

**Hope Community Church  
Transforming Belief #1  
The Bar Behind You**

**Mike Gaudet**

## Introduction

Transformation describes what happens when a caterpillar turns in to a butterfly. Transformation also describes the kind of change that occurs when an individual is changed from the inside out by God's power. This kind of metamorphosis is not the product of determined effort. *"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* (Romans 12:2) Transformation is the by-product of *"the renewing of your mind."* Transformation relies on changing what you believe. With transformation, changes in behavior are the result of changes in belief.

The "Transforming Beliefs" study focuses on truths found in the Bible that will change how you behave by changing what you believe. You will discover truths that will change what you believe about God, others, and yourself. As you learn and persevere in believing these truths, they will transform you.

These four lessons summarize the essential messages contained in the Bible. You will not be told what to do in these studies. They focus not on how you should behave differently but on what you should believe differently. Changing beliefs is the key to changing behavior. Study this material thoughtfully and carefully. Pay special attention to the Bible passages written in italics. Ask God to give you insight and understanding. If you do, you will discover that these truly are "transforming beliefs."

### **Transforming Belief #1-The Bar Behind You**

When you begin to embrace the belief that through faith in Christ God accepts you, transformation begins to occur. Believing that you have come to be accepted in God's sight becomes the soil from which a transforming personal relationship with Jesus Christ grows.

### **Transforming Belief #2-Heaven in front of you**

Believing that you have an eternal home in heaven transforms values. The hope of heaven provides encouragement and promotes perseverance as you face difficulties here on earth.

### **Transforming Belief #3-God's Spirit inside you**

Believing in the transforming influence of God's Spirit inside you empowers change that is marked by freedom and love rather than by condemnation and fear.

### **Transforming Belief #4-A lost world around you**

Believing that lost people matter to God will transform the way you look at others and yourself. Beginning to believe that you can be used by God to make a spiritual difference in the life of another person will produce joy and fulfillment.

## **The Bar Behind You God's Grace**

*"This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus" 2 Timothy 1:9-10*

If we want to start at the very beginning, we need to start with grace.

Before God created the world; even before time began, God determined that He would operate by grace. Before there was a world to live in, a man and a woman to occupy it, and a tree of the knowledge of good and evil to stay away from, God already determined that His first gift to His yet-to-be-created creatures would be a truly divine one...grace.

In order to understand God and His dealings with people, we need to start here. We need to start with grace.

### **Because God operates by grace, He reaches out in love to those who do not deserve to be loved by Him.**

"Grace" means, "unmerited favor," an "undeserved gift."

When we talk about the grace of God, we mean that God shows kindness to those who do not deserve it, to those not entitled to receive it.

It is natural for us to believe that God requires people to earn His gifts and favor. It makes sense to us that God surveys our world to find those who "say it well and do it right" and then rewards them with special attention. Words like "entitlement" and phrases like "measuring up" are part of the way the world operates. However, they are not a part of the language of grace.

In fact, God goes out of His way to select those not entitled to be selected. From one end of the Bible to the other, we find God choosing to reach out in love to those who did not do anything to deserve His favor.

*"The Lord you God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you" (Deuteronomy 7:7)*

*"It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land...Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people." (Deuteronomy 9:5,6)*

### ***What kind of people does God choose to love?***

God still reaches out in love to those who do not deserve for Him to do so.

*"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:6-8)*

### ***How did God demonstrate His love for us?***

God demonstrates his love for us not only by what He did, *"Christ died for us,"* but by when He did it, *"while we were still sinners."* Jesus did not die for us when we were doing what God wanted. Being a God of grace, He sent His Son to die for us while we were sinfully ignoring Him.

### **Because God operates by grace, He helps those who are unable to help themselves.**

When Jesus Christ walked on this earth, He revealed to us what God was like, what kind of people He assists. On one occasion, Jesus Christ scanned a crowd looking to invite people to come to Him. He wanted to help them. He issued this invitation:

*"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)*

While attending a county fair in New Hampshire, I was a demonstration of how a yoke functions. A team of oxen was fitted with a twin opening yoke made of

wood. The yoke was hitched to a loaded cart. The two openings of the yoke kept two animals securely in place, walking side-by-side as they pulled the cart through a course that had been laid out.

Jesus invited the weary to be harnessed beside Him; to take His yoke upon them. His easy yoke and light burden would provide needed guidance and direction. His gentle, humble instruction would provide rest for the soul.

Many believe that, "God helps those who help themselves." Some even believe that this statement comes from the Bible!

The Bible does not say that God helps those who help themselves. On the contrary, the Bible says that God is a God of grace. Because God operates by grace, He helps those who are unable to help themselves.

***Review the verses in this lesson once more and summarize what you learned.***

## **The Bar Behind You God's Standard**

### **The standard God measures our lives by is unreachably high.**

Let the bar a high jumper must clear represent the standard of performance God would determine to be acceptable. "Clearing the bar," means that you have done enough of what God asks of you to receive His approval. The question is; how high do you have to jump in order to clear the bar and receive God's acceptance?

The Ten Commandments, given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, are an enduring description of God's will for our lives. What level of obedience to these commands does God require from us? How well do we need to keep them before God says we have "cleared the bar? "

Jesus used two of the Ten Commandments to demonstrate how high God's standard is.

*"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder,' and 'anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment...You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.'" (Matthew 5:21-22)*

***How did Jesus make the commandments against murder and adultery more difficult to keep?***

***What do you learn about God's standard of right and wrong?***

The people Jesus spoke to reasoned that if they never murdered anyone or committed adultery, they did not have any reason to fear God's judgment. Jesus corrected them by teaching that someone who uses angry words has broken the commandment "*Do not murder.*" He warned that someone who has lustful thoughts has broken the commandment "*Do not commit adultery.*"

It might appear that Jesus raised the bar of God's standard, making it more difficult to clear. However, He merely reset the bar to its original height. The tenth commandment had been neglected over time. Jesus simply dusted it off and put it back into play alongside the other nine commandments.

*"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." Exodus 20:17*

***What is the impact of the tenth commandment on God's standard of right and wrong?***

"Coveting" is merely another word for wanting or desiring which is a normal part of the human condition. We all have wants and desires throughout our lives. Therefore, the tenth commandment does not prohibit coveting. However, the tenth commandment does prohibit wanting what my neighbor possesses.

Lust violates God's standard against adultery because wanting my neighbor's wife is against God's law, even before acting on the desire. Anger violates God's standard against murder because being angry that someone else has something I don't have is against God's law. The acts of murder and adultery rise from the desire to have what someone else has. This is coveting. It violates God's standard.

***When "you shall not covet your neighbor's \_\_\_\_\_" is included, how does it influence our ability to clear the bar?***

Jesus proclaimed that God holds us accountable not only for our external behaviors but also for our inward attitudes and motivations. God demands heart-deep rather than just skin-deep devotion. If we are going to try to earn God's acceptance by living a life that measures up to His standard, we must perfectly control not only our actions but also our words and thoughts. This is an unreachable standard.

**We can never live lives that measure up to God's standard. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, lived the only life that measured up to God's standard.**

We would like to believe that if we try hard enough, we could live a life that measures up to God's standard. When we see how exacting God's standard is, though, we begin to understand that it is impossible to "clear the bar" by trying hard to obey God's commandments.

*"For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker." (James 2:10-11)*

**What does this passage say to a person who thinks that by keeping the Ten Commandments they can "clear the bar" of God's standard?**

God's standard is perfection. Failure to perfectly obey God's commands means that we have failed to meet God's standard. God does not grade our lives using A's and B's for those who try hard, C's and D's for those who don't try as hard and F's for those who don't try at all. God grades Pass/Fail. To pass you have to keep the law perfectly. One slip, just one, and you receive a failing grade. There has only been one individual who lived a life that met God's standard.

Jesus Christ was, *"tempted in every way, just as we are- yet was without sin."* (Hebrews 4:15) He never fell short of God's standard in his actions, words, or thoughts. Jesus Christ is the only person who cleared the bar by living a perfect life.

**Review the verses in this lesson once more and summarize what you learned.**

## **The Bar Behind You Sin's Penalty**

### **Sin is failure to measure up to God's standard.**

The Bible tells us, *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*  
(Romans 3:23)

The word "sin" literally means, "missing the mark." Picture God's standard for us as the center "bulls-eye" of a target and our attempts to live according to that standard as shooting arrows at the bulls-eye. All of us have missed the bulls-eye! Our efforts to live godly lives miss the mark He has established. When the Bible says that we are sinners, it means that our efforts to obey fall short of the standard He set for us.

It is clear that some people live better lives than others. They come closer to the bulls-eye. However, when we compare our lives with God's standard, it is clear that all of us *"fall short of the glory of God."* Only Jesus lived a perfect life and never sinned. By contrast, we have all failed to live lives that meet God's standard. We have "missed the mark." In other words, we have sinned.

### **The penalty for failing to measure up to God's standard is death.**

God warns us that the punishment for failing to obey His commandments is severe.

*"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 6:23)

### ***What is the wage sin pays? What is the gift God gives?***

The *"death"* described in this verse does not simply refer to physical death. It refers to eternal spiritual separation from God. The punishment for sin is separation from God both now and forever.

God loves us and does not want to punish us. However, God is also just and He must punish sin. Sin is a capital offense in God's courtroom. God's penalty for sin is death. When dealing with sin, good deeds cannot balance the scales of justice. Only death can.

**Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our unrighteousness; our failure to live lives that measure up to God's standard.**

Jesus Christ came to earth to provide the way for us to escape the penalty of eternal separation from God.

*"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24)*

*"For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God." (1 Peter 3:18)*

***The "tree" refers to the cross on which Jesus died. How did Jesus Christ provide a solution for man's sin problem?***

When it says that Jesus "*bore*" our sins, it means that He both assumed responsibility for our sins and absorbed the penalty for them. Since sin is punishable by death, Jesus had to die in order to pay the penalty for our sins. Jesus did not merely clear the bar of God's standard by living a perfect life. He also died to pay the penalty for the lifetime of our unsuccessful attempts to clear it.

Jesus lived a "*righteous*" life. He never sinned. Although He was "*righteous*," He suffered the penalty we who are "*unrighteous*" deserved to suffer. We are saved from the penalty of sin not by trusting in what we have done for Him, but by trusting in what He has done for us.

*Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)*

***What claim does Jesus make? What qualifies Him to be able to make this claim?***

***In light of this statement by Jesus, how would you respond to someone who says, 'There are many roads to God'?***

Jesus claimed to be the only one who could bring us to God. He can make this claim because only He has provided a solution for the problem of sin.

***Review the verses in this lesson once more and summarize what you learned.***

## **The Bar Behind You The Law's Purpose**

**God gave us the Law (Ten Commandments) so that we might become conscious that our lives fall short of His standard.**

The Ten Commandments clarify what God's standard is. It is a mistake, however, to reason that if we try hard enough to obey the Ten Commandments, God will declare us to be righteous in His eyes.

*"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin." (Romans 3:19-20)*

***What purpose does "the Law" serve?***

To be "*declared righteous*" means to "clear the bar" and receive God's acceptance. Those who "*observe the law*" will not be "*declared righteous*" by God. God will not declare a person righteous because they have tried hard to keep the Ten Commandments. God gives us the Ten Commandments so that we might become "*conscious of sin.*"

**God gave us the Law to lead us to depend on Jesus Christ as our only hope to be accepted by God.**

Why would God give us commandments in order to make us "*conscious of sin?*" Actually, there is a good reason why He does so.

*"But the Scripture declares that that whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith." (Galatians 3:24)*

God uses the Law to make us "*conscious of sin*" in order to "*lead us to Christ.*"

The Law is like a tutor. It motivates us to go to Jesus to be taught by Him. When Jesus lived on earth, tutors functioned differently than they do today. Today, tutors teach children. Back then tutors merely made sure the students got to school. Once the children arrived at the school, the tutor's job was over and the teacher's job began. The Law is the tutor and Jesus is the teacher. The Law makes sure we get to the place where we will listen to what Jesus wants to teach us. The Law makes us conscious of our sin so that we have to admit that we have a sin problem. Only those who realize they have a sin problem will be motivated to learn from Jesus and depend on Him to solve it.

The Law is also like a thermometer. It motivates us to go to Jesus to be healed by Him.

Thermometers reveal how sick we are. However, thermometers are not able to restore us to health. A doctor would never say, "take two thermometers and call me in the morning." While a thermometer is useful to show us how sick we are, it is useless to heal us. The Ten Commandments function in the same way. The Law of God points out specific ways in which we fall short of God's standard. Because God has given us His Law as a standard of spiritual health, we are able to see clearly that our lives fall short of God's standard. Only those who realize they are spiritually ill will be motivated to depend on Jesus to receive healing.

***Review the verses in this lesson once more and summarize what you learned.***

## **The Bar Behind You Our Response**

**We are declared to be righteous when we depend on what God has done for us, not on what we have done for Him.**

Being sinners, we all fail to meet God's standard of perfection. Consequently, we all have an eternal death sentence hanging over our heads. However, God has provided a way for us to be accepted by Him and to be declared righteous in His eyes. On one occasion, Jesus told a story to illustrate the kind of person God accepts.

*"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men- robbers, evildoers, adulterers- or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get. But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 18:9-14)*

***The Pharisee could be described as "self-righteous." From the story, how does a self-righteous person relate to God? How do they relate to others?***

***Why did God accept the tax collector and not the Pharisee?***

To be "*justified before God*" means to be declared righteous by God and therefore acceptable to Him. Surprisingly, the tax collector was the one who was "*justified*." Although he was not as devoted to God as the Pharisee was, he realized that his behavior was not righteous enough to merit God's acceptance.

He approached God depending on God's grace rather than on his own spiritual accomplishments. He cleared the bar. God accepted him.

The Pharisee was proud of his righteous life. He believed that he was earning God's acceptance. He did not receive God's acceptance. He did not clear the bar. *"For it is by grace you have been saved through faith- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- not by works, so that no one can boast."* (Ephesians 2:8,9)

***When it comes to being saved from the penalty of sin, why is boasting about "works" out of place?***

God operates by grace. His acceptance is a gift we receive not a paycheck that we earn. Being saved from the penalty of sin is *"by grace"* and *"through faith."*

***When we receive Jesus' death as God's payment for our sins, we are saved from the penalty of our sin.***

Those who are saved by God place their faith in what God has done for them rather than what they have done for Him.

A story is told about a woman who was forced to appear in court because of a crime she had committed. The presiding judge found her guilty and established the fine. Once he had done so, he stepped down from the bench and offered the woman a check to cover the fine. Why did he do this? The judge was that woman's father. Because he was a judge, he had to administer justice and find her guilty. However, because of his love for her he not only established the fine, he offered to pay it himself.

***In what way is God like the judge in this story?***

***In what way are we like the woman in this story?***

We all have sinned. As a just judge, God has found us guilty and has set the penalty as death. As a loving father, though, He has arranged to pay the penalty justice demanded be paid.

When the judge offered to pay his daughter's fine, she had a choice to make. If she refused to receive the payment her father offered, she would have to pay the penalty on her own. If she received the check from her father, she would be set free.

We are in the same position. God has found us guilty of sin. The penalty for our sin is death. If we receive Christ's death as the payment for our sins, in God's eyes our penalty is paid in full. If, however, we refuse to receive Jesus' death as the payment for our sin, we will pay the penalty and suffer the consequences of eternal death ourselves.

*Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." (John 5:24)*

***What promise does Jesus make? What are the conditions?***

Admit that you have sinned and have failed to clear the bar of His righteous standard. Believe that God sent His Son, Jesus Christ into the world to keep His standard perfectly and pay the penalty for your inability to do so. Transfer your trust from what you have or have not done for God to what Jesus has done for you and God will credit you to be righteous and acceptable to Him.

***Review the verses in this lesson once more and summarize what you learned.***

## **The Bar Behind You God's Assurance**

**When we place our faith in Jesus Christ, we have "cleared the bar" in God's sight.**

The central message proclaimed in the Bible can be summarized as follows:

- The bar is unreachably high and the penalty for not meeting God's standard is severe.
- Jesus Christ, God the Son, did what no human being has done- He cleared the bar by perfectly keeping God's commandments.
- Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sin; our unsuccessful attempts to clear the bar.
- As an undeserved gift, God declares the believer in His Son to be righteous and credits the believer with having cleared the bar of His standard.
- When you place your faith in Jesus Christ, you are credited with clearing the bar.
- When you place your faith in Jesus Christ, the bar is behind you.

When a person competing in a high jump competition successfully clears the bar at the winning height, that person does not need to jump over the bar any more in that competition. Having cleared the bar at the winning height, the competition is over and the bar is behind them.

When you put your faith in Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. Not only are your sins forgiven, in God's eyes you have been declared to be righteous. You have been credited with a level of righteousness that allows you to be eternally accepted by God. The bar is behind you.

***If the "bar is behind you" what difference does it make?***

If the bar is behind you, you do not need to worry about elevating yourself over a standard in order to be loved and accepted by God. You do not have to worry any more about God rejecting you because of substandard performance. Because your acceptance is conditioned not by your own performance but by the performance of Jesus Christ on your behalf, your acceptance is assured; the bar is behind you.

If you have placed your faith in Christ and believe that God's acceptance of you is a pending decision conditioned by what you do, you have lost sight of the fact that Christ's work is finished. When Jesus said, *"It is finished"* (John 19:30) from the cross, He was announcing that the work required to enable you to be accepted by God had been accomplished. When you place your faith in Jesus' work on your behalf, as an undeserved gift, God credits you with having cleared the bar. If you have come into a relationship with God through faith in Christ that means that God's bar is behind you.

**When we place our faith in Jesus Christ, we become children of God with a permanent place in God's family.**

When we believe in and receive Jesus Christ, God gives us the right to become His Children.

*"Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God- children born not of natural descent, or of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."(John 1:12,13)*

***What must you do in order for God to give you the right to become His child?***

God is the only one who can give the right to someone to become His child. The conditions under which He gives this right are clear- believing and receiving. When we believe in Jesus and by faith receive the gift of eternal life, we are assured that we become one of God's children.

Jesus commented on the significance of being a child of God.

*"Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." (John 8:36)*

***What is the difference between a slave and a son?***

Being a son or daughter of God means possessing a permanent place in God's family. This is what distinguishes a slave from a son.

When a slave did not perform well enough, he or she could lose his or her place in the family. The possibility of dismissal kept the slave in line. They had no permanent place in the family. By contrast, a son or daughter could not forfeit their place in the family by not meeting expectations. They had a permanent place in the family. Jesus' point is that children of God have a permanent place in God's family.

If you have believed in Jesus Christ, you are a child of God with a permanent place in God's "forever family."

***Review the verses in this lesson once more and summarize what you learned.***

## **The Bar Behind You Our Transformation**

### **Love is the mark of a transformed life.**

Jesus told His disciples that love would identify them as His followers.

*"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35)*

In fact, all of God's commands can be summed up by one command, the command to love.

*"The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." (Galatians 5:6)*

*"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not covet,' and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law." (Romans 13:8-10)*

*"The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Galatians 5:14)*

### **Why is love a fitting summary of God's commandments?**

God's priority is to empower His children to love Him and others. The love referred to in the Bible is love that shows itself in actions, not merely in words.

*"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. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." (1 John 3:16-18)*

### **Compare the love described here with popular notions of love.**

When we love one another, we identify ourselves as Christ's followers and live lives that please God. God works in our lives to develop our ability to love him and to love others in His Name.

**God uses love, not fear, to motivate His children to love Him and one another.**

Love is God's priority for us. How does God motivate us to love Him and others?

*"There is no fear in love. Perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us." (1 John 4:18,19)*

***What problems does fear create for us? What stops do people take to reduce fear?***

***What is able to "drive out" fear? Is it possible to know that God loves you and at the same time fear that He might punish you? Why? Why not?***

***What is the relationship between being loved and loving others?***

As we grasp the "perfect love" of God, we are released from fearing God's punishment. *"Perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment."* The fear of punishment and eternal separation from God cannot fuel love. On the contrary, the awareness of God's love for us kindles the flame

of our love for Him and others. *"We love because He first loved us."* Those who know God's love are able to extend love to others. Our love for others is an echo of God's love for us.

God does not use fear and condemnation to generate love in the lives of His children. To the degree that we grasp God's love, we are able to love Him and others.

***Review the verses in this lesson once more and summarize what you learned***