

THE GOOD NEWS

OF TRANSFORMATION





Sean Pica entered prison as a 9th grade New Yorker with a 24-year sentence. He had little hope in himself or any sort of redemptive future. But, when he began reading children's books to fellow inmates and teaching them how to write letters to their loved ones, he witnessed how learning created a flicker of joy amid the isolation.

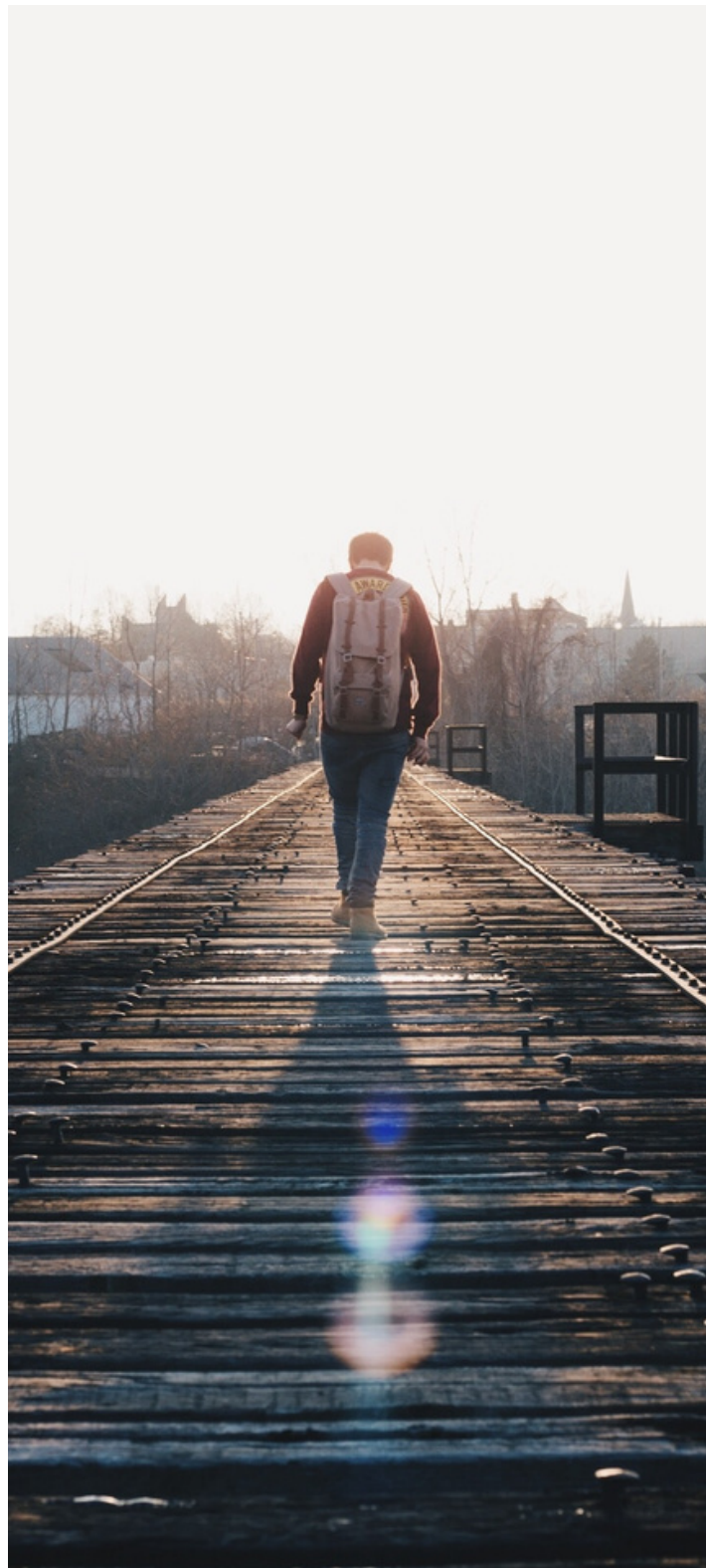
Soon, he enrolled in an organization called Hudson Link, a degree-granting program in prisons, and took college classes. Through that experience, he saw the minds and hearts of individuals transformed through education and how it helped them learn about themselves and what was possible once released.

After Sean was released, he went on to earn 400 credits from Nyack College towards his undergraduate degree. On top of that, he earned two master's degrees from New York Theological Seminary and Hunter College. In 2007, Pica returned to lead Hudson Link as its Executive Director.

Today, Hudson Link's programs provide postsecondary education to thousands of men and women in prison. Less than 2% recidivate. This is a huge improvement compared to the rate of 68% nationwide of those who will eventually return to prison. Pica's work with preventing the return of parolees to prison saves New York State taxpayers over \$21 million per year, and that number continues to increase.¹

Hearing or reading about people who have turned their lives around warms our hearts and even gives us hope that anyone can change. There is something about a turnaround story that inspires. We love watching movies or diving into books that tell the story of a person moving from utter demise to eventual triumph.

The Gospel is the ultimate turnaround story. God moves the people he redeems towards a different future destination and a better present dimension. Becoming a Christian is not just about having your sins forgiven. It also incorporates the transformation of who you are, and as a result, how you live.



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TURNAROUND STORY."



A CHANGE OF BEING

When God saves a person, he turns their life around by changing their very nature. This happens because he moves people from death to life. Jesus said in John 5:24,

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”

To be lost is to be spiritually dead. To be spiritually dead means that we cannot understand or do spiritual things because we are totally incapable of doing so.

Paul spoke of this condition in the following manner in Ephesians 2:1-3:

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”

Being spiritually dead is not a neutral state. We end up following evil and even doing wrong things because we are predisposed to think, feel and act this way. As a result we are, both by nature and by choice, people deserving judgment.

But, through the resurrecting power of Jesus, we are made spiritually alive. Paul echoes this by following up on his sobering statement in Ephesians 2:1-3 with these hope-filled words,

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4-7).

God’s love for lost sinners enables us to be saved, to be raised up to new life, and through that new life serve as living examples for all eternity of how he can change anyone. This is all made possible because of his grace. He changes who we are at the very core of our being. The good news of transformation is that becoming who we should be finds its origin in the free gift of God’s powerful work in changing who we are.





A CHANGE IN PERCEIVING

When we move from death to life, we begin to see things in a totally different way. Jesus said in John 8:12:

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Things that we did not know or could not see because we were in bondage to darkness now become clear to us. Having healthy relationships, how to handle money, and every other important topic pertaining to life now takes on a different angle. We now have wisdom from God that changes the lenses of how we look at ourselves and the world.

This new dimension of understanding what is true, good, and worthwhile comes from God's Spirit who lives in every believer. The Spirit's presence shows us the path that leads to living the good life. Paul put it this way:

"Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual" (1 Corinthians 2:12-13).

God wants all of his children to experience every good thing he has provided. The way we access these excellent gifts is through the insights and revelation that the Spirit gives. The good news of transformation is that we can see and understand what the good life is like as the Spirit takes the Word of God and applies it to our hearts.

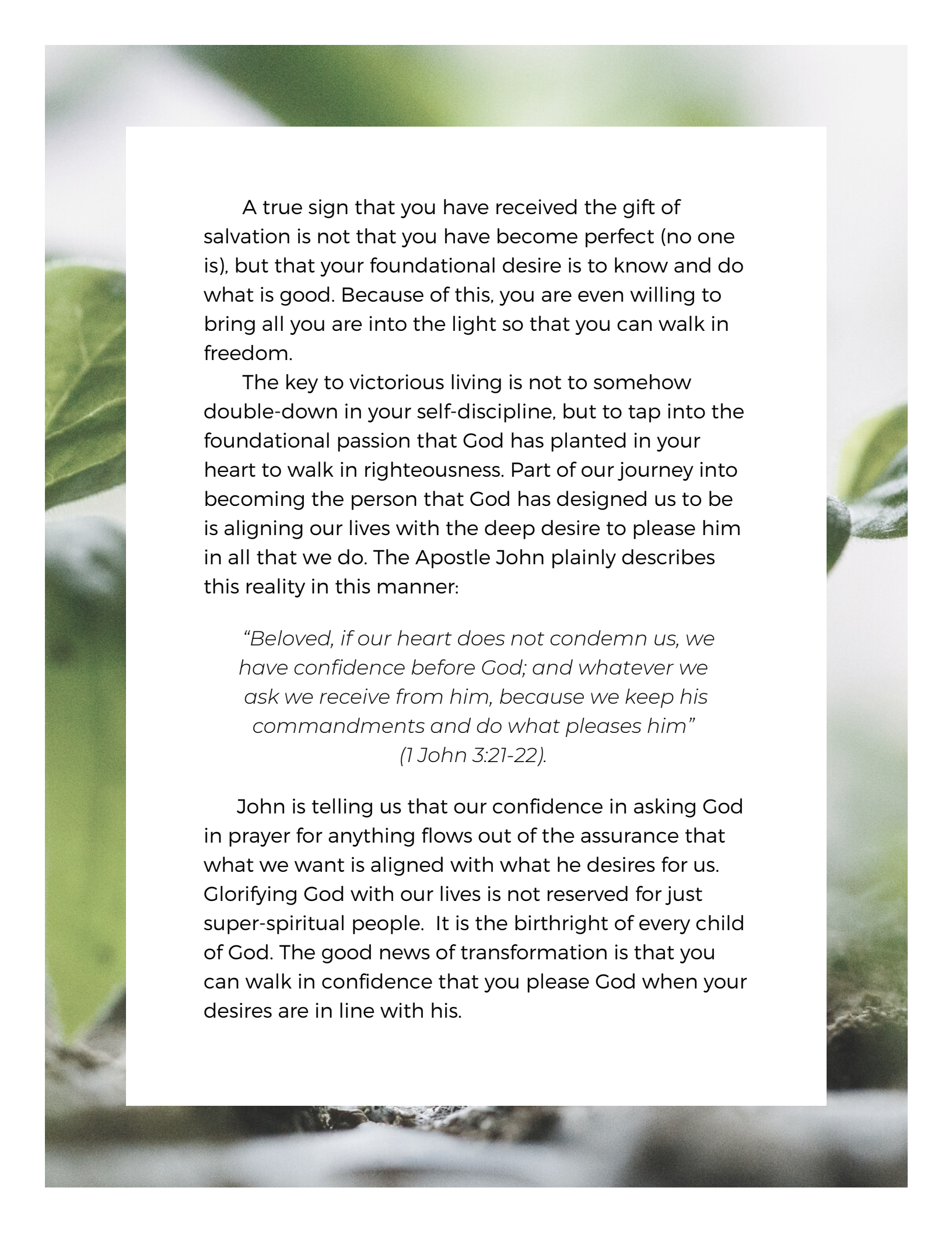


A CHANGE IN DESIRING

God changes our natures when we believe in his Son. That change in who we are allows us to understand what God's will is and how to do it. But that is not all. Because we have been changed, we not only see things differently, we want to pursue and experience all the good things God has in store for those who follow him (1 Corinthians 2:9-10). This is different from when we walked in darkness. No matter what our philosophical or religious ideology was before we met Christ, deep down in the our most basic motivations we preferred to follow what was selfish and even corrupted.

The Apostle John revealed this truth about our desires when he said in 1 John 1:5-10:

"This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."



A true sign that you have received the gift of salvation is not that you have become perfect (no one is), but that your foundational desire is to know and do what is good. Because of this, you are even willing to bring all you are into the light so that you can walk in freedom.

The key to victorious living is not to somehow double-down in your self-discipline, but to tap into the foundational passion that God has planted in your heart to walk in righteousness. Part of our journey into becoming the person that God has designed us to be is aligning our lives with the deep desire to please him in all that we do. The Apostle John plainly describes this reality in this manner:

*“Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him”
(1 John 3:21-22).*

John is telling us that our confidence in asking God in prayer for anything flows out of the assurance that what we want is aligned with what he desires for us. Glorifying God with our lives is not reserved for just super-spiritual people. It is the birthright of every child of God. The good news of transformation is that you can walk in confidence that you please God when your desires are in line with his.

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questions



1. What is intriguing or inspiring about Sean Pica's story? What do you think you feel that way?

How is the Gospel about a change of being?

2.



3. How is the Gospel about a change in perceiving?

How is the Gospel about a change in desiring?

4.



REFERENCES:

1. "Prison to Professional: 6 Life After Prison Success Stories." Stand Together, <https://standtogether.org/news/6-stories-of-transformation-from-prisoner-to-professional/>