

HOW ARE YOU CHANGING?

We invested the past several weeks exploring how to understand the Bible so that God's truth and grace change your life. It's the great purpose of the Christian life: being transformed to become more like Christ. First, you're re-born, saved. Then you grow, being saved, progressing, transforming, graduating.

1- GOD HIMSELF CHANGES YOU - The first of five principles of being a disciple, as outlined by David Powlison in his excellent "*How Does Sanctification Work?*" Sanctification is the process of being made holy, which begins the moment you trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and continues until the moment you are glorified in His eternal presence. Powlison says God Himself changes you, just as promised throughout the Bible. It's God's work, by the Holy Spirit, in the lives of people trusting and obeying Him.

2- YOU CHANGE THROUGH GOD'S WORD - His Word is written down as revealed truth for all people in all times and all places, to be applied by the Holy Spirit so that you understand it and live it. As you trust what God says and obey Him, He transforms your life. James 1:22 commands to not deceive yourself by being only a hearer of His word. Be a do-er. The context provides powerful practical applications. Verse 19, *be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger*. Verse 26, *if anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless*.

James 2 and 3 give more examples of the discontinuity of toxic tongues with hearts that claim to know Christ. The words of your mouth reveal the thoughts of your heart. Are your words toxic? Or healing? Dividing or uniting? Cutting down or lifting up? Conflicts in relationships happen - but they provide practical opportunities to put God's truth and grace into practice. Your daily intake of God's truth is spiritual food that will produce spiritual fruit. How are you putting it into practice?

3- GOD CHANGES YOU THROUGH WISE PEOPLE - Powlison notes we need godly examples to encourage us, people who model walking in God's Word by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Bible never promotes "Lone Ranger Christians." God's commands are plural, to "you all." As in Hebrews 10:25 *"we draw near to God with confidence through the blood of Jesus; let us hold fast the confession, let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near."*

When a sheep wanders from its flock, it becomes susceptible to predators and danger. In the same way, Christians need one another. As Red Green quips, "we're all in this together." 2Corinthians 1 says, *"blessed be the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction by the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."* Your church family are those who can offer you comfort and practical help. Many of your trials and tribulations are not for your sake, so much as for how you can help others in trials.

4- GOD CHANGES YOU THROUGH TROUBLE AND TRIAL - Sufferings and struggle are the garden of sanctification. Jesus said to expect tribulation and persecution. Romans 5 says we have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ so that we can even rejoice in sufferings, which produce character and hope, because God's love is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Martin Luther called "*tentatio*" affliction, trial, difficulty, struggle, the touchstone of Christian experience. That's the intersection of your life experience with God's truth and grace. Transforming you. He said hardships were his greatest teacher, because they made Scripture and prayer come alive. As he lived for Christ.

Powlison agrees, "we learn to love the way Christ loves us only by experiencing the hard things that He experienced in loving us." Good Friday comes before Easter. Yes, you can be changed by God's blessings, but Scripture spends far more time showing how trials change you. Think about your life. Have trials drawn you into closer dependence upon the Savior? If not, you've missed the whole point. 2Corinthians 2:9 says *"My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in your weakness."*

5- GOD CHANGES YOU AS YOU CHANGE - God regenerates you to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and transforms you by the power of the Holy Spirit, but in all this, you change. Real transformation happens as you trust and obey. Powlison says, "you turn, from darkness to light, from false gods to the only true God, from death to life, from unbelief to faith. You ask for help because you need help. You repent, you believe, trust, seek, take refuge. You are honest, remember, listen, obey, fear, hope, love, give thanks, weep, confess, praise, delight, walk. These are all active verbs. They speak of whole-hearted whole-person action. None of these verbs are one-and-done. They are a way of life."

Jesus says to love God with all your mind, heart, and will. Your whole person. Powlison notes, "these are fruitful characteristics of a flourishing life. No one does any of this for you. You are not passive. you are not a puppet or robot. You are 100 percent responsible, and yet you are 100 percent dependent on outside help. Any other way of putting it makes you either far too independent or too passive."

Be doers of the Word, not hearers only. Believe what God says and live it out. Step out in faith and trust and obey. But thankfully, not in your own power, but in God's power, as you walk by His Spirit! ☐