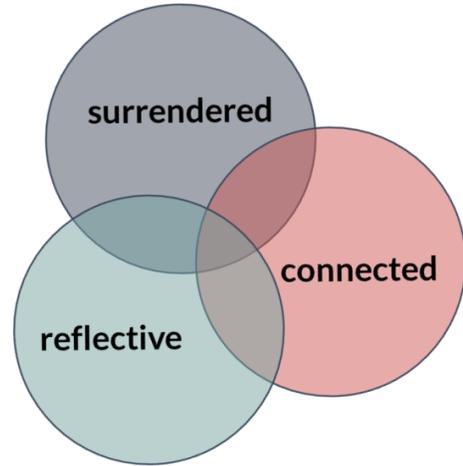


# Understanding Faithwalking’s “Path of Transformation”

*A mental model of the means and ends of Christian discipleship*

To embody the love of God in a broken world through living *reflective, connected & surrendered* lives

- **Reflective** To grow in awareness
- **Connected** To know and be known
- **Surrendered** To lay ourselves down



## A “Mental Model” of Discipleship

From its beginnings in 2007, Faithwalking has been designed around a “mental model” of discipleship – the pursuit and practice of a Reflective Life, Authentic Community, and Radical Obedience. The Houston team (Jim, Steve, Trisha, et al) came up with this construct as a way to describe a holistic, biblical, and balanced view of following Jesus. This 3-fold approach is embedded in all elements of Faithwalking.

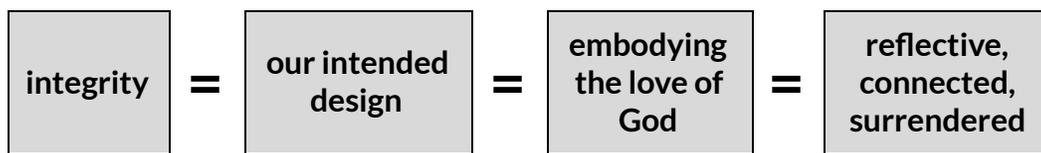
Mental models are “deeply held internal images of how the world works” (Peter Senge, 1990). They seek to describe reality, but are not reality itself. They are a construct, seeking to make meaning of our existence and world. Therefore, in the Faithwalking community, we consider the “Path of Transformation” as a helpful tool in the journey, but encourage humility and the understanding that it is but one attempt to make sense of “the way” of following Jesus (see John 14:6).

*(In these materials, the terms “FW’s Path of Transformation” and “FW’s mental model” are considered synonymous and will be used interchangeably.)*

In January 2017, the Oak Cliff Faithwalking team (Joel and Deborah) updated the Houston’s language. After 5 years of internalizing the construct, we felt that the language of *reflective, connected, and surrendered* better captured our understanding of our shared work. We feel that this revision is very much in the spirit of what we inherited, but we feel that this “tweak” in the language helps in the process of internalizing the *postures of the heart* (as compared to *actions*) required in the journey.

In the Faithwalking journey, we seek to become aware and face our Current Reality (shamed, anxious, alone, etc.) and to live into a new Vision (loved, peaceful, known, etc.). In this regard, the “mental model” has always served as the *Path*, or means, in

the journey. That is, as we live *surrendered*, *connected*, and *reflective* lives, we will see progress of living into God’s design for our lives.



## Components of the Path of Transformation

Let’s consider each component of the Path of Transformation in more detail:

- **Reflective** – This element of the Path of Transformation relates to *awareness* and our ability to *see* – to see ourselves, to see God, to see others, to see the world. This awareness comes from living a life where we make space to be still and listen. It’s a life where we’re willing to confront whatever rises to the surface (fear, shame, painful memories, awareness of our own limitations), instead of repressing and ignoring and distracting ourselves through busyness and other means. It’s a posture of wondering about places of resistance and wrestling with them, instead of getting stuck in defensiveness and “right/wrong” thinking. To be reflective is to ask questions and be curious about our failures instead of running away from them.
- **Connected** – A person who is connected moves toward relationship instead of away. Connection is about reaching out across barriers *to give and receive love*. So often we want to retreat and withdraw, feeling that relationships are too messy, too painful. But we were created to live in community. We were created *to know and be known*. Without love and connection, our souls cannot come alive.
- **Surrendered** – “Surrender” is a hard word for many people. At the moment, many people in the culture at large are fascinated with mindfulness (a version of “reflective”) and community (= connected). Surrender is probably the most countercultural of these three. To be surrendered is to be open instead of guarded. It is to be humble and teachable and able to receive from others. Surrender is *a willingness to lay down our rights* in service of something greater than ourselves. To “try on” a new idea is an act of surrender. To receive feedback from a coach is an act of surrender. To open yourself up to the voice and leading of God requires a spirit and posture of surrender.

It’s important to note that these three components must work together to be transformative. It is in the interaction of being *reflective*, *connected*, and *surrendered* that real change occurs. Imagine a person who is only *reflective*, but not *connected* or *surrendered*. Can you see where they would get stuck? As we grow in each of these, we will begin to see the power of their interactions in our lives.

## Faithwalking's Path of Transformation & 3 Primary Relationships

The primacy of love in *all* of our relationships – God, self, and others – is emphasized again and again in the scriptures. The following chart highlights the connection between Faithwalking's "mental model" and these three integral relationships (see Matthew 22:37-40, Galatians 5:14)

	<b>God</b> "Love God"	<b>Others</b> "Love your neighbor"	<b>Self</b> "As yourself"
<b>Surrendered</b>	Seeking to obediently live out the ways and word of God	Loving sacrificially by laying down our rights for others	Acknowledging and accepting what's inside of me
<b>Connected</b>	Remembering God's abiding presence and abounding love	Giving and receiving in community with others	Relating to myself with grace and compassion
<b>Reflective</b>	Hearing and acting upon the Spirit's guidance	Understanding the dynamics of everyday circumstances	Growing in awareness of what is stirring in our hearts

## Walking an Alternative Path

To more fully understand the abundant invitation of this path, consider how it contrasts with the more prevalent and non-abundant way of leading an *unsurrendered, disconnected, and unreflective* life.

<b>Mental Model</b>		<b>Anti-Mental Model</b>
<b>embodying love</b>	vs.	indifference impatience sorrow inconsiderate agitated apathetic irresponsible unfeeling impulsive
<b>reflective</b>	vs.	busy unmindful oblivious distracted unaware shallow unthoughtful careless inattentive
<b>connected</b>	vs.	isolated walled off inauthentic lonely guarded inward superficial individualistic defensive
<b>surrendered</b>	vs.	resistant lack of humility stubborn unteachable controlling striving clinging need to be right moralistic

## Illustrating Faithwalking's Path of Transformation

More than just a construct used by Faithwalking, for many of us we've come to see this "Path of Transformation" present in other places – in scripture, theology, the natural world, and culture (literature, movies, etc.). Here are a few examples:

- 1. Life in the Trinity:** At the foundation of the universe is a God who is fundamentally characterized by *surrendered connection* – Father, Son, Spirit. This is what is meant by "God is love" – a statement of identity and being, not just action. All of creation is the overflow of that love and *reflects* the glory and essence of God's being. "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." (2 Corinthians 13:14). "Love has its origins in the character of the triune God, where perfect love is shared within a sacred community of three." (David Benner, *Surrender to Love*, p20)
- 2. Our Good Creation:** "In the beginning God created..." me and you (Genesis 1:1). We were chosen in love and in Christ "before the creation of the world" to be set apart for God's purposes (Ephesians 1:3-5). Made in the "image" of God, to *reflect* God's "likeness" (Gen 1:26), we are *connected* in family and created "male and female" (Gen 1:27), for it was "not good...[for us] to be alone" (Gen 2:18). Obediently *surrendering* to God, we receive a blessing and invitation to a shared partnership and responsibility for the care of all creation (Genesis 1:26, 28-30; 2:15). That's our good creation!
- 3. Jesus, the Son of God & Man:** "[Jesus Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" (Colossians 1:15). For "God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son" (Romans 8:29, the Message). This means that we can look to his life to see how we were designed to live.  
  
In the course of Jesus' life upon this earth, we see a life of faithful and consistent *surrender* to the will of God ("not as I will...but may your will be done" – Matthew 26:38, 42). He lived a *connected* life, gathering a community of disciples, remaining in close communication with his mother and siblings, and even staying engaged with his critics and enemies. And he *reflected* God in all of his compassionate ways (John 1:18, 14:9), regularly retreating in solitude to grow in God's ways (Matthew 14:23, Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16, John 17). In him, "we see the original and intended shape of our lives" (Romans 8:30, the Message).
- 4. Jesus' Instructions for Us:** Not only did Jesus model this life for us, he also taught it explicitly to his disciples. Jesus calls us to follow him – a life of *surrendered* obedience and sacrificial service. The call to repentance is a call to wake up to the reality around us – God's love and our brokenness – and to head in new directions (*reflective*). And the two greatest commandments are to love God and love others, which is a call to live into our design for deep *connection*.

5. **The Process of Childbirth:** The Apostle Paul, in a very bold move, compares transformation to bearing a child. In Galatians 4:19, he writes, “My dear children! I feel as if I’m going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives.” (NLT) Consider the process: a woman must recognize and be aware of what’s occurring in her body (*reflective*). She needs to avail herself to the assistance of other – doctors, nurses, midwives (*surrendered*). And to be encouraged and joined by others (*connected*), is the fruit and joy of the process (“It’s a girl!”).
6. **The Development of Children:** Once born, a child follows a developmental path, physically, emotionally, and socially. All children are conceived by parents, begin life dependent upon others, and thrive in relation to how well they bond and attach to others (*connected*). As they grow, they begin to mirror their surroundings, mimicking the sights and sounds around them (*reflective*). While willfulness is innate, life works best when a crying, tired, or hungry baby learns to receive the care given to them (*surrendered*).
7. **The Kid (the movie):** In the beginning of the movie, Russ embodies the “anti-mental model,” showing up as *disconnected*, *unsurrendered*, and *oblivious*. As the story unfolds, we learn where this way of being came from. His childhood experiences led him to make a vow that to be safe in the world he needed to be guarded, push others away, not show weakness, prove himself, etc. In contrast to his adult self, the young Rusty shows a desire to be connected to others, a willingness to receive help, and a zest for life. Through Russ’s interaction with his childhood self, he begins to learn a new way – asking for help, growing in awareness, reconnecting with others. (Note: It’s a FW tradition to show *The Kid* on 101 retreats as a simple illustration of the transformation process)
8. Where else do you see this pattern in the everyday? Think about other movies, books, podcasts, etc. (Lego Batman is a great example. And we aren’t joking!)

## **The Means and Ends of Christian Discipleship**

The “Path of Transformation” is a *means* to an end – a path in “the way” of Jesus that leads us into the life and love we seek. It serves as a tool to help us grow to more fully embody the love of God in everyday circumstances. As we seek to practice a *reflective*, *connected*, and *surrendered* life, we grow in emotional maturity and catalytic leadership

But this *reflective*, *connected*, *surrendered* life is also an *end* – a vision of the world promised to us by God: reflective of goodness, unified through deep connection, surrendered in harmony. And toward that *end*, we surrender to this work of God – creating community for others and more fully reflecting love, joy, and peace.