

STUDY 22 – CHANGING EQUALS GROWING

PART 2A – HOW TO CHANGE

I am convinced that God always desires for us to be changing, growing, developing, and cultivating our spiritual life, and I hope that you believe the same thing. He wants His spiritual qualities to always be expanding and increasing in our life. From a purely spiritual perspective, the truth of the matter is that **if we are not changing, then we are not growing**. Now, all of this has a twofold aspect.

1. First, **SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS INTENTIONAL**. It is deliberate. It is planned. If you have no plan for your spiritual growth, then you will never grow spiritually. Spiritual growth is NEVER an accident, but is ALWAYS intentional. When you become intentional and laser focused on what matters the most, what happens is that you rid your life of things that really do not matter and simply are not for you. So, spiritual growth must always be intentional.
2. Secondly, **SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS A PROCESS**. If you bypass the process, you will not grow spiritually. For instance, if you bypass studying in school, then you just bypass learning and cannot make good grades. So, if you have a bad process or no process at all, then all of your good intentions will have no spiritual value for your life. Why is that? It is because **a bad process or no process ALWAYS trumps good intentions**.

The best way to join these two aspects together is understanding that you must have an “**intentional process**”. It takes an intentional process to grow spiritually. Paul said in [Romans 12:2](#) that the biblical term for this spiritual process of change is to “**be transformed**”.

Ro 12:2 (NKJV) **And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**

The Greek verb for “**be transformed**” is “*metamorphoo*”, and it is in the present tense, imperative mood where the present continuous tense always indicates a process. The word literally means to be changed into another form, and from a spiritual perspective, it always finds its expression in two specific ways – in your **character** and in your **conduct**.¹ We understand the physical process of metamorphosis when we see a caterpillar turn into a butterfly. However, for the believer the idea of being “**transformed**” is always an issue of character and conduct, or spiritual transformation cannot and will not take place.

Vines Dictionary of New Testament Words says that the root word “*morphe*” from “*metamorphoo*” **always lays stress on the inward change**.² So, what I want to accomplish is to help you see that godly changes in your life always begin as **heart changes**. As a Christian, I am much more concerned about my personal character and integrity than anything else in my life. If for any reason I forfeit my character, then I forfeit everything that makes life meaningful. A Christian without character is a paradox, an enigma. Why? It is because **the goal is to always become like Christ**. The principle is very simple.

YOUR CHARACTER ALWAYS DRIVES YOUR CONDUCT.

Your conduct is simply a reflection of your character. So, when someone’s conduct is an issue, it is **because their character is an issue**. Unfortunately, some people just seem to be structured for failure.

¹ Vine, *metamorphoo*, ep.

² Vine, *metamorphoo*, ep.

You have met people like this. You may actually have been someone like this at some point in your life. The good news, however, is that if someone can be structured for spiritual failure, then they can also be structured for spiritual success. I am a perfect example of this. I was completely structured for failure at one point in my life. I made bad decisions, I did not like to study, I had many bad habits, I hung around the wrong people. I was going nowhere very fast, **but then** something happened in my life. God saved me, and as soon as that happened, **He reprogrammed me for spiritual success**. Today, I am the exact opposite of what I was. I do not make many bad decisions, I love to study, I have developed good habits and have great friends and mentors, and I know where I am headed. For someone who had no purpose in his life, now I have the greatest purpose possible - I understand who I am in Christ.

What and how you think always determines the direction that your life will ultimately take.

Right now, today, I can look at your life and know the direction your life is headed. You can do the same for me. The devil is the one who structures your life to spiritually fail and God is the One who structures your life to spiritually succeed. For many people, the enemy knows that their worldly success will always take precedent over their spiritual success. So, he works diligently at changing their values and ambitions, and in that process, he is structuring their life to fail. On the other hand, God is not concerned with your worldly success, but with your spiritual success. He knows that this world is passing away, and what you do for Christ will have eternal rewards that you simply cannot quantify. So, you have to decide what you want. Do you want worldly success with all of its pleasures, or do you want to be like Christ and have great joy? I want the latter. I want God to help me to be spiritually successful in every area of my life. Worldly success quickly dies on the vine, and it creates a mental picture in your mind that is only a mirage. Jesus said it this way in [Mark 8:36](#),

Mk 8:36 (NKJV) For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?

The answer to Jesus' question is that the man who wants the world more than Christ will profit NOTHING! That is the absolute worst decision and investment that you can ever make – to try and get all of your pleasure and enjoyment from this world. You cannot make a worse decision for your life. If what you want is worldly pleasure, in the end that is what you will get, **but that is all that you will get. In the process, you literally lose everything that has any eternal value.** At the end of your life, YOU HAVE NOTHING, ABSOLUTELY NOTHING. God is the only One who has what you are truly looking for in your life. Education will not give you what you want, popularity will not give it to you, money will not give it to you, adrenalin rushes will not give it to you. Only God has what you need. If you see someone whose life is always chasing the wrong things, it is because they have refused to let God change their heart. So, you always want to concentrate on your character, on what you are on the inside, on what motivates you, on what you are going to love the most, and on what you want your life to reflect the most. It really is a simple decision – God or me. Unfortunately, most people choose “me”.

I am reminded of a very popular Christian apologist who died within the last couple of years. He traveled all over the world and was highly respected. Unfortunately, though, He was living a double life, and when his secret life became exposed, all that he had previously accomplished and taught literally became worthless. No one wanted him to be a guest speaker any more. He completely disgraced his family, those who had supported him, and worst of all, he disgraced the gospel and the Christ that he so eloquently talked about and defended. What did he lack? He lacked character, he lacked integrity. He

played his little game with God and lost. When you study the etymology of the word “integrity”, it simply means to be undivided. It means that if you are a person of integrity, then you are the same person in every circumstance. **You are very predictable** – and you should be. In every circumstance everyone knows that you will be honest, trustworthy, honorable, moral, virtuous, righteous, and exercise self-control in your life. You are very predictable almost to the point of being boring to other people. No one will ever accuse you of having too much character or too much integrity.³ “*Oh, he’s way too honest*”, or “*He’s much too trustworthy*”, or “*He has way too much self-control*”. Never.

Here is what Scripture clearly and unmistakably teaches. When God saves you, He first changes your heart. He actually gives you a “new heart”. [Ezekiel 36:26](#) says it this way,

Eze 36:26 (NKJV) I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

God starts with the inside. When God changes your heart, then He can change your mind, and when He changes your mind, then He can change your life. **You must grow inwardly before you can grow outwardly.** Think of spiritual growth as an **inside / out job**. What I did not previously tell you is that the verb to “**be transformed**” is in the passive voice. What that means is that someone else is acting upon you, someone else is helping you to make the internal changes that you need to make. At the moment of salvation when God gives you a “new heart”, [Ezekiel 36:26](#) says that He also “**puts a new spirit within you**”. God has given you everything you need to grow spiritually, so you cannot blame God for where you may be in your spiritual life. God will help you to live the Christian life, but He is not going to live it for you. You have to live out the Christian life, and it just seems to me that so many Christians have no idea what I am even addressing.

Unfortunately, so many people just seem structured for failure.⁴ Why is that? It is because they have allowed their thinking to shape them rather than allowing God’s thinking to shape them. If I can say it a different way, **you become what you think**. If the mental structure of your mind is not God-focused, then you are destined for spiritual failure. If you are so stubborn in your life that you will not allow God to shape how you think, then you cannot be spiritually successful. You can be successful in your career and make a lot of money and have everything that you thought that you wanted, but in the end, you will look back on your life and realize that “things and stuff” never truly satisfied your heart. Listen carefully.

What you are thinking today is revealing what your future will be tomorrow.

I know people who are thinking today about leaving their marriage partner, and they ultimately will. I know people who all they are thinking about today is making more money, and they ultimately will. However, I also know people who are thinking today that they truly want to become more like Christ and they ultimately will. **You become what you think**. What Jesus did is that He gave His disciples a new heart and a new spirit. When He sent the Holy Spirit to His disciples on the Day of Pentecost, He created a “**mind shift**” in them that became an unstoppable, irresistible force in their life. If you look at their life initially, they all seemed structured for failure, but when God gave them a new heart and a new spirit, at the same time, **God restructured their mind for spiritual success** – and they literally impacted

³ McManus, Mind, 129.

⁴ McManus, Mind, 3.

the entire world. So,, for anything meaningful to change in your life, the first thing that must change is how you think. The classic statement regarding a lack of meaningful change is this – “*If you always do what you have always done, then you will always get what you always got.*” So, as your pastor, the following are four things that I want to entreat you to do.

1. **MAKE SURE THAT YOU ARE SAVED.** If you have any doubts about this, then please let me know and we will talk about it. Nothing, absolutely nothing, that I say to you past this point will have any value or meaning to you if you are not actually saved.
2. **EXAMINE YOUR LIFE.** Take a close look at your life, then write down on a sheet of paper what you already know that you need to change. Write it down so that you can quantify what needs to change in your life. My assumption is that I doubt that anyone will actually do this. Most people are willing to say that certain things need to change in their life, but they are completely unwilling to begin restructuring their life to make those changes. Examine your life.
3. **FIGURE OUT WHAT IS HINDERING YOU.** Whatever God wants you to become is what you want to become, so please do not tell me that you have nothing to change. If you think that way, then you are in the grips of the devil himself. He has already structured you for failure. Every single one of us have areas in our life that God wants to change, so determine what is hindering you from becoming what God wants you to become.
4. **DEVELOP A PATH FORWARD.** You must develop a plan to make the necessary changes for spiritual success that you need to make in your life. Once again, write it down. I seriously doubt that anyone will do this either, but what do you have to lose? Nothing actually.

We KNOW that God wants us to grow spiritually. [2 Peter 3:18](#) says,

2Pe 3:18 (NKJV) but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

[1 Peter 2:2](#) says,

1Pe 2:2 (NKJV) as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,

In my mind, not doing what we have to do to grow is just a spiritual copout. If you take your Christian life seriously, and you should, then you have to be willing to change those things in your life that dishonor Christ. Take it slow, take it one step at a time, but do it. Begin to make the changes. Make a plan and stick to it. Intentionally choose to embrace the changes that God wants you to make in your life.

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