Hi,

Today’s updates:

* My 3pm Monday class on Matthew and my 12:00 noon Tuesday class on Genesis will meet this week, both [on my personal Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/scottengle).
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.
* I’ve been told that my YouTube page/channel can be hard to find. A simple solution would be to [go to the link (here)](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChtwqaUcpZbwyTWnkp6INwQ?view_as=subscriber) and then bookmark the page or subscribe to my channel. Also -- all the “covid” Sunday classes since March are on the YouTube page, not the Vimeo page we used when we were meeting in person (the archived videos are all still there, going back a number of years). One of these days, I’ll figure out how to also post the Sunday “covid” videos on Vimeo. . . . one day. ;)

The pandemic, the murder of George Floyd, the protests, the violence and looting . . . it all leaves us hungering for change and true transformation. For us all to become the people God hopes we will be. And it is “transformation” that is the key word here. Paul speaks of being transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:1-2).

Are you the person you hoped you would be? The disciple? The father? The mother? The husband? The wife? The son? The daughter? The friend? The citizen? Are you leading the life you’ve always wanted? Or better, the life God wants for you? . . . I think many of us would have to say “no” to much of this.

At the heart of Christianity lies this transformation, this renewing of our entire selves so that we might each become the unique person that God created. Hence, Soren Kierkegaard’s insightful prayer, “And now Lord, with your help I will become myself.” The Christian life, the life lived before God, is less about doing the right things than it is *becoming the right person*.

When Moses walked over to the burning bush, he didn’t have a clue who God had created him to be. When God revealed Moses’ startling mission, all Moses could see were the problems and his own inadequacies. Yet, God promised Moses that he could be more and do more than he had ever imagined – for the Lord God would be with him (Exodus 3:12).

It is easy to sell this transformation short, to see it as some sort of impossible task. But all things are possible with God. Consider Zacchaeus:

**Luke 19:1-10 (NRSV)**

**He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.” Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. 10For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”**

Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector, every bit as much an outcast as a blind beggar, and more hated and despised. Already contemptible in the eyes of his fellow Jews, Zacchaeus subjects himself to further ridicule. This little tax collector runs to catch a glimpse of Jesus even though it was most unseemly for a Jewish man to run. Zacchaeus also climbs a tree; something else unbecoming for a grown man. Perhaps because Zacchaeus has made such a spectacle of himself, Jesus spots him in the tree and, as was his custom, he goes to Zacchaeus’ home. In fact, Jesus invites himself.

Can you imagine the joy Zacchaeus must have felt as he welcomed Jesus? Of course, the townsfolk didn’t much like Jesus entering the home of the hated tax collector, but Jesus always seemed to hang around with the wrong sorts of people. Having invited himself into Zacchaeus’ home, what happens next will be Jesus’ miracle.

Zacchaeus asks nothing of Jesus, not even a question. He simply steps forward and, without prompting, commits to giving half of his ill-gotten possessions to the poor – not all, but half. Then, in keeping with the most stringent interpretation of the ancient Judaic law, Zacchaeus promises that he will repay four-fold those he has defrauded. Zacchaeus’ repentance and generosity demonstrate that he is a “son of Abraham.” He was lost, but now is found.

Notice that Jesus does not ask Zacchaeus to give up all he has. Nor does it seem that Zacchaeus abandoned his life to follow Jesus. Rather, Zacchaeus is redeemed *in* his life. He is transformed within the life he is living. By God’s grace, Zacchaeus points his transformed life toward repentance and away from exploitation. He will be generous to the poor. He will make amends to those he has wronged. He will stay a tax collector, but he will now conduct himself with honor and justice. He will heed John the Baptist’s teachings to tax collectors: “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you” (Luke 3:13). Zacchaeus will “bear fruits worthy of repentance” (Luke 3:8). Even after giving away half of his wealth and making reparations, Zacchaeus would have still been a wealthy and powerful man. But now, he will use his wealth and power and talents for God’s purposes. He will be a force for good, pointing others toward just and generous lives.

*Never beyond hope*

Zacchaeus’s is another story of transformation. The people whom Zacchaeus had exploited surely would have thought him to be beyond the possibility of redemption and transformation. What could there be to salvage in a man who had sold his soul to the Romans? Yet, when Zacchaeus encounters Jesus, he is saved, for transformation is the essence of salvation. He was lost and yet is found.

We sometimes make the mistake of thinking of salvation only as a one-time event, an instant when we are made right with God by virtue of our faith in Jesus Christ, which is itself a gift from God. Yet, being saved is just as much a process. Paul urges believers to work out their own salvation (Philippians 2:12). As Roger Olson puts it, salvation is both gift *and* task. But to say that salvation is a task, as well as a gift, is not to deny that it is all God’s work. For, after telling the Philippians to work out their salvation, Paul, in the very same sentence, writes, “for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

*Metamorphosis*

In his book, *Finding the Life You’ve Always Wanted,* John Ortberg helps us to understand what we are really talking about when we speak of “spiritual growth” or “spiritual formation.” It is not as if we lead a “spiritual life” that is compartmentalized from the rest of our life. Rather, when we speak of our spiritual life, we are speaking of the very center of who we are. It is the sum, not a part, of the person God created us to be. There is no authentic spiritual life that is lived on the margins, no Christian spirituality that can be dabbled in. There are no cookbooks or formulae that comprise this life. Rather, it is about a complete metamorphosis, a transformation from our self-centered selves to Christ-centered selves. It is no less a transformation than the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly.

Paul’s mission to the Gentiles is to preach “the Gospel of God” and “bring about the obedience of faith” (Romans 1:1,5). This obedience is not about following a bunch of rules, nor forcing ourselves to be kind or just or humble toward all people because that is what Jesus said to do. The obedience of faith is about doing as Christ would have us do because we want to. We have been made so that we can truly love from a desiring heart. We seek genuine transformation so that we will no longer have to try to reflect Christ to others, to be the light to the world, but so that we will simply be the light. A light bulb doesn’t have to try to make light, does it.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott