



*Whole Life Transformation:  
Becoming the Change Your  
Church Needs*

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## Are You Home Yet?

One day I came home early. I had piles of work on my desk in the church office but had promised myself and my wife, Cheri, I would spend some “quality time” with my six-year-old son, Kyle. Quality time for Kyle sometimes meant watching cartoons with him, and today that was just what I needed—some vegetative TV watching. I plopped myself down next to him on the couch, joining him in his cartoon reverie.

And then I noticed that I was really tired. But not just physically; I was tired of ministry and the kind of life it seemed to require of me. I was preaching, teaching and creating programs about living the Christian life and getting to heaven, but I was living in what seemed like a kind of hell on earth.

I had grown up a pastor’s kid, and time spent at church or in ministry activities often edged out time at home. I was now modeling to my family what I had been shown as the right way to serve the church and God. Consequently, Cheri and I were having arguments about how I was spending my time. Too many nights out each week, long hours and preoccupation with ministry were not what she had signed up for when saying “I do.” Looking back on it now I can see that I was pursuing a twisted idea of success, not in the secular forms I regularly preached against but in the sanctified activism and workaholism often seen in professional ministry. A growing church, defined mostly by higher attendance at church services, more and more programs, and bigger budgets and buildings, was the mark of a successful ministry in the clergy circles I ran with. I was not alone in this pursuit or the harried kind of life it seemed to require.

More often than not, at denominational conferences the conversation would soon turn to church attendance figures or building programs. A subtle form of ambition seemed just below the surface of our desire to grow our ministries. Although uneasy with the practice, I often found myself comparing my age and the size of my congregation with my father’s at the same age. At age thirty my father had one thousand at worship. I had five hundred. I lose—both at ministry and family.

So on that day while vegging out with little Kyle at my side, a jolting question broke the drone of the TV.

Without even looking at me he asked, “Dad, are you home yet?”

His question hit me as strange and surprising. Home yet? What did he mean? Hadn’t I been sitting there with him for at least twenty minutes, watching his favorite cartoon?

# CUT

## BOOK EXCERPT



Keith D. Meyer

*“I didn’t start out with noble ideas of becoming some kind of a saint. I just wanted to have my family back.”*

I didn’t quite know how to answer his question. It reminded me of my wife’s complaints of how absent or distant I had been to her. His question shined a searchlight on what I had excused as my spiritual duty. The life I was living was deformed and driven. I was standing at the center of an orbit that was spinning out of control and about to split in a million directions, fueled by just as many good intentions.

About this time a friend suggested I read Dallas Willard’s *Spirit of the Disciplines*. The book helped me see things in the Bible in such a different light that I began to hope for a different kind of life. I read that life in Christ was more than just being forgiven of sin; it was having power over sin and a new kind of life, one rich in relationships. Christ’s commandments, which call us to the reality of a life not ruled by anger, contempt, worry, lust and the isolation these produce, were meant to be obeyed so that we could live like Jesus and love others as he did. And freedom from these sinful attitudes and behaviors could actually become the atmosphere of our lives rather than occasional whiffs of an existence found only in the afterlife. Willard also claimed that the process of becoming like Jesus is not to be a “pose or by a constant and grinding effort, but with ease and power,” which he called the “easy yoke” or way of Jesus.

Dallas Willard not only thought change was possible, he said it might even be easier on the soul and body than disobedience, or as Scripture puts it, Jesus’ commands are not burdensome, and the life Jesus offers is a “winning” one that others will desire when they see it in us. This is what God actually intends and is planning on, the fact that *we* would become the change needed in our churches. We pastors and leaders are his program, “the program” he wanted for whole life transformation in his church.

I didn’t start out with noble ideas of becoming some kind of a saint (my family and coworkers will assure you—I don’t ever need to worry about that). I just wanted to have my family back. The process of putting *The Spirit of the Disciplines* into practice is my story of whole life transformation—a change in me that was needed first before I could partner with God for any kind of change in my church. It sparked my imagination. I now understood not only what a truly transformed person would look like but also how a marriage, friendships, a church, the body of Christ in a city, and eventually, in God’s time, a whole world could be transformed.

Having tried and tested this new kind of life and having met others who have experienced the same, I have come to believe that God is calling the church to recover the life that is ours in Christ, a life that the Holy Spirit keeps on breathing into the church.

—adapted from the introduction