GROWING IN CHRISTLIKENESS THROUGH CHANGE

There are a number of questions that people ask that are associated to change. Why should I change? What are the reasons for change? What is my motivation for change? What is required to change? How will this change affect my future? How will this change affect others? How will this change affect my relationship with God? How lasting will this change be? What value should be placed on these changes? These questions are not all-inclusive, but your decision to change or not to change is far-reaching. The reason change is so far-reaching is that when we are faced with change, and we are on a regular basis, our response to change will always influence our relationship with God and others. Change takes place within two spheres of relationship, God, and others. Both relationships are affected by change, or the lack thereof, and both relationships are inspired by love.

Mark 12:30 ‘And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ 31 The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.

This is a far reaching and deeply profound truth. To love God and my neighbor as a command has no greater or higher authority. It means that there is no nobler act that I can pursue than to change for God and for others because of love. Additionally, if our choice to change has loving God and my neighbor in mind, so also change has its primary focus upon changing for God’s glory. *1 Cor 10:31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

MOTIVE FOR CHANGE

Love for God and my neighbor runs congruent to God’s glory. Love and God’s glory harmonize together to cause us to want to change, especially for God’s glory. Our focus must be upon pleasing God by bringing Him ultimate glory because we love both God and our neighbor. Change for the glory of God may sound impersonal but changing for God’s glory because you love God and others makes change more personal. You must ask yourself as you make the decision to either change or not to change, will this decision show love for God and others, and will this decision ultimately bring glory to God? Does this choice please God? Choices to change are acted upon at the heart or motive level. The decision you make answers the question about your heart motives, where your heart is focused. It reveals your primary focus and purpose in life. The motive is for higher reasons, out of love for God and my neighbor. Our neighbor is anyone and everyone!

“The Bible sets the stage, defines motivation, provides the central focus for motivation and provides all the guidance we need to understand our motives and God’s help in seeing where our true motives lie.”[[1]](#endnote-1) Starting with understanding why we desire to change, or not change, will help in understanding where our motives and focus in life are placed. We are all motivated by something, we all are in need of change.

What if I don’t make a choice to change? If we try to land on the side of just giving up, or just not making a choice for change, well, that is still a choice to change. For instance, if you decide that you are not going to make a choice for change, you are still making a choice for change—you are choosing not to change. There is no neutral position, not changing does change things. The choice to not change has far-reaching implications because it affects your relationship with God and others. This choice addresses the heart through which choice and desire is formed.

BEING SPIRITUALLY AMBITIOUS

*2 Corinthians 5:9 (ESV) So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.*

(NASB) Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

In this portion of Scripture Paul explains why he does not loose heart in ministry. Paul is confirming, in view of the things he had written in the first eight verses, as well as the previous chapters, that he desired to be present with the Lord, but while he is in his present body, he makes it his ambition “to please him”, that is to please God.

I read an article from a counselor about the danger of teaching people to please God. We could give a hundred illustrations on how counselors misapply the focus of pleasing God by bringing Him ultimate glory, but that does not mean that we don’t teach people how to please God. I get what the author was saying. He basically encouraged explaining what you mean when you use the phrase, being careful to not create a works-based obedience pattern about pleasing God. That pleasing God is not about us, it is resting in the One who could and did please God, Jesus. To carefully use the term gospel motivated works, which obviously is based on motivated gospel obedience. As I have said in the past, Christianity is not about what you are doing, but Who you are becoming, Jesus Christ, Rom 8:29, 2 Cor 3:18. When we speak of pleasing God by bringing Him ultimate glory, we are speaking in specific terms that refer to the sanctification process, what God does in a person that is revealed in outward manifestations of that gospel process.

The big picture in progressive sanctification is to please God by bringing Him ultimate glory, by becoming like His Son in whom He was pleased Matt 3:17. The result will be inner man life change that includes outward expressions of that continual inner transformation into the image of Christ, in whatever we do, 1 Corinthians 10:31. Progressive sanctification is specifically what we are talking about, by the transformational effects of the gospel, and by the power of the Spirit. “The Holy Spirit gives you the power to grow in your sanctification. And you are promised that one day you will be made perfect and live with God forever. No wonder Paul argues that you are full to overflowing! You lack nothing. You don’t need Christ plus something else. He is enough. All that he is, we are.”[[2]](#endnote-2) Rom15:13 The Holy Spirit through the sanctifying power of His Word makes us to become like Christ, that is what pleases God and brings Him ultimate glory, that is what makes change possible, that is something that only God can do.

“Neither man’s redemption from sin’s penalty nor his progressive growth from sin’s enslavement come from within. Man is not capable of either in or of himself. Something has to come to man from the outside. God, His Word, and the Holy Spirit all must invade and persuasively take over a man for salvation and/or sanctification to occur. Man does not have the means to attain what he totally needs – forgiveness from sin and the capacity to know and glorify God.” [[3]](#endnote-3) The gospel is multifaceted in its influence upon man’s heart that leads man to respond spiritually by the power of the Spirit. A believer is a responder not an initiator in the process of spiritual growth, even as He is commanded to grow in Christ for His glory!

*2 Peter 3:18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.*

The gospel is multifaceted, and every aspect of gospel transformation is affected by the power of the Spirit of God. “Of course, justification, adoption, sanctification and glorification are distinct categories of the application of redemption and should never be confused. But they are not to be viewed as separate events; they are aspects or facets of the one event of our union with Christ in his risen glory, effected by the power of the Spirit and worked out progressively through the Spirit’s ongoing ministry.”[[4]](#endnote-4) So, we are not talking about “doing something”, we are talking about “becoming like Someone”, Jesus Christ God’s Son. The ability to please God by bringing Him ultimate glory resides in us because the transformational effect of the gospel resides in us. Within that change our ambitions and focus/goals in life will reflect that very transformation.

The word ambition means to strive earnestly, make it one's aim to do something, to desire very strongly. Paul is ambitious, he is striving, he is laboring, he is focused on pleasing God. His whole focus in life is on this endeavor. We could say then that he was a spiritually driven man with an insatiable desire to please God. Paul is speaking of that kind of noble ambition– an aggressive mindset that seeks to glorify God through actions that are pleasing to God. As Matthew Henry states in his commentary on this verse, “We are ambitious, and labor as industriously as the most ambitious men do to obtain what they aim at. What was it that the apostle was thus ambitious of acceptance with God? We labor that, living and dying, whether present in the body or absent from the body, we may be accepted of him, the Lord (v. 9), that we may please him who hath chosen us, that our great Lord may say to us, Well done. This they coveted as the greatest favor and the highest honor: it was the summit of their ambition.”

ITS ABOUT FOCUS

What are we focused on in life? That is a fair question. Jesus’ life on earth gives us the clearest example of how to live a focused life. John 7:6, 30, 9:4. Jesus specifically shared His philosophy of life and living.

*John 8:28 So Jesus said to them, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. 29 And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.”*

* Jesus’s life and ministry was focused and expressed itself as doing “*nothing on my own authority*”, but rather, “*I always do the things that are pleasing to him*.”

Ultimately that was Jesus’ focus/goal, to please the Father. He understood himself as the Son sent by the Father to accomplish the Father’s plan of redemption, the task, and He communicated this plan in a variety of ways. Here is one way that He did this. *Matthew 20:28 even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

It is important to recognize in ourselves, and others the same focus that Jesus embraced. Christ's focused life was to please God, “*I always do the things that are pleasing to him*”, we might call this “the what to do”. He also obediently worked that focus into everyday life as a task. “*I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.”* We might call this, *“*the how to do*”.* Reaching the goal of pleasing God and bringing Him ultimate glory by accomplishing a task requires being focused on pleasing God. Pleasing God and bringing Him ultimate glory must be our every moment focus as we live life. This is exactly what Jesus always did for God’s glory. The focus was to please the Father by bringing Him ultimate glory by performing the task of dying on the cross for our sins.

John 12:27 “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”

People become frustrated over the “what to do” and the “how to do” of life, but here is a perfect example of how our Lord accomplished both. He knew what to do, please the Father, and He knew how He was going to do it in everyday life. There was not a question about life focus or life’s purpose. Jesus perfectly illustrates proper focus in life, He was focused and He had purpose. Those two words should resonate in our hearts, (focus & purpose), because without the right focus and purpose in life we have no direction in life. Jesus’ desire to glorify the Father followed what He was taught, which folded into always doing “*the things that are pleasing to Him*”. The implication to us is that He learned and then applied what was taught by the Father, in His everyday life, so that the Father was ultimately pleased and glorified.

This is a fascinating thought and provides a clear understanding of how Jesus’ mind focused upon pleasing God in everything He did, with a clear task that glorified the Father. We can and must follow this example. *1 Peter 2: 21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.* Living life without a proper focus and purpose is harmful and destructive.

* Paul followed example of Jesus as a very focus individual, 1 Cor 9:24, Eph 5:16, Phil 3:10-14, 2 Tim 4:6-8.

There is no doubt that Paul adopted the Lord’s same mindset of pleasing God by bringing Him ultimate glory as his primary focus in life. He made it his “ambition” or “aim” to “please Him”, this ultimate focus was what motivated him. Paul’s focus in life was subordinate to the will of God, to please God in all things, this was his highest focus/goal. It was also Paul’s prayer and instruction to those who he had reached for Christ.

*Eph 5:8 for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.*

*1 Thess 4:1 Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.*

Paul states that his ambition, his motivation, his focus, was to be accepted of Him, to please Him. *2 Cor 5:9 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.* Every person who is born of God wants to live a life acceptable to God. The urge to live for ourselves should diminish and the urge to live for Him should increase, Jn 3:30. Paul urges believers “to please God” in the same way he made it his “*aim to please him”.* If this urge is not present, why isn’t it present? This is a question that is a deeper question about your relationship with God from the heart level.

Our God not only saved us from our sin through the work of Christ on the cross, He makes it possible to continually live a righteous life for Him by the process of becoming more like His Son. The Father said about His Son. *“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Matthew 3:17.* It is obvious that to the degree that we are being transformed into the image of God’s Son, to that same degree we are pleasing to the Father. The more that God sees His Son in us, which is His eternal purpose for every believer, Rom8:29, the more pleasing we are to the Father. As the Father sees Jesus’ life reflected in our lives in tangible ways, He is pleased. Faith that is actively focused on pleasing God is faith that is actively seeking Him. Are you this person?

“The faith that pleases God goes well beyond salvation. God is pleased by a vigorous faith that is operational moment by moment. God-pleasing faith lives life with the conviction that God keeps His promises—both in this life and the next. The one whose faith pleases God does not just “believe that He is,” but also, “that He is a *rewarder* of those who *seek* Him” (Hebrews 11:6, *emphasis added*).”[[5]](#endnote-5)

We could say then that Jesus, Paul, and a host of others in the Bible lived structured spiritually goal-oriented lives that were focused on pleasing God by bringing Him ultimate glory. This is a valuable lesson for us as Jesus model of living to please God for His glory, the glory that only He deserves, the glory that our lives should constantly give him. Does your life reflect this kind of ambition, not in words but in deeds? In what ways do you please God and in what areas of your life do you need to begin to please God?

YOU ARE NOT ALONE IN THE CHANGE PROCESS

Although we are responsible for change, we are also dependent on other means to help us change. Other means for change are numerous but here are a few. God changes us, His Word changes us, God uses people to change us, trials change us, we change.[[6]](#endnote-6) When I say other means, I am speaking of means besides yourself. The Christian does not live in isolation. He is not independent, but rather interdependent. You are not alone! Don’t think you are and don’t try to change on your own. “Christless, grace-less attempts at change conclude either with the praise of your own glory or with your shame.”[[7]](#endnote-7) God’s plan is to use many different resources including your own life to bring about change. You are not alone, God has purposely planned for many things in your life to create change.

God is not asking us to change on our own and He would never ask us to set our minds “on the things of the Spirit” if it were not possible to “walk by the Spirit.” He asks us to train our minds to think spiritually, to set our mind or affections on “*things that are above”.* God is helping us to center our minds on things above because a mind centered on things here, things below, is too overwhelming, too detrimental to the mind. If Christ was not “*your life”* this would not be possible, but because you profess that “*your life is hidden with Christ in God* “ then change is possible.

*Rom8:5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.*

*Galatians 5:16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*

*Colossians 3:1 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

He would not ask you to grow and change in Christ for His glory if it were not possible in Christ. Growth equals change. Be confident that you can change because that is what you are designed to do in Christ.

*2 Peter 3:18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.*

*Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

CHANGE MUST BE FROM THE HEART LEVEL

First pray. Ask God to help you to change from the heart level before you seek how to change. Change must first come from the heart. *Psalm 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.* This is where change must begin, this is the place that God begins the process of change.[[8]](#endnote-8)

“Beneath the battle for behavior is another, more fundamental battle—the battle for the thoughts and motives of the heart. The heart is the real or essential you. All of the ways in which the Bible refers to the inner person (mind, emotions, spirit, soul, will, etc.) are summed up with this one term: heart. The heart is the steering wheel of every human being. Everything we do is shaped and controlled by what our hearts desire. That is why the Bible is very clear that God wants our hearts. Only when God has your heart does He have you. As much as we are affected by our broken world and the sins of others against us, our greatest problem is the sin that resides in our hearts. That is why the message of the gospel is that God transforms our lives by transforming our hearts. Lasting change always comes through the heart. This is one of Scripture’s most thoroughly developed themes, but many of us have missed its profound implications. We need a deeper understanding of Proverbs 4: 23, “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”[[9]](#endnote-9) Pray for God to change you from the heart level no matter what, pray for a decrease in pleasing self and an increase in pleasing God for His ultimate glory. The heart—this is where the change must first take place.

“When your thoughts, beliefs, and desires are set on glorifying God, there will be right actions and good consequences. But because of a heart that is set on pleasing “self,” your thoughts and actions are not naturally going to be like God’s. This presents a dilemma because God commands us in the Bible to be holy.”[[10]](#endnote-10) That dilemma can be conquered by recognizing that you are empowered to change by virtue of being a believer. Your prayer to God can change you because prayer has the power to change. Continue in prayer, Col 4:2.

POWER TO CHANGE BEGINS AT SALVATION

Be encouraged! The power to be able to change begins at salvation. *2 Cor 5:17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.* God, as He did with Lydia, makes it possible to receive truth, to “pay attention” and respond to truth. *Acts 16:14 One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.*

The transformational effect of the gospel makes us *“partakers of the divine nature”*, provides the power and ability to live and reproduce godliness, *2 Peter 1:3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence, 4 by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire*, and is working in us to do His “good pleasure”, *Philippians 2:13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.* So, we can say we are empowered by the gospel to change, *Rom1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* The power and ability to change begins at salvation. Change is possible no matter what kind of change needs to occur in your life, you can change, you have the power to change. Do not convince yourself otherwise.

BECOMING CONFIDENT IN THE ABILITY TO CHANGE

So, we can confidently say that the transformation of a life began at salvation and continues throughout our lives. It’s not a matter of if we can change. It is God’s purpose being fulfilled in us to continually grow and change. *2 Corinthians 3:18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.* So, change is not an option. It is not something we ignore or choose to stay in a state of confusion or instability and unrest over. The notion of a person being a genuine follower of Christ on one hand and being unchanged or not changing on a regular basis is unheard of in the Word of God. *Philippians 1:6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*

For instance, change is a dynamic of being a believer, as we have noted. *2 Corinthians 3:18* We all, without exception, have access to the power of salvation that transformed us. This verse illustrates the divine perspective of the process through which we are being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ by the Spirit. That is important to understand because it informs you that change is not on your own. Remember, change is not commanded *2 Peter 3:18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.* without provision to change. Our God is not an angry demanding God; He is a loving, facilitating God who makes a way for change.

CHANGE IS PROGRESSIVE

We are “being” transformed—an active state of being, present tense, of a continual process. ”The Bible passages that emphasize the need for new behavior are all built on the foundation of God’s grace at work to change our hearts through the power of the Spirit.”[[11]](#endnote-11) “Jesus comes to transform our entire being, not just our mind. He comes as a person, not as a cognitive concept we insert into a new formula for life.[[12]](#endnote-12) Paraphrasing a point made about change, “what is true about and from God always frames and drives how we are to respond. Faith works through love.”[[13]](#endnote-13) I want to change because of love. *John 14:15 “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*

Again, God has already set up your life for change into the likeness of Christ. What we were meant to be through the gospel. The change is “from one degree of glory to another,” progressive and gradual, not sudden. “Sanctification does not, however, make us become more than human. Rather, men and women become fully and truly what they were created to be; now in principle, hereafter in fullness. This is the perspective of such apostolic statements as 1 Corinthians 15:49: just as we bore the image of the man of dust, we will bear the image of the man from heaven 1 Cor. 15:49; *cf.* 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Jn. 3:2.”[[14]](#endnote-14)

It is critical to remember that God desires change and has built within us this transformational effect of the gospel, but this is over time, progressive. “Sanctification already involves a radical, once-for-all-break with the dominion of sin (1 Cor. 6:11; Rom. 6:1–14), but it also develops progressively to its perfection (1 Thess. 5:23).”[[15]](#endnote-15) However, I will add this caveat, you can change immediately as well. The power of the Spirit using His Word to transform you into the image of His Son in an area of your life does not have limits or time limits. That’s the amazing and wonderful aspect of spiritual growth.

WHEN WE SPEAK ABOUT CHANGE, WE ARE SPEAKING FROM THIS PERSPECTIVE:

1. The reason you must change - Glory of God/please God. 1 Corinthians 10:31, John 8:28,29

“To sanctify” means that God repossesses persons and things that have been devoted to other uses and have been possessed for purposes other than his glory, and takes them into his own possession in order that they may reflect his own glory. . . . Underlying all is the motif of expressing this divine image: being holy as he is holy. . . . Sanctification means being restored to the glory-image of God by being made like Jesus Christ . . . Christlikeness is the end in view; sanctification is the transformation which produces it.”[[16]](#endnote-16)

1. The replacement principle - Replacing bad or sinful thoughts or behavior. Sanctification/Holiness Ephesians 4:24

“This portion from Ephesians is the most extensive passage that teaches what is often referred to as “the replacement principle.”3[[17]](#endnote-17)1 Believers are called upon to stop walking in the old ways of their unsaved past, which were futile. In place of sinful habits, believers must be renewed in their minds—their thinking must change—so that they may habitually put on the new self, “which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Eph. 4:24). The apostle then provides numerous examples of old sinful habits and the corresponding righteous habits that must take their place in the life that is worthy of the calling of God in Christ.” [[18]](#endnote-18)

1. To reflect the image of Christ Romans 8:29

As you go on living this righteous life, and practicing it with all your might and energy, and all your time … you will find that the process that went on before, in which you went on from bad to worse and became viler and viler, is entirely reversed. You will become cleaner and cleaner, and purer and purer, and holier and holier, and more and more conformed unto the image of the Son of God. [[19]](#endnote-19)

1. What is the process of change? Progressive sanctification/spiritual growth 2 Corinthians 3:18,
1 Peter 3:18

“God is ever in the business of changing His people into the image of Christ. He does this through experiences, through gradual changes in our hearts, through stages of spiritual drought and through times of great victory. In one area of life He might do a slow gradual work of changing us. In another area of life, He may leave us at a plateau for several years and then suddenly use one experience to bring about great repentance and change. It all works together in His wonderful plan to mold us into vessels of use.”[[20]](#endnote-20)

1. What is the final result of change? Romans 8:28, 29

“What is the goal of this change? It is more than a better marriage, well-adjusted children, professional success, or freedom from a few nagging sins. God’s goal is that we would actually become like him. He doesn’t just want you to escape the fires of hell—though we praise God that through Christ you can! His goal is to free us from our slavery to sin, our bondage to self, and our functional idolatry, so that we actually take on His character!” [[21]](#endnote-21)

THE DYNAMICS OF BIBLICAL CHANGE.

1. Acknowledge - Change starts with the acknowledgment of the need to change because one’s life does not please God.

Change that is acknowledged leads to confession and repentance as one sees their life like God sees their life. “Every time we try to build our lives on who we are apart from Christ, it is an attempt to justify ourselves. It is a way to create a righteousness apart from Christ so that we can feel we earned our acceptance before God, others, and ourselves. A Christian not only sees the Thorny behavior that results from these false identities; he also sees the many outwardly good things that may be motivated by the worship of something other than God. He repents of those things as well.” [[22]](#endnote-22)

You may be thinking that you have not necessarily sinned against someone or even sinned at all, so you don’t see your problem as a sin issue. But let me challenge you. Repentance is seeing sin like God sees sin. When I speak of seeing sin like God see’s sin, I am referring to how God exposes sin according to His Word in one’s life. [[23]](#endnote-23) This not only includes deliberate sins, known sin, but sin expressed in and throughout lives. Consider Ephesians 4:22, “to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires.” Here Paul is encouraging us to rid ourselves of the former manner of life that continues to crop up and dog us, to renew the mind with truth (vs 23) and put on the new man.

When we evaluate our lives by laying our lives, our thoughts, our inner struggles, our behaviors, our heart, against God’s Word, the bright light of God’s Word exposes our broken condition. Sin effects our lives in numerous ways. What sin has done to us, even though we may not have intended to sin, are acts that come out of our sinful broken condition. Sin distorts and excuses our actions. So yes, we can and do deliberately sin because we follow former passions, *1 Peter 1:14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance,*

We are often blinded by our sin nature and its effects. The expression of our sinful human nature is always lived out to the fullest. It has contaminated every aspect of our humanity—heart, mind, personality, emotions, conscience, motives, and will—but also the material part of man—our bodies. We then can have emotions and feelings and thoughts that are far removed from God because of sickness or some other biological ailment and not even know it or be able at times to control it because it presses so hard on us. None of this means we cannot overcome these thoughts, or feelings or emotions, even in the midst of physical brokenness associated with a biological problem. What it does mean is that we need to recognize that we may be sinning by not handling our difficulty properly. Even as Job said” “Though He slay me, I will hope in Him; yet I will argue my ways to His face.” (Job 13:15) As hard as it was on Job, he was determined to hope in God. Charles Spurgeon said, “As the salt flavors every drop in the Atlantic, so does sin affect every atom of our nature. It is so sadly there, so abundantly there, that if you cannot detect it, you are deceived.”

Paul grieved over his struggle with sin. Read Rom7. In verse 25 he writes, “*Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.*” Our sin nature has an effect on us until we die, but the ability to acknowledge our sin nature as the cause, for the Christian, is liberating because he acknowledges the cause of heart ache and pain, but he also acknowledges that he is victorious over sin. Paul also writes, *7:22 For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, 23 but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.*

“The darkness of the human condition is characterized by two immense wrongs that create turmoil throughout our lives: a complex mix of moral evils arises from inside us; a complex mix of situational evils besets us. The Bible uses the word evil to describe both sin and suffering, just as we do in English. Something inside us is wrong. People believe, think, feel, want, and do bad things.” “In sum, we face troubles (externally); we are troublesome (interpersonally); and we are troubled (psychologically), struggling both with what we face and with who we are.” [[24]](#endnote-24)

Sins effect on our lives is absolute and total, but so is the abounding grace of God. *Rom5:20 Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.* First confess and acknowledge that sin has had a horrendous effect on you, but secondly also confess and acknowledge that grace abounds toward you to overcome.

1. Change takes place at the heart level when one sees the need to change from the heart level and not the behavior level.

The Bible tells us *the heart* is what motivates our behavior. At any given moment of time, you are acting upon your desires, your intentions of your *heart*. As we compare Matthew 15:19 with James 4:1-3 we notice that the “pleasures” within are actually *within* the heart. The heart is our “control center.” It contains our desires, our motives for doing what we do. James 4:2 even speaks of these desires or pleasures as “lusts.” A lust is simply a strong desire for something good or bad.[[25]](#endnote-25)

“Beneath the battle for behavior is another, more fundamental battle—the battle for the thoughts and motives of the heart. The heart is the real or essential you. All of the ways in which the Bible refers to the inner person (mind, emotions, spirit, soul, will, etc.) are summed up with this one term: heart. The heart is the steering wheel of every human being. Everything we do is shaped and controlled by what our hearts desire. That is why the Bible is very clear that God wants our hearts. Only when God has your heart does he have you. As much as we are affected by our broken world and the sins of others against us, our greatest problem is the sin that resides in our hearts. That is why the message of the gospel is that God transforms our lives by transforming our hearts. Lasting change always comes through the heart..

1. God’s Word. Change takes place when God’s Word is used as the agent of change to address the conviction that change must take place in one’s life. *John 15:3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.* The paper on the sufficiency of Scripture reinforces this very important point.

*2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

Here God’s Word is said to be profitable for teaching, for reproof, and correction as well as training in righteousness.

*Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

Here God’s Word is said to be *discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.* We can say then that God’s Word is the agent of change in our lives and must be a daily and significant factor in our change. If we are not exposing ourselves to God’s Word in meaningful ways it becomes a textbook, a devotional book rather than a workbook for change.

1. Renewal of the mind—Change takes place by the renewing of the mind brought about by God’s Word by the power of the Spirit.

*Rom12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

*Ephesians 4:22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*

As important as thinking is, we do not believe that "new thinking automatically produces new living.” The believer must change from the heart level “deceitful desires” to godly desires that transform their lives. From desire to actually reproducing that desire, incorporating and integrating truth into one’s life because their desires have changed toward God and His truth, and actively pursuing righteousness. 1 Tim 6:11, 2 Tim 2:22

In short, the Holy Spirit of God uses the Holy Word of God to conform us into the image of the Holy Son of God. You and I have the greatest opportunity and potential to be everything God wants us to be, if we consistently seek God’s Truth and apply God’s Truth to everyday life. If we do a constant inventory on our lives and lay our lives up against the grid of God’s Word, we can examine the dissimilarities, and it should motivate us to change.”

1. Change happens because we are in partnership—a cooperative effort—with God as He changes us.

*2 Corinthians 7:1 Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.*

*Philippians 2:13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

*Colossians 1:29 For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.*

The doctrine of biblical change is described in Ephesians 4:22-24 as having three components: putting off the old patterns of life, being renewed in the spirit of the mind, and putting on the new patterns of life reflective of Jesus Christ.

Interestingly 2 Timothy 3:16 states a process as well: “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”* This is where we are challenging ourselves to be disciplined in responding to the truth, we are actually taking in and reproducing it.

Notice Scripture has the effect of “training in righteousness,” disciplined training in righteousness—the putting on of an entirely different way of thinking and living. This is where Ephesians 4:23 *“and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,*” comes into play. This is where the heart changes—the inner man who thinks according to his heart’s motives. “In other words, it is not “contrived” by us, but it is produced by God as His Spirit works righteousness in us and by us through His Word.” [[26]](#endnote-26) “Such righteous works are God’s works because they are produced by Him as His Spirit disciplines His regenerate people in the ways of righteousness, according to His Word.”[[27]](#endnote-27) “And even these righteous works, because they are produced not without the aid of the Spirit, must be attributed to faith (Gal. 3:3).” “They are the fruit of “remaining” in the Vine (Christ), without whom we can do nothing.”[[28]](#endnote-28) “Our righteousness must flow from hearts changed by the Spirit, hearts which, under His control, produce His fruit for God’s glory.” [[29]](#endnote-29)

This is training ourselves toward righteous behavior that is motivated by truth. Its effect is on the heart, the inner man who believes by faith this truth must be applied to their lives. “This training consists of learning the biblical alternatives to the acts, attitudes, and lifestyles that need to be replaced. It consists of “putting on” the new man (new ways) in place of the “old man” (old ways).”[[30]](#endnote-30) What is the effect of disciplining yourself by the aid of the Holy Spirit? 2 Corinthians 3:18 gives us the “Divine Perspective.” It observes that the more a believer beholds the glory of the Lord, the more they will become like what they behold. It makes a believer’s perception of God central to his ability to change.

Our Great God also uses His Fatherly discipline in this father son relationship to cause us to be eager to be holy and to bring about this same righteousness.

*Hebrews 12:6–12 (ESV) — 6 For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives.” 7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. 11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. 12 Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.*

Righteousness is God’s goal in discipline, and like a loving parent, our Father allows and uses many circumstances in life to bring about spiritual change for His glory, one of which are trials.

*James 1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings. 2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.*

*1 Peter 1:6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 8 Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

By actually understanding this father son relationship as well as getting to know Him through His Word and beholding His glory in His Word, the believer is aided in this transformation. Philippians 3:10 *that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.* To find, comprehend, own, and reproduce Truth is paramount to spiritual growth. There is no question that a fresh view of His glory and His power coming from the power of the gospel in our lives is a needed focus. That is the essence of what is being talked about in Colossians 3:9 *Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.* That “renewal” again is the “new self” or “new man” who is “being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.” This is God in us, in partnership, working this new work daily within us, something He finds great pleasure in doing. Philippians 2:13 *for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

A key question to ask is, “what does the Bible say I should replace?” (It could it be anger, worry, slothfulness, envy, pride, vengeance, fear, etc.) and what does it say I should replace it with? (the virtues of love, forgiveness, unity, compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, purity, or patience).

*Colossians 3:8 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.*

When is a liar not a liar? When he stops lying? No. That’s only the put off. He must have a renewing of the mind (learn what God’s Word has to say about lying) and then train himself to put on truth telling as a righteous, habitual response.

What does the dynamic of spiritual change look like in Scripture according to Ephesians 4?

*Examples of the Dynamic of the Put off/Put On Principle*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Put Off* | *Renewal of the mind with Scripture* | *Put On* |
| Lying | Ephesians 4:25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. | Truth Telling |
| Being a thief | Ephesians 4:28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. | Getting a job and giving to others |
| Resentment and clamming up | Ephesians 4:26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, | Keep current |
| Unwholesome words | Ephesians 4:29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. | Gracious words that edify |
| Returning evil | 1 Peter 3:9 Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. | Giving a blessing |

Nothing in our lives can be “taken out” without being “replaced”. If you try to put off without putting on you are in danger of falling back into former sins worse than before, and more so if you do not renew your mind (heart) with biblical truth as the reason for change.

GETTING DOWN TO THE NUTS AND BOLTS—THE PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF CHANGE

So “how” is change accomplished in my life? Let’s first establish an understanding of spiritual goals.

First have a goal in mind (what I am trying to accomplish). Here it might be to please God and bring Him glory by not allowing depression to consume my life. So, we are working on depression.

Next put together a plan or task (to put on a truth and supplement my faith with the truths found in 2 Peter 1:5-11) by reproducing them in my life in order to accomplish the goal of pleasing God by not responding as I did in the past.

Always remember, goals are the “what to do” (what I propose to do). Tasks are the “how to do” (how I propose to meet those goals). A rule to remember is that you cannot have a proposed goal (what I want to do) without a proposed plan/task (how I propose to do it).

The second rule is the replacement rule. You cannot put off something without putting on something. If you are going to identify what to “put off,” you must identify what the Biblical alternative is, or what you are going to “put on” as a godly alternative. Take time for self-examination. Take a look at yourself and ask the hard questions about what depression has done to you and why you need to put off depression and put on an alternative to depression.

Thirdly: In order to do this, you must examine God’s Word. God’s Word renews the mind. (Eph 4:22) God’s Word reconstructs and transforms what you found lacking in your life. Carefully study God’s Word to find where it applies to your struggles. Remember God’s Word is the agent of change. “This kind of mind change only comes as the Holy Spirit changes your thinking through consistent study and meditation on the Word of God. This kind of study will enable you to know what God’s will is for you”. [[31]](#endnote-31) Man’s thought process is affected by sin. His thinking, reasoning, understanding, and cognitive processes are effected by sin. He is only capable of thinking correctly about life as the Word of God has effect on him. (Luke 24:45) Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. So, the noetic effect of sin—the sinful effect of our mind upon us, is varied. At home, at work, at church, even in prayer, we constantly find that God is correcting sinful thoughts that we have.

Fourth: start a simple list with only one thing at a time. You can list several things you need to work on but don’t overwhelm yourself or you will quit. Place a column next to that list and write how the Bible is addressing the failing and how it explains a new way or biblical way to handle failings or points to polish. The third column is the put-on column, actually the “how to” in dealing with change.

List Scriptural references you are applying to the areas you need to adopt as truths in your life in the list of “How I Propose To Do It.” (Think of it as a personal list of put-off's and put on's.) The put off/put on dynamic of Ephesians 4 verses 22–23 are meant as a guide: *22 throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. 23 Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. (NLT)* This change has to do with the renewal of the mind, not behavior—spiritual change from the heart level which changes me at the behavioral level.

Ok, lets slow down and talk about the desire to change again. So, we are talking about putting off depression, renewing our minds with God’s Word concerning depression, and then putting on biblical joy or hopefulness. No one but you can produce these desires. If they are not your desires, then your desire to do something about your problem will be motivated by guilt or shame or pressure from someone or something. You MUST want to become like Christ in your struggle, to be like Christ in the example 1 Peter 2:21, because this is what God wants to see in you. Ephesians 2:10 *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* Your motive MUST be to please God by becoming like His Son which is His eternal purpose for you. Rom8:29 *For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. I John 3:2*

To examine your desires is one of the most fruitful ways to see our motivation biblically. Is our desire to please God and bring Him ultimate glory 1 Cor 10:31, or is it only for the benefit of ourselves or others? Check you motives from the heart level and settle the goal of pleasing God by bringing Him ultimate glory as you start or else this exercise will be futile.

Biblical change is practical and progressive inside and out. Here is a simple and practical way to work toward biblical change.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Things I Must Put Off** | **Renewal of mind/heart** | **Things I Must Put On** | **How I Propose To Do It** |
| “personal difficulty” | Biblical truth/Scripture driving the change | “Biblical replacement with Scripture” | “Plan to integrate biblical truth and then reproduce that truth. |

* Let’s flesh this out in a different way. Make five columns and place at the five headings
1. Spiritual goal, 2. Putting off, 3. Renewing my mind, 4. My accountability, 5. Putting on.

Here Is What This Will Look Like.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Spiritual GoalWhat I am trying to accomplish? | Putting off its effect on my life. | Renewing my mind. My biblical study in order to apply truth to my situation. | My accountability. | Putting on Reproducing what I am learning and growing in. |
| Struggling with depression and need to overcome its effects on my life so that God may truly be glorified in how I deal with this ongoing problem.My goal is to please God by bringing Him ultimate glory by dealing with the problem head on any time it arises. | Disrupts my life in Christ and my life in general.Here is how it does this in specific ways.Work is taxing, I come home gloomy, I look at life gloomily, I look at my own life gloomily. | I will consult Bible study aids.I will discipline myself to study and journal my study.I will search the Scripture diligently and begin to build a verse and passage list.I will begin to lay my thoughts up against Scripture.I will write down when I respond habitually to life and share with others about my thoughts and its patterns  | I will enlist the aid of an accountability partner.Talk to a counselor at church.Utilize my elder and elder community. | The next time I am tempted toward depressed thoughts I will use the tools I have learned in my study.I will call my accountability partner for prayer and consultation.I will not allow my thoughts to dominate my life, but rather I will speak Scripture into my life.I will reaffirm the power of the gospel in my life and preach the gospel to myself.I will reaffirm Who God is and how He is ever present and active now in my life.I will reaffirm God’s goal for me to become like His Son in every area of my life and especially this area. |

The Bible is calling us to construct a different view now by putting off, renewing the mind, and then putting on new ways of thinking and doing. (Eph 4:22-24) Remember, God’s Word reconstructs, transforms, and convicts. (Heb 4:12) We are being careful not to modify or accomplish horizontal behavioral change. our target is the heart (Proverbs 4:23) by the renewing of the mind, through biblical truth, aided by prayer and the Holy Spirts guidance. This vertical renewing of the mind leads to a horizontal transformation of living our lives differently. God must supply you power to change as you supply the will to change.

We cannot just say that this exercise is the end all of “how too.” God uses many resources to help change us. 1. The effects of the gospel, our new nature. 2. God gives us His Spirit, 3. God uses His Word, 4. God uses prayer. 5. God uses People. 6. God uses Circumstances. So, the combination of all of these and more are the key to how God changes our lives, and we must expose ourselves to all of them.

Remember, God uses many resources to help change us. Now place a number in the brackets that indicate where you are with these resources or influences in your life, one being the lowest, ten being the highest. How much are you influenced by these six resources?

1. Acknowledging the effects of the gospel on my life and exposing myself to meditating and examining the gospel as an outworking of my life. ( )

2. Acknowledging the effects of the Holy Spirit on my life and exposing myself to meditating and examining the Spirit in my life. ( )

3. Acknowledging the effects of the Word on my life and exposing myself to meditating and examining Gods Word in my life. ( )

4. Acknowledging the effects of prayer on my life and exposing myself to meditating and examining how God uses prayer in my life. ( )

5. Acknowledging the effects of people on my life and exposing myself to meditating and examining how God uses People in my life. ( )

6. Acknowledging the effects of circumstance on my life and exposing myself to meditating and examining how God uses circumstance in my life. ( )

* Another author offers a comprehensive and interesting visual of how the dynamic of change occurs in our lives. [[32]](#endnote-32)



God watches over our growth process. Philippians 1:6 *And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ*. We are not left to ourselves; He will use and does use many factors in cultivating change in our lives.

This is the great part of growing and changing. I am becoming more like Christ by learning how to creatively implement God’s Truth in my life. No one is a super saint, no one knows it all, and no one is growing at the same rate or in the same ways. God is calling us into conformity to Christ according to His sovereign will. Like Paul, we are all trying to attain, but none will be perfect. God, however, is not looking for a perfect model. He is in the business of perfecting His people by constantly showing us the Perfect Model, Jesus Christ. Christians who know the truth must be in subjection to the truth or it is sin. (James 4:17) If God has provided the model in His Son, the method through His sufficient Word, and the might by and through the Holy Spirit we can grow and change into His image. Remember the Holy Spirit of God takes the Holy Word of God and conforms you into the Holy Son of God. How that is accomplished is as varied as there are different people who are Christians. What is important is that you remember that you are responsible to grow and change in a creative manner.

Praise the Lord as you grow in small ways, because these are the small ways from which larger areas of growth will begin to develop and occur. You are less likely to get angry now, less likely to worry now, less willing to give into lust and your desires. Resolve to not be defeated by what you may perceive as too large of a spiritual goal to reach and then give up. Each small step you make will get you closer to success. You have the spiritual ability and power to grow and change. Rejoice and be joyful in small steps of growth and don’t be driven by expectations that are unreasonable. Be sure to include an accountability partner so that you can have a greater understanding from outside of yourself to determine these small steps of spiritual growth. Be sure you have an accountability partner to help you with self-evaluation.

PLEASING GOD FOCUS CHART [[33]](#endnote-33)

THE CHRISTIAN’S ULTIMATE GOAL IN LIFE IS TO PLEASE GOD BY BRINGING HIM ULTIMATE GLORY.
1 COR 10:31

I. Life focus and pursuit flows from the heart proverbs 4:23, “from it flow the springs of life.”

1. Pleasing and glorifying God should be a daily pursuit and (GOAL) for every believer. 1 Cor 10:31; Gal 1:10; 1 Thess 4:1; 2 Tim 2:4

2. Not only a daily pursuit but a daily (FOCUS). Matt 6:33; Col 3:1-3 (The question Is Upon Our Focus. Where is our focus? What is our focus?) STOP and think, what is your answer”?

3. God has enabled us to accomplish this (GOAL) through the gospel, by specific, concrete and measurable focused growth in Christ. Everything in life is for this (PURPOSE). Rom 8:28-29; Eph 1:9-12; 2 Pe 3:18 #4. The TASK then is to please God (FOCUS), by become more like His Son, (PURPOSE).

II. UNDERSTANDING HOW TO GLORIFY AND PLEASE GOD FROM THE HEART BEGINS:

When we recognize the centrality of our hearts in knowing, worshiping and pursuing God. Matt 6:21, Pr 3:5, 6; 4:23.

When we understand that God is and has made us to be goal oriented like Him. 1 Cor 9:24, Eph 5:16, Phil 3:1-16,2 Tim. 4:6-8

When we recognize that God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in Him, our goals in life change. Phil 1:20-23

When our ultimate satisfaction is having our deepest desires centered on Him, our pursuits in life change. Ps 37:4; Mk 12:30

When our maximum pursuit in life is in the maximum pursuit of God, that brings the maximum amount of glory to God. Heb 11:6 (THE TRIGGER)

When His life is preeminent in ours, we are “fully pleasing to Him” Col 1:9-19, which is Gods eternal purpose reflected in becoming more like His Son, “with whom He was well pleased” Matt 3:17.

God desires that you understand His (Focus & Purpose) according to His will for you. Rom 8:28-29; Rom 12:1,2; Eph 1:4-6, 11-14.

III. THIS (FOCUS & PURPOSE) IS REALIZED IN THREE WAYS.

FIRST: Recognize God’s perfect model for us to follow in Jesus Christ. 1 pe 2:21

1. Christ modeled how to live a biblically goal oriented life. Jn 7:6, 30; 9:4; 17:1; 19:30. One that pleased God Matt 3:17, and focused on pleasing God Jn 8:28-29, through TASKS that would bring about Gods ultimate purpose which is His ultimate Glory. Christ’s singular FOCUS & PURPOSE. Jn 17

2. God has designed us to be goal or “Godward oriented” like Christ in order to fulfill his eternal purpose in us. Rom 8:29, Eph 2:10, Phil 1:6, 3:1-16

3. God has also fully equipped us to please Him in life and godliness, as “partakers of the divine nature.” We are completely enabled and empowered in Him. 2Pe 1:3-4

4. God desires for us to understand the full effects of the gospel on our lives
as well as “What to Do” to please Him. Hebrews 11:6 (faith, believe in Who He is and diligence in seeking Him)

5. God has made it possible to please Him and bring Him glory by reproducing His Son in us which is His eternal purpose. Col 1:27-29

6. God has called us to look to Jesus, follow His example, making Him preeminent in our lives.
1 Pe 2:21, Col 3:18. He is the example on how to focus and orient our lives to please God and bring Him Ultimate Glory in our works. Matt 5:16

7. All of this is accomplished by the enablement and the empowerment of our new nature, 2 Cor 5:17, 2 Pe 1:3,4 through the Holy Spirit and the abiding of Christ. Jn 14-16, by the influence of the Word, Heb 4:12, and the power of the gospel, Rom 1:16.

SECOND: Recognize the gospels effect on us Rom 1:16.

1. We were created and recreated in Christ for His glory. Col 1:16; 2 Cor 5:17. Thus the natural outflow of life’s purpose is to please God and bring Him ultimate glory by living within this purpose. This is possible through the power and PURPOSE of the gospel. Eph 1:9-12

2. We are declared righteous and holy POSITIONALLY 1 Cor 1:30, but our lives change PROGRESSIVELY to reflect the positional change in Christ. 2 Cor 5:17-21

3. Holiness, which begins at salvation, is carried on in the process of sanctification, which is a gradual and progressive work. We are now “servants of righteousness” and free from the old man. Rom 6:4-18, Gal 2:20

4. We are now completely able to identify with Christ’s ultimate goal in life, which is to please the Father. Jn 8:28-29 Paul identifies and embraces this philosophy of life and ministry as well. 2 Cor 5:9, 2 Tim 3:10

5. We are now completely able to walk as He walked 1 Pe 2:21 in order to please God 1 Thess 4:1 and integrate His goal to please God as a lifelong endeavor. Phil 2:5

6. God’s goal and saving purpose is to conform us into the image of His Son. Rom 8:29 This lifelong process is called “Progressive Sanctification” or “The Doctrine of Spiritual Growth”.

Stop and Ask -what specific goals do you have for your life this week, this month, this year, that reflects God’s purpose for you?

THIRD: Having a Godward focus.

Focusing on pleasing God and bringing Him ultimate glory with your life is Gods saving purpose. Gods GOAL is to please Him by bringing Him ultimate glory. God has enabled us in Christ through salvation to reach the goal of pleasing Him. 1 Thess 2:12. The task is to specifically and diligently grow in Him in concrete and measurable ways to please Him. 2 Pe 3:18, and to understand how we are becoming like His Son. Gods eternal purpose. Phil 3:8-11, 2 Cor 3:18

This is important because knowing God’s goals are our goals: 1. Gives us confidence. 2. Gives direction for daily decisions. 3. Focuses our energy & life with real meaning. 3. Produces faithful obedience. 5. Helps with wise use of spiritual gifts. 6. Provides a yardstick for evaluation.

How Christ is formed in you! Gal 4:19

1. Truths that you learn as a disciple are taught as practical attainable tasks, ways you plan in your life to reproduce truth by spiritual exercise and confidence in God’s only purpose for every believer. Phil 3:14, 15; 1 Tim 4:7-8

2. God’s sufficient Word 2 Tim 3:16-17, produces the ability to change and please God by the renewing of the mind. Rom 12:2, Eph 4:20-32, Col 3:4-17, and begins to daily work in your heart to produce a consistent life toward godliness. Heb 4:12, 2 Pe 1:3-9 3. Reaching God’s goal for you becomes a reality, and God is pleased by seeing Christ formed in you by daily spiritual growth and maturity. 2 Pe 3:18

This study helps us to understand a “Godward Focus”. If you are purposeful and discipline yourself to godliness, God’s Word will have a powerful effect on you, and you will indeed please God by becoming more like His Son. To God be the glory!! *1 Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

The chart below on the next page is a visual that will help to clarify how one establishes spiritual goals in life that ultimately lead to pleasing God. At times believers become frustrated or become stagnated because they do not have clarity on how to measure spiritual growth. This chart simplify and clarifies the process. The numbers below corresponds with the chart on the next page.

#1. The Ultimate goal of pleasing God by giving him ultimate glory. This ultimate focus in life has already been discussed.

**Supplemental Chart**



 Goal fish chart.pptx

1. Edward T. Welch, Motives: Why Do I Do The Things I Do?, Resources for Changing Lives [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Paul Tripp & Timothy Lane, How People Change, Tripp, Lane [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Bill Hill, Unit One Teacher's...Foundations For Biblical Ministry, Equipping Nationals Worldwide [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Sinclair Ferguson, The Holy Spirit, Ch 5 The Spirit of Order, Intervarsity Press [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Lou Priolo, Teaching People to Please God. The Journal of Modern Ministry Vol 4, #1, 2007. Adapted from: *Pleasing People: How Not to Be an Approval Junkie,* Presbyterian and Reformed Publishers [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. The idea for this sentence came from David Powlison, How Does Sanctification Work. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Powlison, David. Seeing with New Eyes. New Growth Press. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. If you have not done the heart study, please stop here and request the homework assignment (Heart Homework, B. Hilgeman). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Paul Tripp & Timothy Lane, How People Change, Tripp, Lane pg.14, 15 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Ganschow, Julie. The Process of Biblical Change (Page 10). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Paul Tripp & Timothy Lane, How People Change (p. 26). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. ibid [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. David Powlison, How Does Scripture Change You, The Journal of Biblical Counseling, CCEF 2012 [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Sinclair Ferguson, The Holy Spirit, Ch 7 The Spirit of Holiness, Intervarsity Press [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid Ch 5 The Spirit of Order [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Brian G. Hedges, Christ Formed in You. Shepherd Press. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Paul Tautges, Counsel One Another: A Theology of Personal (31 Jay E. Adams, The Christian Counselor’s Manual (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1973), pp. 176–216) [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Romans: An Exposition of Chapter Six, [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1972], 268–69 [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Steve Gallagher, The Walk of Repentance [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Tripp, Lane, How People Change pg.18 [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. ibid (pg.166). [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Repentance Homework, B. Hilgeman [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Powlison, David. How Does Sanctification Work. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Heart Homework, B. Hilgeman [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Jay E. Adams, How to Help People Change, [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. ibid [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. ibid [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. ibid [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. ibid [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Ganschow, Julie. The Process of Biblical Change (Page 18). [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Powlison, David. How Does Sanctification Work (I have modified the original drawing but not changed the content) [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. See https://christinyoucounseling.com/understanding-focus-and-purpose-in-life/ [↑](#endnote-ref-33)