

The Transforming Power of DISCIPLESHIP

**Transformed
By The
ECCLESIA**



- I was blessed many years ago to spend some time with Brother Wilfred Alleyne
- For those of you who haven't had the pleasure, Brother Wilfred is a Guyanese Brother who now lives in Birmingham, England
- Brother Harry Whittaker taught him the Truth and was instrumental in developing Wilfred's view of the Scriptures
- One night I asked Brother Wilfred what the purpose of an Ecclesia is...
- Brother Wilfred thought for a while, and in his heavy Guyanese accent he replied,
 - **"To test us."**
- That one, simple, honest answer changed my life
- No longer was I disappointed by the shortcomings of my Ecclesia
 - No longer was I longing for some utopian group of Brothers and Sisters who would look at Christian Life just exactly the same way that I do
- I realized that when it came to my Ecclesia, God's Purpose for me wasn't to somehow get a perfect group of believers together and move away somewhere...

- God's Purpose was for me to get along with the group that He gave me
- God purposely designed it that way...

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- God has purposely designed us to live together in groups
 - He could have established a different pattern if He chose, but He didn't
 - He could have designed our service to Him to be one of solitude and reflection
- But, instead God put us together with an Ecclesia
 - Not just any Ecclesia, but He has purposely brought you to where you are today

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- God wants us to be members of an Ecclesia, because it is through the Ecclesia that He is able to change us and grow our characters
- Sure...
 - Sometimes we are encouraged, uplifted and motivated by our relationships with our Brothers and Sisters
 - But, we are also stretched, pushed, pulled, beaten, burned and tested...

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- We are **TRANSFORMED** by The Ecclesia
- There is one important thing to remember about God's view of life:

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- *Life is all about **LOVE***

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- Because **God is Love...**

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- The most important lesson He wants you to learn is **HOW TO LOVE**

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- It is in **LOVING OTHERS** that you are most like God

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- Galatians 5:14 (Message)

14) For everything we know about God's Word is summed up in a single sentence: **Love others as you love yourself.**

- Learning to love unselfishly is not an easy task
 - This runs counter to your self-centered nature
- Of course, God wants you to love everyone
 - But, He is particularly concerned about you learning to love others in His family
- Why does God insist that you give special attention to trying to love your Brothers and Sisters?
 - The answer is simple...

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- John 13:34-35 (Message)

34) "Let me give you a new command: **Love one another.** In the same way I loved you, you love one another.

35) **This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples** - when they see the love you have for each other."

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- **Love cannot be learned in ISOLATION**
 - God wants you to be in regular, close fellowship with other believers so that you can develop your skills of loving
 - God wants you to have fellowship with people just like you...
 - Imperfect, irritating, frustrating people
- Living in an Ecclesia teaches us **3** important truths:

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1 - Life without Love is **WORTHLESS**

- Paul makes the point quite clearly...

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- 1st Corinthians 13:3 (Message)

3) If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. **So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.**

- Love should be your top priority, your primary objective, your greatest ambition
- Often we act as if relationships are something that we squeeze into our schedule
 - You **find time** for your family
 - You **make time** for your friends
- God says that relationships are what Life is all about
- Four of the Ten Commandments deal with your relationship with God
- The other six of the Ten Commandments deal with your relationships with each other
 - All Ten Commandments deal with relationships!
- Jesus confirmed that life is all about Love:

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- Matthew 22:36-40 (NIV)

36) "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"
37) Jesus replied: "'**Love the Lord your God** with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'
38) This is the first and greatest commandment.
39) And the second is like it: '**Love your neighbor** as yourself.'
40) All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

- Learning to love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind is the essence of Worship

- Learning to love each other is the essence of Ecclesia Life

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2 - Love will Last **FOREVER**

- Another reason God tells you to make love your top priority is that love is eternal
 - Love leaves a legacy
- How you treated people, not your wealth or accomplishments, is the most enduring impact you can leave on earth
- No one on their deathbed asks to be surrounded with their bank statements, or their diplomas, or their awards or medals...
 - When life comes to an end, people want to surround themselves with people who they love...
 - People who they have had the privilege to enjoy relationships with
- In your final moments you all come to realize that relationships is really what life is all about
 - Being wise means learning that truth sooner rather than later

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3 - You will be **EVALUATED on your Love**

- The third reason to make learning how to love the goal of your life, is that it is what you will be evaluated on in eternity
- When you stand before the Judge, he won't ask you about your career, your hobbies, or your net worth
 - Instead He will be concerned how you have treated others

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- Matthew 25:37-40 (NIV)

- 37) "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?'"
- 38) "When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?"

- 39) When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?
40) “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, **whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.**’

- Look at what that verse says!
 - The **LEAST** of these Brothers!
 - Not the **BEST** – Sometimes we can muster up enough energy to help out that **GREAT** Brother who is always there for us
 - Not even the **AVERAGE** – The verse is not talking about helping out every day Brothers and Sisters like yourself
 - The **LEAST!** – The verse is specifically calling us to those who are on the outside
 - Those who are not connected to the Ecclesia
 - Those we don’t naturally share a social affinity with
 - Those who are not the strength and backbone of the Ecclesia
 - The **LEAST!**
- Knowing these three things, you should look at each day as an opportunity to spend loving God and loving other people...
 - Because that is what life is all about

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- ***The best expression of Love is TIME***
- The importance of things can be measured by how much time you are willing to invest in them
- Time is so precious, because we all only have a set amount of it
 - You can make more money, but you can’t make more time

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- **When you give someone your time, you are giving something that you’ll never get back**

- If you say that relationships are important to you...
 - You have to prove it by investing your time in them

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- *You can **GIVE** without **LOVING***

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- *But you can't **LOVE** without **GIVING***
- *Love means giving up...*
 - Your preferences
 - Your comfort
 - Your money
 - Your energy
 - **Your time**
- You are not simply asked to believe...

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- You are called to **BELONG**
- While your relationship with God is personal, it is not intended to be private
- God wants you a part of an Ecclesia, so that you can grow

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- Romans 12:4-5 (NIV)
 - 4) Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,
 - 5) so in Christ we who are many form one body, and **each member belongs to all the others.**
- *each member belongs to all the others...*
- Did you ever think of it that way?

- You don't "belong" to yourself any longer
- You BELONG to others
- It's not YOUR Time any longer
- It's not YOUR Schedule
- It's not YOUR Interests

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- Following Christ means **BELONGING**, not just **BELIEVING**
- Body parts, on their own, are useless...
 - Listen to these same verses in another translation:

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- Romans 12:4-5 (Message)
 - 4) In this way we are like the various parts of a human body. **Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole**, not the other way around.
 - 5) The body we're talking about is Christ's body of chosen people. **Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body**. But as a chopped-off finger or cut-off toe we wouldn't amount to much, would we?
- If an organ is severed from it's body, it will shrivel up and die
- It cannot exist on it's own, and neither can you
 - Spiritually disconnected from the lifeblood of your body, your spiritual life will wither and eventually cease to exist

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- ***That is why the first symptom of spiritual decline is usually inconsistent attendance at Memorial Service and other gatherings of the Ecclesia***
 - When you become careless of attending your Ecclesia, other things begin to slide also

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- **Beware of becoming spiritually disconnected even while sitting in Memorial Service**
 - *If you think that simply sitting in church will turn you into a Christian...*
 - *Then you must think that sitting in your garage will turn you into a car!*
- Membership in the Family of God is neither inconsequential nor something to be casually ignored
 - You must be there in order to participate in it
 - And when you are there, you have to actually **be there**
- Here are **3** of the many reasons why you benefit from being a member of an Ecclesia

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1 - An Ecclesia forces you out of your SELF-CENTERED LIFE

- The Ecclesia is the classroom for learning how to get along with people
 - It is a lab for practicing unselfish, sympathetic love

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- 1st Corinthians 12:26 (NIV)

26) If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

- Only in regular contact with other imperfect believers can you learn what God wants you to learn
- Only in regular contact with other imperfect believers can God Transform you
- God wants you to learn to be as committed to each other as you are to Jesus Christ
- God wants to force you out of your Comfort Zone
 - Out of a life focused solely on YOU, and focus you on others

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- 1st John 3:16 (NIV)

16) This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.
And **we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.**

- This is the kind of sacrificial love that God expects from you
 - To be able to love your Brothers and Sisters in the same way Christ loved you

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2 - An Ecclesia helps you develop **SPIRITUAL MUSCLE**

- You grow to maturity by full participation in Ecclesial Life
- All through the New Testament you are commanded to do things like:

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- **Love Each Other**

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- **Pray** for each other

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- **Encourage** each other

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- **Admonish** each other

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- **Greet** each other

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- **Serve** each other

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- **Teach** each other

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- **Accept** each other

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- **Honor** each other

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- **Forgive** each other

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- **Submit** to each other
- Look at this list!
 - Look at the task we have before us!
 - Tackling HALF of this list would Transform us **DRAMATICALLY**
- It may seem easier to you to be holy when no one else is around...
 - But, that is false holiness
- It's easy to fool yourself into thinking you are mature if there is no one there to challenge you
 - Real maturity grows because of relationships with immature people
 - Not just those that we have a natural closeness to, but that awkward, unsocial, unacceptable person that sits in the back of the hall

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3 - An Ecclesia helps keep you from BACKSLIDING

- You are not immune to temptation
- Given the right situation, you are capable of sinning

- God knows this
 - So God has assigned each one of us the responsibility of keeping each other on track
 - You are foolish if you think that you don't need this help...

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- Hebrews 3:13 (NIV)

13) But **encourage one another daily**, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

- ***"Mind your own business"*** is not a scriptural concept...
 - You are commanded to be involved in each other's lives
- It is your responsibility to go after those that are wavering in their faith, and to bring them back into fellowship

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- James 5:19-20 (Message)

19) My dear friends, if you know people who have wandered off from God's truth, don't write them off. **Go after them. Get them back**

20) and you will have rescued precious lives from destruction and prevented an epidemic of wandering away from God.

- ***Life was meant to be shared***

- God intends for you to experience life together
- Experiencing life together is:
 - Honest sharing
 - Practical serving
 - Sacrificial giving
 - Sympathetic comforting
- God wants you to experience an Ecclesial relationship like this for your own benefit

- Here are 4 keys to a valuable Ecclesial Relationship:

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1 - God wants you to experience AUTHENTICITY

- Authentic relationships are not superficial, surface-level chit chat
 - It is genuine, heart-to-heart, sometimes gut-level sharing
- ***Authentic relationships happen when people are honest about who they are and what is happening in their lives***
 - They share their hurts
 - Reveal their feelings
 - Confess their failures
 - Disclose their doubts
 - Admit their fears
 - Acknowledge their weaknesses and
 - Ask for help and prayer
- ***Authentic relationships are the exact opposite of what you often find in our Ecclesias***
 - Often in your Ecclesia you find:
 - Pretending
 - Role-playing
 - Politicking and
 - Superficial Politeness
 - People often wear masks
 - Keep their guards up, and
 - Act as if everything is rosy in their lives

- The shame about this is not only are they themselves missing out on the beautiful glory of what God has planned for us, but they often endanger others
 - I have heard too often someone (frequently a young person) complaining about the hypocrisy in their meeting
 - Once the truth leaks out, and you are truly seen for who you are, it can crush people who grew up their whole lives believing the pretense that you projected for so many years
- It's only when you become open and honest about your life that you experience the real shared life that God calls us to

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- 1st John 1:7-8 (Message)
 - 7) But if we walk in the light, God himself being the light, **we also experience a shared life with one another**, as the sacrificed blood of Jesus, God's Son, purges all our sin.
 - 8) **If we claim that we're free of sin, we're only fooling ourselves.** A claim like that is errant nonsense.
- Of course, being authentic requires courage and humility
 - It means facing your fears of exposure, rejection and being hurt again
- Why would anyone take such a risk?
 - Because it is the only way to grow spiritually and become emotionally healthy

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2 - God wants you to experience MUTUALITY

- Mutuality is the art of Giving **AND** Receiving
 - Mutuality is learning to depend on each other
- Some people are good at Giving
 - Few people are good at Receiving
- Mutuality requires us to be honest enough to admit that we need help, and open enough to allow our Brothers and Sisters to provide that help

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- 1st Corinthians 12:25-26 (Message)

- 25) The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: **every part dependent on every other part**, the parts we mention and the parts we don't,
- 26) the parts we see and the parts we don't. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance.

- ***Mutuality is the heart of an Ecclesia***

- Building reciprocal relationships, sharing responsibilities and helping each other

- ***You are not responsible for everyone in the Body of Christ***

- ***But you are responsible TO them, and God expects you to do whatever you can to help them***

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3 - God wants you to experience SYMPATHY

- Sympathy isn't giving advice, or offering quick, cosmetic help
 - Sympathy is entering in and sharing the pain of others
- ***Sympathy meets two fundamental human needs:***
 - ***The need to be understood***
 - ***The need to have your feelings validated***
- Every time you take the time to understand and affirm someone's feelings, you build a stronger relationship with them
 - ***The problem is that we are too often in a hurry to try to fix things, that we don't take time to sympathize with people***

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- Galatians 6:2 (Message)

- 2) Stoop down and reach out to those who are oppressed. **Share their burdens**, and so complete Christ's law.

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4 - God wants you to experience MERCY

- *An Ecclesia is a place of grace*
 - *Where mistakes aren't rubbed in, but rubbed out*
 - *Love is when mercy wins out over justice*
- We all need mercy, because we all stumble and fall
- You can't have an Ecclesia without forgiveness
 - Bitterness and resentment always destroy an Ecclesia
- Because you are an imperfect, sinful person you will inevitably hurt other people when you are together with them for a long time
- People will inevitably hurt you also:
 - Sometimes unintentionally, sometimes intentionally...
 - Either way it takes mercy to be a member of an Ecclesia

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- Colossians 3:12-13 (NIV)
 - 12) Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.
 - 13) **Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another.** Forgive as the Lord forgave you.
- *Many people are reluctant to show mercy because they don't understand the difference between forgiveness and trust*
 - *Forgiveness is letting go of the past*
 - *Trust is about how you deal with the future*
- You must forgive someone immediately
 - Trust has to be built up over time
- You are commanded by God to forgive people

- But you aren't expected to trust them immediately
- ***Experiencing Life with a group of believers is essential to your spiritual growth***
- But, this kind of life is not always easy
 - Dedicating yourself to this life requires **Commitment**

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- James 3:17-18 (Message)
 - 17) Real wisdom, God's wisdom, begins with a holy life and is characterized by getting along with others. It is gentle and reasonable, overflowing with mercy and blessings, not hot one day and cold the next, not two-faced.
 - 18) You can develop a healthy, robust community that lives right with God and enjoy its results **only if you do the hard work of getting along with each other**, treating each other with dignity.
- If you want to be Transformed by your Ecclesia
- You will need to commit yourself to **5** things:

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1 - Commit Yourself to HONESTY

- You have to care enough to lovingly speak the truth, instead of glossing over a problem or ignoring an issue
- Many fellowships remain superficial because they are afraid of conflict
 - Issues never get resolved and everyone lives with underlying frustration
- Everyone knows about the problem (the 800 pound gorilla in the room), but no one dares talk openly about it

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- 1st Corinthians 5:3, 6, 11 (Message)
 - 3) ...**You must not simply look the other way and hope it goes away on its own**. Bring it out in the open and deal with it in the authority of Jesus our Master.

- 6) ...**You pass it off as a small thing**, but it's anything but that. Yeast, too, is a "small thing," but it works its way through a whole batch of bread dough pretty fast.
- 11) ...**I am saying that you shouldn't act as if everything is just fine** when one of your Christian companions is promiscuous or crooked, is flip with God or rude to friends, gets drunk or becomes greedy and predatory. You can't just go along with this, treating it as acceptable behavior.

• ***In the end, people appreciate frankness more than flattery***

- But, frankness is not rudeness
- Don't be rude...
 - Be loving, but honest

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2 - Commit Yourself to HUMILITY

- Self-importance, stubborn pride and smugness destroys an Ecclesia
 - ***Pride builds walls between people...***
 - ***Humility builds bridges***

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- Romans 12:16 (CEV)

- 16) Be friendly with everyone. **Don't be proud and feel that you are smarter than others**. Make friends with ordinary people.

• ***Humility is not thinking less of yourself***

• ***Humility is thinking of yourself less***

- Humility is thinking more of others
- Humble people are so focused on serving others, that they don't think of themselves

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3 - Commit Yourself to COURTESY

- Courtesy is respecting other people's differences
 - Being considerate of their feelings
 - and being patient when they irritate you
- **Every group has at least one "difficult" person**
 - **They are an opportunity for growth and a test of your Love**
- You also have quirks and annoying traits
 - **A healthy Ecclesia has nothing to do with compatibility**
 - **Your connection to your Ecclesia is based on your relationship to God**
 - **You are part of a family**
- **In a family you are accepted simply because you are a member of the family**
- One key to courtesy is to understand where people are coming from
 - Get to know their history
 - Don't concentrate on how far they still have to go
 - Look at how far they have come in spite of their problems

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4 - Commit Yourself to CONFIDENTIALITY

- Only in a safe environment will people open up and share their deepest hurts, needs, and mistakes
- Confidentiality does not mean keeping silent while your Brother or Sister sins
- It means what is shared with your group needs to stay in the group
 - The group needs to deal with it and not gossip about it
- **God hates gossip**
 - **Gossip causes hurt and divisions**
 - **Gossip destroys Ecclesias**

- You are commanded to confront those who cause division and gossip and not to allow it to continue

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5 - Commit Yourself to FREQUENCY

- You **MUST** have frequent, regular contact with your group in order to be Transformed
- Relationships take time

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- *Ecclesial Relationships are not built on **CONVENIENCE**, but on **CONVICTION***

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- *You don't get together when you **FEEL** like it, but because you **NEED** it*
- It might hurt sometimes...
 - It will often be inconvenient and uncomfortable
- But, you are members of an Ecclesia for a Purpose

SLIDE

- God wants to **TRANSFORM** you by **YOUR ECCLESIA**