

A Proper 13	What's Beyond Conversion? Isaiah 55.1-3 by Tim Isbell	Preached 8/6/2017 Cupertino New Life
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Thesis: Beyond conversion lies the invitation to a romance with God in which we experience increasing intimacy, freedom, and fruitfulness. (this file also available at bit.ly/nInc2017-08)

(for a very similar sermon, see [God's Redemptive Loops](#))

The words of the Lord through Isaiah... read Isaiah 55.1-3

Today's message is a snippet of a project I'm working on to help another pastor working on ordination, and to use as a resource in our one-on-one evangelism and discipleship ministries.

Context

I've walked with many pre-Christians as they choose to become Christians

- I'm walking with some now.
- It's usually a difficult decision.
- The most common obstacles I see:
 - They can't reconcile Christian faith with the science they learn in school or the secular worldview they learn from the culture. - Heather/SLO, Aron Wall's site: [Undivided Looking](#)
 - They see hypocrisy among self-proclaimed Christians they know well. - Gary T/Ying S bro-in-law. And they see public figures who claim Christian faith but obviously are not following Jesus.
 - They know someone who converted but their life didn't get materially better. - Jesus suffered; of course, his followers will suffer difficulties. The Christian life is not easy, but it is the best life we can possibly live because we're following the one who created us and loves us passionately.
 - Their family disapproves - common among immigrants.

Despite such obstacles, I've seen many people convert.

- I've walked with many of them for years after conversion. It's never a steady upward path...
 - There are stagnant times and "dark nights of the soul."
 - There are times of sinful regression, sometimes I get to help them reset.
- But God never gives up on us and most of us make it through.

This morning I want to do 2 things:

1. Describe 6 marks that I see on people on that road beyond conversion. (It's best to choose three of these marks because 6 is too many for a typical sermon. I have [a list of](#)

[55.](#))

2. And then explain God's saint-building process, as I understand it.

Saintly marks

Descriptive, not prescriptive. If you've not yet surrendered your life to Jesus, I'm hoping that you will find some of these marks attractive enough to take the step soon. If you are a Christian but stuck or in regression, I hope you'll respond to the Spirit's whisper and reset. Here are a 6 of the [55 marks](#) that are currently on my list:

1. (Already done at prayer time) **Seek the welfare of their enemies** - Pray for them until their heart wishes them well. Ralph M. Luk 6.27-29
2. **Live with abundance mentality** - [Abundance by Rolheiser](#)... "When should I refuse absolution?" Mat 13.1-9 (sower threw his seed everywhere!), Mat 14.13-21 (feeding 5k, "Feed them all!!!), Mar 14.1-11 (expensive perfume on Jesus' head), Luk 7.36-50 (perfume on feet)... just consider the extravagant abundance in creation!
3. **Accept limitations with grace** - [William Booth anecdote](#), when he learned from his son that his blindness was permanent, the founder of the Salvation Army replied *"God must know best. I have done what I could for God and the people with my eyes. Now I shall do what I can for God and the people without my eyes."* Golf/arthritis. 2 Cor 12.7b-9
4. **Notice the unnoticed and broken** - Robin/Dobkin story. Talk with Bernard/Yvonne about entering a room and choosing to sit with the broken rather with those who appear 'whole.' I'll bet folks fitting this description sit among us this morning. Mt 5.3 (KJV: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven), John 4.4-9 (Samaritan woman)
5. **Build culture everywhere** - Trinitarian theology teaches us that God is a community of 3 persons so being created in his image suggests we are to live in community, too. This means saints build culture wherever they go, in the family, neighborhood, school, workplaces - everywhere. From Keller's *Every Good Endeavor*, chapter 3: *"Work is our design and our dignity; it is also a way to serve God through creativity, particularly in the creation of culture... Human beings 'filling the earth' means far more than plants and animals filling the earth. It means civilization, not just procreation. We get the sense that God does not want merely more individuals of the human species; he wants the world to be filled with a human society/culture. He could have just spoken the word and created millions of people in thousands of human settlements, but he didn't. He made it our job to develop and build this society." (EGE55-56). My story at HOA. Rev 21.1-4.*
6. **Do the redemptive thing**, regardless of rules - This is not so much "freedom from the Law" as it is a higher law reserved for those on the journey. See [Freedom in Christ](#). Also see [Best Practices for Pastors](#), items 2 & 3, Kinzler anecdote and Joiner quote, *Our lives are designed to be a platform to illustrate God's story of redemption and restoration to others.*). Jn 13.34.

The Personal Journey Toward Christlikeness ([latest rev to section: 9/19/17](#))

In conversion, the Holy Spirit leads us to confess our rejection of the Creator's path for us, receive forgiveness through Jesus, and begin following Jesus into the future.¹

One way to understand this Christian life is through the Family Metaphor: God the Father adopts us into his family, where Jesus is our elder brother and the Holy Spirit lives within us as our guide. This Trinitarian family re-parents us, along with other adopted sisters and brothers so that we increasingly exhibit the family characteristics. In particular, our hearts grow to beat more and more like Jesus' heart, where *sorrow and love flow mingled down*.² Our part is to respond daily to the Spirit's urges to keep Jesus at our center as we follow him.

God created us in his image, including the freedom to choose. Even after conversion, our humanness and surroundings tempt us to replace Jesus with someone or something else at our center. When we drift from the path, the Spirit notifies us that we've strayed. Instinctively, we apply willpower to try to correct it. This seems so right, but it is so wrong. Instead, our willpower compounds our sin because it puts self back at our center!

God loves us anyway, and more of his *sorrow and love flow mingled down* to us. The Spirit urges us to set aside the human strategy, humbly confess our sins, and offer gratitude for God's grace. Then, we simply invite Jesus back into our center. While counterintuitive, this redemptive loop is at the center of the gospel. Yes, it takes some practice.³

Repetitions through God's redemptive loop draw us into increasing intimacy with Jesus, where our hearts beat increasingly like Jesus' heart. Over time, we grow past the parent-child relationship of the Family Metaphor. Some of us experience this deeper life as an intimate brotherly love, such as Jonathan had for David,⁴ or the sisterly love, such as Ruth had for Naomi.⁵ Others experience this as an intimacy, such as described in the Nuptial (Marriage) Metaphor.⁶

Friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors begin to notice something different - and oddly attractive - about us. Some ask us to explain the reason for the difference, and then we can gently and respectfully share the good news of life with Jesus at the center.⁷

Caution: Living this authentic Christian life rarely offends secular people, but it can offend religious people. The New Testament tells of religious leaders attacking Jesus for breaking their religious laws when, in fact, he was doing a more redemptive thing! Indeed, that's why the religious leaders crucified him. So, as we follow Jesus, we can expect pushback from religious people. But we're in good company: the company of Jesus.⁸

This life with Jesus at the center leads to the "Marks of Christ-likeness" described in the last section of this doc.

¹ For more on this, see [Becoming a Christian](#)

² From the hymn [When I Survey the Wondrous Cross](#) by Isaac Watts

³ See also Keller's [War Between Your Selves](#), a 2-sermon series

⁴ 1 Samuel 18.1-4

⁵ The Old Testament book of Ruth

⁶ See also [3 Biblical Metaphors](#), [An Invitation to Romance](#), [Holiness: Romance in the Christian Life](#)

⁷ 1 Peter 3.15

⁸ Matthew 16.21-25. For more see [Freedom in Christ](#)

Other resources:
Click on the link for the Google Slides . (Similar to PowerPoint)