

The Metamorphic Phenomena

In Living Color, Part 4

Selected Scripture

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

Metamorphosis in the natural world reveals to us certain principles in the spiritual world. Metamorphosis is a transformation. Some ways that we see it in the natural world is through the metamorphosis of rocks into gems, ceramic into porcelain, and a caterpillar into a butterfly. Through all of these examples, we can apply spiritual principles. Through the transformation of a rock into a gem, we see the transformation that pressure brings on one's life. Through the transformation of ceramic into porcelain, we see the transformation of refinement on one's life. A believer can go through trials and be tested and come out of it more refined and more like Christ. Through the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly, we see the transformation of change on one's life. Don't be conformed to the ways of the world. We need the environment of pressure so that we can develop a character that reflects Christ. We need the environment of refinement so that we can continue to grow and mature in our faith. We need the environment of change so that God can change our way of thinking to be completely immersed in His word and not the world.

Discussion Points:

Spiritual transformation is a transformation of the heart. Most of the time, this transformation hurts.

- We face pressures every day. What kinds of pressures do you encounter daily?
- How do you see God using those pressures for your good?
- What promises in Scripture does God give us to show us that He is with us through it all and that He is worthy of captivating our hearts?

Along with pressures, the believer will also go through trials and the refining fire.

- Romans 8:28 says that God works all things together for our good and His glory. How has that truth been made know to you this past week? How can you use that truth to minister to someone else?
- What does the world say about trials? Why are trials good for us?
- Our trials should bring glory to God. How can you bring Him glory? How can you use your trials to share the Gospel?

Discussion Guide Cont.

Romans says to not be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

- Does the world encourage individualism or conforming?
- In what areas have Christians started to compromise?
- How do we renew our minds daily so that we don't conform to the world?

Gospel Connection:

The Gospel changes lives. Metamorphosis is all about transforming. When someone believes and the Holy Spirit indwells, there is absolute transformation. That person is no longer dead in his or her sin but alive in Christ. Without the Gospel, there is no change. We would continue on the same path – the path to destruction. But with the Gospel, we can change paths and be on the path to life with God.

Practical Implications:

Think: What areas of your life need transformed? How has the truth of metamorphosis changed your perspective on spiritual transformation?

Pray: Ask God to help you be more like Him. Ask Him for a desire to be spiritually transformed in your heart and mind. Ask Him to help you give Him glory in every circumstance of life.

Do: Walk in the Spirit. Say “no” to the world and “yes” to God.

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In the late 1930's a man by the name of Frank was diagnosed with hypertension – which was barely understood at all back then.

Frank was diagnosed in 1937 at the age of 54. His blood pressure was 162/98 and, at the time, that was considered mild and not of any concern.

By 1940, his blood pressure was running 180/88 and still, no treatment was ever initiated or medical advice offered.

In 1941, his pressure had risen to 188 over 105 and only then did his doctors tell him to cut back on his work. He tried, but his condition didn't improve.

Four years later Frank's blood pressure was 260/145 and a few months after that, on April 12, 1945, he complained of having a severe headache and his blood pressure was measured at 300/190. Later that same day he lost consciousness and died, at the age of 63.

You probably know him better as Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the 32nd president of the United States.ⁱ

There were things going on inside of him that he didn't understand and certainly those around him – even the medical doctors committed to his care – didn't understand either.

Fortunately, more than 100 years later, the medical profession has developed in so many ways and it now knows the danger of hypertension. But even though the medical profession has progressed – and I'm waiting for it to progress to the point where it can cure hay fever – until it does, I'm on the Claritin-a-day program.

But I couldn't help but think of the believer . . . you happen to be living in a world that does not understand the internal issues of the heart. The stress and the struggles that inflict damage, not necessarily to blood vessels, but on the believer's spirit and mind.

We need guidance from beyond this world as we know it; and the good news is, we happen to belong to a Great Physician who knows exactly what we need internally.

In His inspired manual on the human condition, He sometimes refers to what we need in terms of transformation. And the spiritual principle of transformation is not only revealed to us in scripture, it's also illustrated for us physically, in the natural world.

In fact, one of the most fascinating phenomena in the natural world is this process of transformation.

There's a Greek term that has been transliterated into the English language for this process – it's the word metamorphosis. Metamorphow gives us our word, metamorphosis, which Kittel writes, can mean, to remodel *or* to change from one form into another.ⁱⁱ

In other words, metamorphosis might refer to something new and improved in alteration, or for something entirely new in form and function. And there are a variety of ways we see this taking place in the natural world.

And let me state at the outset of our study - the metamorphic phenomena is an incredible illustration of things that are taking place in your own heart and life right now . . . and you might not even be paying it all that much attention. But God is at work!

This morning, I want to point out three illustrations of metamorphosis – and provide three environments where they take place – and ultimately apply it through scripture, to our own lives.

Now when I mention the concept of metamorphosis in the natural world – you automatically think of the metamorphosis that produces beautiful what? – that's right – beautiful rocks.

Otherwise known as precious gems. We'll get to butterflies . . . so hold your horses. But let's start with rocks. Otherwise or more scientifically referred to as metamorphic rocks.

The Metamorphosis of Rock into Gemstone

The principle (or the environment) of pressure

This is the metamorphosis of certain rocks into gemstones or other rock of great value. And it takes place because of what we'll call, the principle or the environment of pressure.

While you turn to **Romans chapter 5**, let me explain. At some point in the past, metamorphic rock inside the earth's crust and even deeper – were subjected to intense pressure, and heat, causing the atoms to recombine into new rock formations.

Through the movement of earth's crust and the erupting of volcanoes, these rocks are carried closer to the surface where they can be mined.

For instance, marble is a metamorphic rock that forms when limestone is subjected to enough heat and pressure. The calcite in the limestone recrystallizes and overtime, with continued pressure, it becomes marble and you get your new countertop.

Diamonds are another metamorphic rock – made from graphite under great pressure. Diamonds are the hardest natural substance found on earth.

The prophet Jeremiah speaks of writing an un-erasable record by writing with a pen of iron that has a diamond point (**Jeremiah 17:1**).

Almost all diamonds are formed 100 miles or more below the Earth's surface – carried upward through crustal movements and rising hot magma as well as the eruption of water from beneath the earth's crust during the great flood of Noah.

Without that intense pressure, 100 miles deep beneath the earth's surface, graphite stays graphite and you use it as a pencil in school. But if it undergoes incredible pressure, the

metamorphosis produces something so beautiful and stunning that royalty have used it in their crowns and scepters from ancient times.

And to this day, diamonds are the most intensely sought after gemstone. Especially in the western world over the past 70 years or so, primarily due to a successful advertising campaign, launched in 1947 by DeBeers Incorporated. They launched an advertising campaign called, "A Diamond is Forever"; 6 years later, an actress by the name of Marilyn Monroe sang a song that included the words, "A diamond is a girl's best friend." Thanks to that song, men have been deeply in debt ever since.

Gemstones created from metamorphic rock by intense pressure – deep within the surface of the earth – include rubies and emeralds and sapphires, along with diamonds.

Exodus chapter 28 informs us that God selected the emerald and the ruby and the diamond among other gemstones to fit into the breastplate of the High Priest.

It's interesting to consider that without pressure, graphite remains one of the softest metamorphic rocks in existence – I'm holding it in my hand right now . . . and this # 2 pencil cost pennies to own. It's just hard enough to write with and soft enough to erase. But this pencil and a diamond are made of the same carbon.

But nobody is going to wear this pencil around their neck for jewelry. You don't propose by pulling out a pencil. Sweetheart, did you know that graphite and diamonds are made out of the same carbon atoms . . . look at the tip on this thing – it's got to be the size of a two carat diamond – will you marry . . . here's a pencil you can use."

She'll use it alright . . . you'll probably die a painful death. She doesn't want a pencil from Walmart. She wants you to get something 100 miles below the surface of the earth. Something forged from great pressure and heat; why? Because that's a much better metaphor of the strength and depth of your love.

You see, you add the principle of pressure – and this graphite metamorphosis's into the

hardest rock on the planet . . . exquisite and valuable and rare . . . and a privilege to own.

The Apostle Paul takes that word pressure and uses it to talk about how we as believers make our walk with Christ all the more valuable and exquisite and strong.

He writes in ***Romans chapter 5 at verse 3*** a description of what the chain reaction – the transformation that pressure brings about in your life.

He uses a word that is often translated tribulation, but it comes from the Greek word (thlipsis) which is better translated here in this context as pressure. Notice, *We exult in our pressures . . . knowing that pressure brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope.*

Romans 5:3-4

God is taking ordinary graphite and turning us into diamonds . . . how? Through the principle of pressure where we learn to rely on Him. We all face pressure – the pressure of deadlines, people’s expectations; the economy; office politics; relationships; failing health; financial needs; job loss; grief; major life events that bring hardship and difficulty.ⁱⁱⁱ

Paul essentially informs us that the principle of pressure is a part of God’s plan in the metamorphosis of our character and our demeanor and our perspective and our testimony.

In the plan of God, *pressure is productive*. It promotes this chain reaction which ultimately produces the character of Christ within us. This is the metamorphosis of common rock into precious gemstones – made possible by means of and through intense pressure.

Secondly, let me briefly address something similar – but with a different product in mind.

The Metamorphosis of Ceramic into Porcelain

This will add: *The principle, or environment of refinement*

Technically, porcelain is a form of a ceramic. The term ceramic is a broad term for clay forms. In fact, the word ceramic comes from the Greek term which means potter’s clay, from which we’ve created the word, pottery.

The earliest pottery forms we’ve been able to excavate are pots and figurines and hand-held oil lamps. I’ve held in my hand a small hand-held oil lamp dating back to the days of Abraham.

It wasn’t until the 1300’s where European merchants encountered Chinese porcelain – and they were mesmerized by its beauty.

Normal ceramic is thick, porous, chalky or grainy, soft and easily cracked or broken. I brought some of it up here with me this morning – I’m holding in my hand a ceramic – a piece of my favorite pottery – it has my name painted on it – Grandpa.

This is my second one. It’s from Cracker Barrel. They must’ve known I was coming! This mug is inexpensive . . . it’s porous . . . coffee doesn’t stay hot for very long.

The first one was given to me by one of my kids . . . and I was just wiping it clean one day, and the handle snapped off . . . so I had to wait until I went back to Cracker Barrel again – which was only about 3 days – and I bought another one . . . I had to have this one . . . it has my name on it . . . did I mention that? Now this cup is not an expensive work of art.

At home we have some of those – they’re porcelain – otherwise referred to at times as fine china – cups that are on display in our dining room – from wherever we’ve traveled around the world, we’ve tried to pick up a tea cup and saucer as a reminder.

They are works of art. But they happen to be pottery as well. Fine China and porcelain and pottery are all made of clay. Which is another kind of illustration in how God uses all of us, no matter where we are in the process.

The difference between pottery and porcelain is that porcelain is put through higher temperatures and additional phosphates or elements added in the process. When ordinary pottery is fired at higher temperatures, the

product might be a porcelain tile or a china cup and saucer, which are much more water tight and smooth, more resistant to staining and chipping. The key is the heating and the pouring and even the cooling process.

The Apostle Peter is actually using the terminology of this process when he encouraged the believer. Beloved, do not be surprised at the *fiery* ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your *testing* . . . but to the *degree* that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing . . . if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but it to glorify God.

1 Peter 4:12-16

This is the principle of refinement . . . the believer through the fire of trials is refined and tested and emerges along the way as one who isn't to be ashamed, but someone who essentially is able in an even greater and more distinctive manner to bring glory to their Creator God.

This is the confidence of Job who writes with this perspective; God knows the way I take; when He has *tried* me, I shall come forth as gold.

Job 23:10

Metamorphosis in the natural world reveals to us principles in the spiritual world:

- the principle or environment of pressure
- the principle or environment of refinement

And now, thirdly, the principle or environment of change. Let's address the metamorphic phenomena that we expected to cover in our study – and that is;

The metamorphosis of caterpillar into butterfly

In his letter to the Roman believers Paul begins the 12th chapter by telling us to stop doing something. And do not be conformed to this world . . .

Romans 12:2a

Phillips translates this, "Don't let the world squeeze you into its mold."

The verb – *to be conformed* – is passive, which means that Paul is telling the believers to not allow themselves to be conformed to the world system.

Which essentially means, don't adopt the mindset of the world system which surrounds you. Don't slowly melt into their manner of thinking where God doesn't exist in real form.

Ask the average person on the street –

- How did the universe begin? And they will answer, "Probably by an accident – called the big bang."
- Ask them, how will it all end? And they will answer – "Probably by an accident."
- Ask them, "Why are we here? Are we the result of an accident?"
- "What moral instructions can you give us? Accidents don't come with instructions."

You see, the average person has figured out that the accidental life isn't worth living because it's without meaning or definition or purpose.^{iv}

Celebrity chef and TV personality, Anthony Bourdain, wore a tattoo on his arm that read in the Greek language, "I am certain of nothing." He took his own life this past summer.

Do you realize how different you are than the world around you when you say,

- I am certain of my Creator;
- I am certain of my purpose for living for His glory;
- I am certain of the gospel;
- I am certain of my Savior;
- I am certain of His resurrection;
- I am certain of my future eternal destiny.

But how does the world think? One recent poll highlighted what's being called the new moral code. Here are the percentages of Christians who claim to practice their Christianity (they attend church, pray over their meals, read the Bible, give money to charity, etc.); here's the percentage of those Christians who agreed completely or somewhat with the following statements:

- Any kind of sexual expression between two consenting adults is acceptable – 40% of practicing Christians agreed.
- The highest goal in life is to enjoy life as much as possible – 66% agreed.
- The best way to find yourself is to look within – 76% of practicing Christians agreed.
- People should not criticize someone else's lifestyle choices – 76% of Christians agreed^v

Ladies and Gentlemen, it's possible for Christians to be molded by the world instead of being molded by the word.

And keep that in mind. Paul is writing this command to Christians. Then Paul goes on – And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.

Romans 12:2

In other words, don't be shaped into the mindset of the world, be radically changed into the mindset of the word.

The Holy Spirit, through the word of God, isn't interested in making a few modifications and putting on a little makeup – He's interested in demolition and reconstruction.

He is going to create a new appetite . . . a new perspective . . . a new way of living . . . new interests and new abilities and new patterns – an entirely new focus.

And nowhere is that more beautifully illustrated than in the metamorphosis of the visible transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly.

With the aid of modern DNA analysis and even the help of MRI's, we are discovering things about this transformation that earlier generations would not have been able to know, much less watch.

Here's a quick review. For many butterfly species, it begins as a caterpillar, eating only a specific type of plant. Its mother knew just where to deposit the egg . . . because when the caterpillar emerges, it starts eating. In fact, it devotes most of its life to eating and eating and eating . . . evidently they are born with the appetite of 14 year olds.

By the time the caterpillar finishes growing, it will have grown over three thousand times its original size – that would be like a 6 pound baby growing into a 9,000 pound creature – just think of Godzilla – and it all happens in a few weeks.

Eventually the eating frenzy ends and it spins a cocoon and disappears from sight.

With the help of MRI's and other machinery, scientists have been able to watch what has been a secret for several 1,000 years.

The entire caterpillar actually dissolves in the cocoon into caterpillar soup. That's my term . . . I can't pronounce their term. The liquefied caterpillar parts now provide the building materials for the adult butterfly parts.

The cells will form legs, antennae, a mouth that no longer crunches leaves, but sucks nectar; scale-covered, intricately patterned and painted with color pair of wings; a new digestive tract designed for an entirely different appetite; an elaborate vision system through a new set of eyes, a complex new breathing system that powers their flight through the air and more.

And when the butterfly eventually splits open the cocoon it will sit there for about 20 minutes while it pumps fluid into its wings, expanding and stretching them as they dry in the air; then it flaps its glorious wings and without any flight practice, it takes off in the air.^{vi}

Paul writes, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

2 Corinthians 5:17

We have a new appetite – Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation since you have tasted the kindness of the Lord

1 Peter 2:2

We have a new direction – a new flight pattern in life – In reference to your former manner of life, lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

Ephesians 4:21-24

The Apostles were aware of these principles of metamorphosis.

The Chinese were already trading silk during the days of the Apostle Paul – in fact, the Chinese had been weaving with silk 1,000 years before the birth of Christ.

One cocoon of a silkworm could yield up to 1,000 yards of silk; one continuous thread could be as long as 10 football fields, end to end.

I found it telling and instructive that when it came to the silk business, should the adult moth break out of the cocoon, it would leave a trail of broken, unusable thread. And so in order to keep this from happening, the silk farmers discovered that they could keep the moth from fully maturing by steaming the cocoons. For whatever reason, they found that the comfort and warmth provided by the steam actually stunted the growth process and the silkworm never fully matured – it finished the cocoon, but it never broke free.

You need all three principles or environments at work as a believer in order to mature and grow and reproduce in disciple making.

We need the environment of pressure so that we're developing new attributes and character that shines with brilliant gemstone quality for the Lord.

We need the environment of refinement – the refiner's fire – it isn't soft steam that keeps us drowsy and comfortable; it more like the flames of a fire that keep us refining, maturing, trusting, following the Savior.

We need the environment of radical change – the work of God internally, through the DNA of God's word, changing our mindset; changing our appetite; altering our focus in life and redirecting our energy for eternal things.

May the metamorphic phenomena impact us all, as we surrender to Him – be it pressure, fire or radical change – experiencing His character developing in us and demonstrating through us, to the world around us.

And all because of His faithful love, according to His creative metamorphic design . . . and ultimately for His eternal glory.

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- i Timothy R. Jennings, [The God Shaped Heart](#) (Baker Books, 2017), p. 21
ii Gerhard Kittel, [Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Volume 4](#) (Eerdmans, 1967), p. 755
iii Charles R. Swindoll, [New Testament Insights: Romans](#) (Zondervan, 2010), p. 113
iv Adapted from Neil Postman, "Science and the Story that we Need" *First Things* (January 1997)
v Adapted from David Kinnaman & Gabe Lyons, [Good Faith](#) (Baker Books, 2016), p. 55
vi Adapted from Answers in Genesis *metamorphosis*