



Transcendent Living

Text: Romans 8:13
O.T. Lesson: Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24
N.T. Lesson: Romans 8:12-25

Presbyterians are Christians who live in the world but are not of the world. We like to think of ourselves as interacting with worldly people without them affecting who we are as Christians.

We survive in a world which denies God's existence. But we don't think it influences our beliefs about God.

We don't go to a Christian parochial school that shelters us from the world. We send our children to learn the world's ways from teachers who are not paid to teach the God-formed life. We don't expect lessons we've learned to alter our faith in God.

Living in the world but not being of the world has significant challenges. It's far more complicated than living in isolation as a community of faith apart from the world. Daily we sift through information - sights, sounds, and experiences – so that we live spiritually despite our worldliness.

We achieve great academic degrees in science and the humanities. But for most Presbyterian young adults, the spiritual level in which they live is based on high school Sunday school, one hour a week. Some attend Bible studies as adults, but not many.

Most Presbyterian Churches don't have an explicit educational goal in adult Christian formation so they can better apply biblical theology and Christ-formed morality to the complicated life their members live in the world.



Rising above the world is the great challenge of Christian living. Presbyterians don't subscribe to a monastic life. We don't renounce public life like the Amish. We follow John Calvin who wrote, God created the world for us to live an abundant life. We live in the world appreciating our Creator's gift.

So, Presbyterians live a balancing act. Just how far can we live in the world before we're assimilated into worldly values and beliefs? To what degree is our appreciation for life in this world more important to us than life with God?

The answer to both lies in a God-given identity. We rise above worldliness when we intentionally use our knowledge of God's Word to be Spirit-driven people.

When our identity is formed by Jesus Christ's mission for our life, we live in the world, but transcend worldliness.

Jesus lived our daily balancing act between being in the world but not of the world. He lived in it fully as a spiritual person.

Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness. Jesus transcended His worldliness by renouncing Satan's temptations. Jesus knew Satan offered Him less than what He was sent by God to give the world by showing them God's love.

Jesus was swarmed by people's needs wanting something from Him that was less than what they truly needed. He left them to pray. He sought God's counsel amid worldly needs. He transcended the needs of the flesh when He came back to them to teach them how to identify themselves with God.



Jesus offered the people's petitions in prayer to His Father. He returned from prayer to teach them what they needed most. "Man does not live by Bread alone, but by the Word of God."

Jesus didn't just teach the people who wanted loaves and fishes that what they really needed was Jesus Himself. His lesson applies to us who live in the world but want to transcend the world. Jesus gave them Himself to satisfy their need, instead of what they thought they needed. He gives us Himself, instead of the worldly wants and desires we are taught to desire instead of God.

Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane facing the Cross. The Cross was the price He was to pay for people who let themselves be assimilated into worldly thinking, a worldly identity, and lose their way with God. He turned to His Father, alone in prayer.

Jesus transcended His flesh when he concluded, "Not my will but Your will be done." He gave up preserving this life we hold so dear so He could show us the life that is far more precious. We taught us to do the same. Give up on preserving worldly desires and follow God's will for your life.

In each moment in His life, Jesus lived in the world. But the way He responded to the world around Him transcended the flesh.

Think of the times you are in a situation in which God challenged you to transcend the flesh – to live in the world but not be of the world.

They are times God challenged you to give up the blessings of this world so you would depend on God alone. You were tempted with a great opportunity only to learn that not every opportunity is from God.



You came to realize, God placed you on a greater mission He wanted you to accept which meant giving up a worldly opportunity. That's when you were with Jesus in the wilderness being tempted.

Living transcendentally identifies God's place in your heart, mind, and soul. Living transcendentally involves prayer and contemplation on a regular basis to measure whether you are of the world or are living in it as a spiritual being.

Living transcendentally depends upon God's wisdom and God's inspiration. It emerges from a God-shaped heart, with a God-shaped life. It is not overwhelmed by worldly ways. It's a life listening for God's whisper amid the clamor of worldly temptations.

Richard Stearns is no different than you or me. Although, he may have grown up in circumstances different from yours. His parents separated. The family faced bankruptcy. His family was evicted from their home. At the age of 10, Richard Stearns determined he would survive his terrible childhood.

He learned the Darwinian ways of the world. Survival of the fittest depends upon instincts, intelligence, and personal reliance.

At age 13 he wrote for college catalogues from eight Ivy League Schools. Neither of his parents had finished high school. But he knew education was the ticket to success.

While his friends were dating and socializing, Richard Stearns focused on what it took to be successful. He refused temptations of alcohol or drugs – which had devastated his home. He studied and excelled in school.

He was taken to church, although his parents never went. At age 15 he rejected church. It wasn't for him.



Richard Stearns was set upon success. He worshiped in the temple of self-reliance where worldly people worship.

Richard Sterns, the child of a single mother who rented an apartment in Syracuse, New York, was accepted at Cornell University. He took a step closer to moving up in the world.

Richard Sterns was a self-professed humanist. He was self-reliant and dedicated to mastering the lessons of Reason and Common Sense to make his way in life.

But all along the way, he was teased by God to hear the message of the gospel.

It seemed each young lady he dated was deeply devoted to following Jesus Christ. He graduated from Cornell and entered the Wharton School of business. He had the academic credentials to lead business and industry.

But God offered him an alternative to use his gifts for Jesus Christ's mission. He met his future wife Renee at Wharton.

Renee, like other young women who caught his eye was devoted to Jesus. She had graduated from a Boston law school determined to help the poor. She was not impressed by how Richard lived. Christ challenged Richard's self-reliance through Renee.

Richard offered the sinner's prayer and committed his life to God. Renee gradually accepted the sincerity of his faith.

Richard Sterns cemented his commitment to Christ when he was engaged. He announced to Renee he did not want to accept wedding gifts of china and silverware when so many children were starving. He understood what it meant to be alone as a child in need. Renee agreed. God took Richard Sterns at his word.



In the irony of God's blessings to live the abundant life, Richard Sterns became president of Parker Brothers toys at the age of 33. God challenged Richard to be in the world but not of the world.

Richard lost his job. He found a job at the Franklin Mint making more money than at Parker Brothers. But God continued to challenge Richard to not be of the world. He lost this job too.

Richard was hired at Lenox China. He rose to become its CEO. He and Renee had five children. They lived in a 10-room field stone home on 150 acres outside of Philadelphia. Richard traveled the world for Lenox and met many leaders of business and industry. They went to church each Sunday like Richard and were active leaders in their congregations.

Richard believed he was living in the world, but was not of the world, like so many of us Christians who walk life's balancing act.

But God saw things differently. To live transcendentally, you must face the worldly opportunities before you and see a greater spiritual purpose beyond them.

When you commit your life to God, and your identity is in God, remarkable things happen. God's spirit elevates you to new insights about His mission for you.

And so, Richard Sterns was called one day by a friend who was on the search committee for a new CEO for World Vision, a Christian humanitarian organization. The search committee wanted Richard to travel the farthest reaches of the world for Jesus Christ. But he had to give up his Lenox salary, his house in Philadelphia, and move his family to Seattle, Washington. He would be Christ's missionary to the world praying to God for help. Renee agreed with the vision.



God wasn't through testing Richard Sterns' spiritual commitment. He sent another opportunity to Richard just to see whether he was committed to living in the world, but not being of the world. At that exact moment World Vision came calling, a friend called Richard asking him to become CEO of a British fine china company. The job promised an annual income of between \$25 and 50 million dollars.

The Apostle Paul says, "If you live according to the flesh you will die. But if by the Spirit, you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

What choice would you make?

Richard Sterns chose to be daily tormented by the faces of poor children around the world, starving mothers, and dying fathers, who pray to God for help. Richard goes with Renee to pray in Seattle's mountains, relying on God to give Him strength.

Each day you are surrounded by people who are in need. In this world of street protestors of systemic injustice, there are all sorts of demands to saving lives. They are important demands that have been unfulfilled.

But what is the whisper of God showing us His mission in the world's unsettled streets.

This week I took my daughter to work on the way to Hillcrest. She works downtown. As she was about to leave the car, we noticed an angry man taunting a police officer and a security guard on the street corner.

The taunts by the young man were hate-filled and threatening. The officers stood their ground without anger or threats.



The young man leaned forward toward them, taunting them with greater venom. A friend who could have sided with the angry protestor did not. Instead, he stepped between the officers and the angry protestor and persistently separated his friend from the men of law he was bullying.

It was being filmed with a camera by a passer-by while other people on the street tried to avoid the young man's goading of the police. The hate filled man saw my daughter and me and started condemning us along with the police.

Not every opportunity is from God in this world. But God does present in every opportunity a challenge to transcend being of the world by living like Christ. That morning, the young man who stepped in the middle of the conflict to separate the young man from the officers, and the officers themselves transcended worldly disdain that divides the world into warring camps.

They could have used state power to subdue this tortured soul. They could have succumbed to worldly ways that might have led to another television broadcast. But these three ordinary men used the self-control in the Holy Spirit to transcend the situation so that it would escalate no farther.

Transcendent living takes many different forms, depending on the situation. But in all things God's calls us to model Christ's Spirit so others can see a better way of living!

Amen.