



C.S. LEWIS INSTITUTE

NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

## IT'S ABOUT TRANSFORMATION IN COMMUNITY, NOT INFORMATION IN ISOLATION

JOEL S. WOODRUFF, ED.D.

PRESIDENT, C.S. LEWIS INSTITUTE



We take it for granted today, but Apple's first iPhone was launched in 2007, a little over a decade ago, and it changed the way we store, retrieve, and send information. People all over the world now have access via a handheld device to more data than ever thought imaginable. The field of information technology has boomed as companies are trying to get all of this data to us at faster speeds. We get annoyed now when we have to wait three seconds for something to download. Compare this to the old-fashioned means of getting information when you went to a library, rummaged through the card catalog, walked up several flights of steps to find the bookshelves with the correct Dewey decimal number and then hoped that someone else hadn't already checked out the book.

Information is everywhere, yet why hasn't it led to world peace or helped us become more civil in our political discourse and diplomacy? Perhaps an even more important question for followers of Jesus Christ is, with all of this information now accessible about the Bible, Christian spirituality, discipleship, and theology, why aren't Christians behaving more like Jesus Christ?

The research seems to indicate that although we now have instant access to more Christian books, Christian television and radio, podcasts and other Christian resources than ever before, self-identified followers of Jesus Christ are not making as large an impact as one would hope. Having all of this Christian information accessible has not led to the development of more mature disciples. Why is this?



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I think the problem comes down to the fact that information in isolation doesn't lead to spiritual transformation. Information is an important ingredient in the development of believers. As Christians, we value the written Word of God as found in the Bible and it is a blessing to have great biblical teaching and preaching available to us. It is good to spend time by ourselves studying God's Word and listening to podcasts from sound, biblical expositors.

However, Jesus's model of spiritual transformation doesn't stop with individual study or the focus on getting an intellectual understanding of the Bible. Jesus demonstrated through His discipleship practices — that spiritual transformation takes place within the context of a community of believers who are using the information (the teachings of the apostles) not merely for the purpose of knowing the material; rather, they are applying the truth with a goal of learning to obey all that Jesus commanded (Matt. 28:18–20). Both our heads and hearts need to be transformed if our actions are going to begin reflecting the mind and actions of Jesus.

The concept of obedience to Jesus's commands implies active learning and the thoughtful application of biblical truth and information throughout all spheres of life. On this earth, we are able to learn to obey through the inner prompting of the Holy Spirit and within the context of a community of like-minded disciples in which gracious and loving accountability is being exercised. We need to be challenged by others both to do good and to avoid sinful practices.

For example, I may be tempted to gossip about a neighbor. The Bible clearly states that gossip is a sin (Rom. 1:29). When I gossip, the Holy Spirit will nudge me to stop gossiping, yet at times I will turn a deaf ear to His prompting. It is then that the Lord may use another more thoughtful brother or sister in Christ to step in to squelch the gossip through a word of exhortation and/or through prayers for me. I need the power of Christian community to transform the way in which I speak about other people.



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Spiritual transformation requires biblical truth (information) and a desire to understand God's commands, but it cannot be done in isolation. We need the discipline of Christian community, the power of the Holy Spirit, and an active approach to learning in which we are seeking to obey all that Jesus commanded, allowing God's truth to permeate our minds and hearts.

If you desire to become an obedient, fervent, disciple of Jesus Christ, then make an active decision not only to study God's Word on your own with all of the resources available online, but also to make a commitment to engage with others in Christian community. Spiritual transformation will not take place in isolation from others. Daily we need to ask the Holy Spirit to fill us and empower us so that we're sensitive to His prompting. And we need to rub shoulders with other believers more than just on Sunday mornings for two hours and on Wednesday nights. We need to seek out biblical accountability within a gracious, faith-filled body of believers. We need to be in fellowship daily with other disciples for the purpose of learning to be as obedient to our heavenly Father as Jesus was.

One of the reasons I believe that the year-long discipleship program of the C.S. Lewis Institute (the C.S. Lewis Fellows Program) is so effective in developing mature believers is that it is creating an environment for spiritual transformation. It begins with the personal study of Scripture and the reading of good books, but it doesn't stop there. It provides a community of like-minded believers from different churches who walk together through a year devoted to the goal of learning to obey all that Jesus commanded.

Are you hungry for more? Are you eager to become more competent and confident in living out your Christian faith and love for Jesus Christ? If so, I encourage you to consider the C.S. Lewis Fellows community. For more information, go to the Fellows page on our website: [www.cslewisinstitute.org](http://www.cslewisinstitute.org). ■



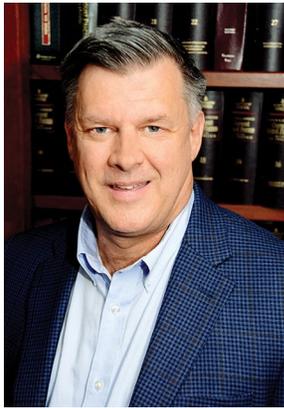
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Joel Woodruff, President, C.S. Lewis Institute, has worked in higher education, “tent-making,” nonprofit administration, and pastoral ministries in Alaska, Israel, Hungary, France, and Northern Virginia. He served as Dean of Students, Chaplain, and Professor of Bible & Theology at European Bible Institute, where he helped train Europeans both for professional ministry and to be Christian leaders in the marketplace. Prior to joining the Institute, he was on the leadership

team of Oakwood Services International, a nonprofit educational and humanitarian organization. He is a graduate of Wheaton College, earned his M.Div. from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and has a doctorate in Organizational Leadership from Nova Southeastern University.

As a Parish-Pulpit Fellow, he studied Biblical Backgrounds & Archaeology in Israel for a year.