ROSE HILL CHURCH

Luke 18:18-30
I Once Was Lost
"Opening Up to Change"

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Today we continue the series we began a couple of weeks ago, looking at the thresholds people often move through on the journey from non-believer to disciple of Jesus. This framework comes from the book *I Once Was Lost*, which draws on research with thousands of Christians and identifies common patterns—or "thresholds"—people tend to experience as they come to faith.

Understanding which threshold our family members, friends, and neighbors are currently in matters, because it shapes how we relate to them and how we point them toward Jesus. Someone in the first threshold, for example, is unlikely to be ready to confess Jesus as Lord and Savior. So, recognizing these thresholds helps us respond wisely—what we say, how we say it, and what we *don't* say.

The first threshold is building trust with a Christian. People usually need to see faith lived out well by someone they trust. That trust can take time and effort, but sometimes even a small act—showing up, helping out, being present—can begin to establish it.

The second threshold is developing curiosity about Jesus. This often takes longer and grows out of two things: Christians living their faith in a way that is genuinely compelling and invites curiosity, and Christians being genuinely curious about others—about their lives, their stories, and their struggles, not just surface-level things.

The third threshold is "opening up to change." This is where we are today. According to Don Everts and Doug Schaupp in their book, "…being open to change is often the most difficult to overcome" (p. 69). With the difficulty of this step in mind, let's take a look at today's passage, Luke 18:18-30, beginning with the first five verses…**(18-22)**

First, to address a misconception some people have about this passage: When Jesus responds to being called "Good Teacher," he is not denying his divinity. **Instead, he is correcting the man's understanding of goodness, whether Jesus' goodness or the man's goodness.** The man assumes goodness is about what a person *does*—about moral effort, rule-keeping, and achievement. So, Jesus redirects him away from human effort and toward God as the true source and standard of goodness. God alone is good, with the implication that any goodness any of us have is a gift from him.

In answering the man's question, Jesus starts by reminding him of how high the bar is set, as he cites several of the 10 Commandments. The man seems to respond confidently that he's kept these since his childhood. I wish I could be there to hear his tone and see his body language. Is he prideful, or is he maybe frustrated and disappointed that even though he's apparently kept these all so well, he senses something is lacking. Maybe there's a tone of self-exasperation.

In Matthew's account of this conversation, we get a bit of a window into that, perhaps. **There, the guy responds that he's kept all these, but then immediately asks, "What do I still lack?" (Matthew 19:20).** It suggests something deeper. His confidence may be overstated and a bit prideful, but he also seems to recognize that something is missing. Doing the right things, and rule-keeping alone is not satisfying. It doesn't bring the fullness of life he's looking for.

It's also one of those moments where I really wish I could hear the tone or see the expression on Jesus' face as well. It's easy to imagine Jesus giving a little bit of a "false surprised" look if the guy was only prideful, or a "knowing" nod of the head and posture of compassion if the guy was coming from a place of frustration and recognition that he's missing something.

But at least he's come to Jesus. He's come to the right person. So, he's curious, and because of Jesus' reputation the guy trusts Jesus enough to ask this question. He's through the first two thresholds and now is beginning to be open to change.

Jesus then names what needs to change—and he identifies two things. **First, the man must sell his possessions and give to the poor. Second, he must come and follow Jesus.**

Together, these represent the changes required for eternal life. His wealth and possessions have become an obstacle. They command too much of his attention, identity, and security. Luke calls him a "ruler" which isn't well-defined for us, as the Greek word can be used to speak of different kinds of positions. But he's got some status and positional power in his community. His possessions and wealth are likely connected to that. And they've got too much of his heart. Too much of his attention.

So, this first step really is one of confession of sin and repentance. That's what Jesus is inviting him to do: to turn away from this stuff that has captured him. As Elsa sings in the Disney movie, "Frozen": let it go. It could have been something else in his life that was the primary problem, but for him, this was it. And for many of us, if we're honest, our money and our stuff can become obstacles too.

I recently heard about a gal—this is a true story—who had a condo she no longer needed, and because she moved out of the area it was a burden to maintain. She contacted a pastor she knew whose church was not far from the condo, and offered to give the condo to the church to use for staff housing or to sell it and use the funds for ministry needs. It's an incredible gift, right? Now, she's already a disciple of Jesus, which matters, but the principal is still the same. She recognized that her possessions were meant to serve God's purposes, not define her security or identity. That's what Jesus is inviting this man into—freedom from earthly attachments and a reorientation of his life around God's kingdom.

So, if that first step is an invitation to *let go* of the direction and identity of his life, the second step is where he *gets* his new direction and identity, when Jesus says, "then come, follow me." Eternal life isn't found in just letting go of our accomplishments or earthly stuff and earthly identities; **Something else**

must fill the void from outside ourselves. That second thing is to follow Jesus. Jesus gives us a new and lasting identity. It's a second significant change Jesus is inviting him to make. And the guy seems open to change, as we said. After all, he's come to Jesus with this question about what he must do to inherit eternal life. So, let's turn to **verses 23-25** to see his response.

So: **Although he's becoming open to change, and even seeking it: when the opportunity to change presents itself, he becomes deeply sad.** Kind of like how Los Angeles Rams fans will be this afternoon. 😂

The implication is that he didn't begin following Jesus here. Matthew and Mark confirm it, when both of them very explicitly write that he *went away* sorrowful because he had a lot of possessions.

That's the hard truth about change: it requires letting something go, and that's hard. And for many people, the life they are living mostly *works* for them. Even when there's dissatisfaction, pain, or restlessness, there is also a measure of comfort, control, identity, and security. **Walking away from something that mostly works—even when parts of it are broken—is incredibly hard.** So, we see in this man that opening up to change doesn't guarantee a person is *actually* ready to change yet. Letting go of an old identity to find a new one in Christ can feel overwhelming – like a camel fitting through the eye of a needle.

If you find yourself in this threshold—becoming open to change—I want you to hear this: naming what you "lack" is not condemnation. It's not about guilt. It's honesty. It's clarity. It's the beginning of God's work in you to help you see the truth that something isn't quite right, isn't truly fulfilling or satisfying. It's what we might call "a holy discontentment."

And if you're walking with someone who is in this place, Jesus shows us how to do that well. He doesn't argue. He doesn't pressure. He doesn't chase the man down and beg him to do this. **He names the obstacle clearly and compassionately, offers a new way to go, and lets the man respond.** That takes courage to do, and compassion to do it well. Mark writes that Jesus

looked at him and *loved* him and then spoke the two-step process of change. That Jesus spoke in love should come as no surprise. Jesus always speaks the truth in love.

That's our posture too. Not pressure, not manipulation—but honest, caring, loving conversation. Thoughtful questions or statements that invite reflection can be spoken, such as: "It sounds like some things in your life aren't working the way you hoped. Would it help to talk about that?" Or "You seem open to and even needing something new in your life—what do you think God might be stirring in you right now?" Remember, the people at this place in your life have likely crossed through the first couple thresholds – they trust you and there's some level of curiosity about your faith. So, it's ok to bring God into the conversation even if they might not naturally do that.

Will people always respond positively? No. Change is hard. Even Jesus didn't get a perfect response every time as we see today. Others stopped following Jesus after difficult teachings. Jesus taught about this in what is usually called the parable of the Sower—where some seed that's scattered grows to bear fruit, but a lot of seed lands in places where it does not. Not everyone is going to quickly and positively respond to God moving in their lives the way Zaccheus does, or Peter or the other of the 12 disciples.

Not everyone will respond the first time with such utter conviction as Ruth in the Old Testament and her famous response to Naomi, "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16).

So, we shouldn't be surprised when grief, not excitement, accompanies the realization of what change might cost. But we can still name that cost honestly—and lovingly. Let's read the **final verses (25-30).**

The key statement here is Jesus' words, "What is impossible with man is possible with God" (Luke 18:27). We must trust God's work in people's lives and trust him with the outcomes. Someone may be open change, but not ready to actually take that step just yet. That's ok. God is patient. He keeps

working, drawing, inviting, and reshaping hearts. Transformation of hearts and lives is God's work, not ours.

And let's be sure to recognize that this work of change is ongoing and remains difficult—even for us who are already followers of Jesus. We still wrestle. We still have difficulty in letting go of what makes us comfortable – whether it's our accomplishments, finances, possessions, positions, or the pew we're sitting in. Change is hard. The difference is that we Christians have seen how Jesus provides. We trust that wherever he leads us, even when it's hard, it is better than going our own way.

So, take heart as you follow Jesus' teaching in your own life and as you walk with people who are in this threshold. **The work of transformation belongs to the Lord.** Change is possible with God—for you, and for the people in our lives who are opening up to change. *All things* are possible with God. And when others are ready to cross this threshold of change, and as they make that crossing, he will continue to work through you as he draws people toward Jesus. Let's pray…Amen.