief by walking out of the store with candy in my pockets. I became a thief the moment I decided to steal. My choice changed my soul, changed my life.

Paul warns us to be very careful what we choose because our choices change who we are. This life-transformation activity may be compared to wise Internet connections in the computer world. You know that you must not open every email you receive because many of them are designed to destroy your computer or steal something from you. In addition, you know that you must not go to just any website for the same reason. The Internet is filled with dangerous connection points. So is the world.

Be careful what you decide to do. Our choices change who we are, for the worse and for the better. Perhaps the best example of a choice for good is choosing to surrender our lives to Jesus. This starts the whole life-transforming process! But little choices are important, too. Make smart, wise choices. Make protective choices.

*SONG: Cry of My Heart (Terry Butler)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Heavenly Father, please give me wisdom to make the best choices today and every day. Amen.*

—Steve Diehl

*BIBLE READING: Hebrews 10:23-25*

The mobility of laptop computers is wonderful! However, that mobility can lead to some poor decisions. A couple of my children wanted to take their computers to the beach. They had no idea how beach sand, salt and moisture in the air, the blazing sun, and seagulls would adversely affect their sensitive machines. To function well, computers must be maintained in environments away from destructive elements, including Starbucks coffee! The same is true for the human soul. God created the soul to function best in Christ-nurturing environments.

When a soul remains unhealed through a lack of practicing forgiveness, when it is jammed up with lies and distortions, when it is being influenced by demons, when it is being starved of personal experiences with God, and when its character is being eroded by poor choices, then that soul is going to suffer, even if it has been redeemed and recovered by Jesus Christ. If we really want to let God transform us into the likeness of Jesus then, as Paul said, we need to “press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called [us]” (Philippians 3:14).

We need to create nurturing environments. Poor eating, neglecting exercise, and inadequate sleep; letting our minds dwell on worthless, worldly things; complaining, focusing on the negative, and forgetting to give thanks; not fellowshiping with others who also want to become like Jesus—all these can hinder our transformation. God has given us the power to create nurturing environments. Let us make the most of it.

*SONG: Jesus at the Center (Israel Houghton, Adam Ranney, and Micah Massey)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, please show me how to build nurturing environments into my life.*

—Steve Diehl