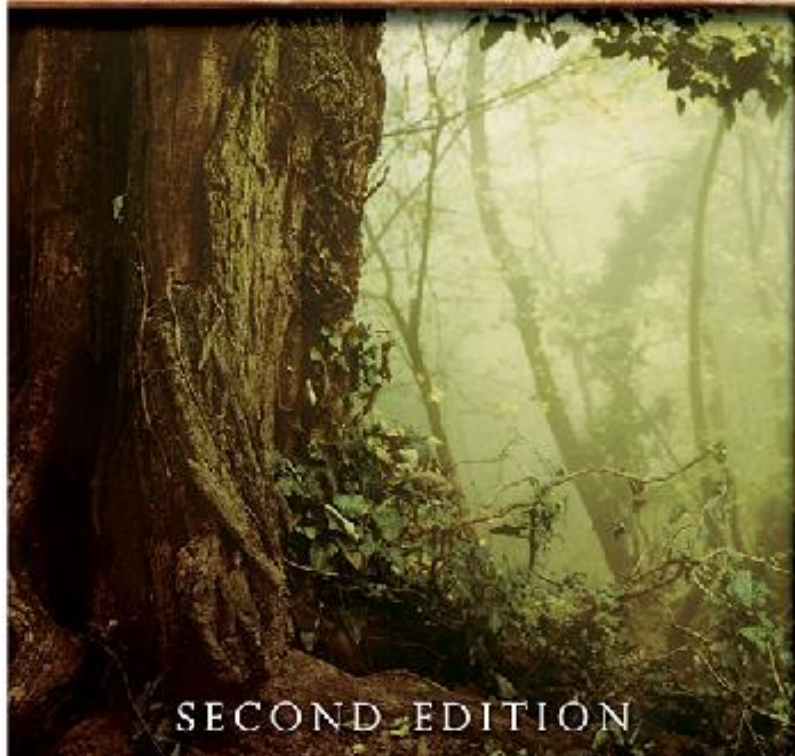




CHANGED INTO HIS IMAGE
GOD'S PLAN FOR TRANSFORMING YOUR LIFE
JIM BERG



SECOND EDITION

Table of Contents

[Chapter 1 Understanding Biblical Change](#)

[Part One: Restraining Your Flesh](#)

[Chapter 2 Recognizing the Evil Within](#)

[Chapter 3 Identifying Your Own Way](#)

[Chapter 4 Getting in Your Place](#)

[Chapter 5 Mortifying Your Flesh](#)

[Part Two: Renewing Your Mind](#)

[Chapter 6 Getting in Touch with Reality](#)

[Chapter 7 Becoming like Christ](#)

[Chapter 8 Searching for Wisdom](#)

[Chapter 9 Walking in Wisdom](#)

[Part Three: Reflecting Your Lord](#)

[Chapter 10 Being a God-Loving Example](#)

[Chapter 11 Being a Word-Filled Teacher](#)

[Chapter 12 Being a Ministry-Minded Overseer](#)

[Chapter 13 Laboring Together with God](#)

[Appendix A: Reproducible Study Sheets](#)

[Appendix B: Supplemental Articles](#)

PREFACE

In August of 1996 I presented the original draft of this book to my three daughters with a personal letter that outlined my intent for its writing. I had occasionally written “letters from Dad” to them about biblical truths I wanted to be sure they understood. I soon realized there were many truths I wanted them to not soon forget—truths they had heard repeatedly at home and during their formative years growing up on the campus of Bob Jones University. In order for you, the reader, to get a better grasp of the passion I felt for this project from its beginning, I have, with the permission of my daughters, reproduced here a portion of the letter that accompanied their original draft of this book.

Dear Kirsten, Angie, and Michelle,

These chapters are the lengthiest “letter from Dad” you have received yet, and perhaps the most important one. In December of 1993 we forged a family mission statement together that God has used to mold our direction as a family. I want to restate it here so that you can see where these chapters fit into the picture.

The Mission of Our Family

To passionately know our God,
and to love and please Him by
living together in harmony,
serving each other in humility,
growing together in godliness,
helping others with cheerfulness,
and thereby, as a family,
to provide a “living advertisement”
of Christlikeness
for others in this generation and
for our children
in the generations to come.

Ever since we together crafted this statement, I have been burdened to make sure you have in your hands the information you need about the Christian life to insure that our family can indeed be a “living advertisement” of Christlikeness. This book is one means to that end. It is written in such a way that others outside our family might benefit from it, but I want you to know that it was written for you. If no one else ever reads it, I have accomplished my primary goal by placing it in your hands.

I have told you before that your mother and I will probably not be able to pass on to you any kind of earthly inheritance. If we can pass on to you a passion for God, however, we will have given you something more valuable than silver, gold, or rubies and more satisfying than anything a mortal can experience (Prov. 3:13–15). Your mother and I can honestly say that “[we] have no greater joy than to hear that [our] children walk in truth” (3 John v. 4). Our prayer is “that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished [as for] a palace” (Ps. 144:12).

May God use all of this book to draw you to a greater love and devotion to our matchless Savior, Jesus Christ. You truly are our beloved daughters in whom we are well pleased.

Love,
Dad

The two years that went into the original writing of this book were two of the most spiritually refreshing of my entire life. Writing this book forced me to clear away the chaff in my thinking about the Christian life and drove me to consider only the fundamental issues of life with God. As I culled through sermon notes of messages I preached or classroom lectures I delivered, I was compelled to continually ask myself, “Do I consider the material I am examining essential for my daughters’ pursuit of God and godliness, or is it merely peripheral? Is this idea or that

thought indispensable for their walk in the Spirit, or is it only incidental? And most important, will it stir within them a thirst for God, a hunger for His Word, and a desire to represent Him well as salt in the earth?”

This book was intended to be a sort of travel brochure for them, enticing them to fellowship with God and to behold for themselves the breathtaking vistas of the glories of God in Christ Jesus. It was also to be a basic road map of Christian growth, showing them the way to that kind of relationship with God. It was an attempt to present to them in writing a biblical overview of the Christian life. Twenty years later, every goal I had in the beginning remains the same—for them and for you.

Please keep in mind that the illustrations you will encounter as you read this text have been greatly changed “to protect the guilty.” Names and details have been altered so that no situation, as it is printed, represents any actual individual in my acquaintance. While I do not wish for anyone’s personal identity to be exposed, I would hope that all of us would see ourselves often in the various scenarios so that biblical truth can be more readily understood and applied.

Although the primary target audience for this book was my daughters, it is also my prayer that you, too, will have a greater passion for our God and will be enabled by God’s Spirit to have a godly impact in this darkening age that precedes the imminent return of our blessed Lord. We shall stand before Him soon! There is much to be done in us and through us before then.

UNDERSTANDING BIBLICAL CHANGE

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

—Romans 12:2

Have you ever set out to help someone, not really knowing what you were doing or how you were going to do it? Have you ever tried to tackle some gnawing problem in your own life but didn't have a clue about how to get started? Christopher Columbus experienced this problem when he set out to find a westward passage to Asia. Because he had little idea about what he was doing, someone proposed the following award in his memory for those who emulate him.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS AWARD

Citation: This award goes to those who, like good old Chris, when they set out to do something, don't know where they are going; neither do they know how to get there.

When they arrive, they don't know where they are, and when they return, they don't know where they've been. (Source Unknown)

Tragically, many Christians set out in life with little more understanding of what they are doing than had Mr. Columbus. While he possessed no accurate charts to lead him to Asia, the journey that we take as believers has been very carefully mapped out for us by the captain of our salvation (see Heb. 2:10).

This book is about *sanctification*. Sanctification is the word used to describe the Bible's teaching about how we are sanctified or made holy. The Bible teaches that a person becomes a Christian by accepting Jesus Christ as his personal substitute for the penalty of sin. Once a person becomes a child of God, God begins a process in him that changes him to become more like Christ in his attitudes, ambitions, and actions. God will use many things to accomplish this change, including temptations and trials, the local church and Christian friends, His Word and His Spirit. Sanctification, in the sense we are discussing in this book, is progressive. A person's likeness to Christ is not something that happens all at once. It is a process of change that the Bible calls *growth*. As we look at various aspects of the Christian life in this book, remember that whenever you see the phrases "change and grow," "becoming like Christ," or "biblical change," we are talking about the Bible doctrine of progressive sanctification.

The discussion of growth toward Christlikeness in this book will help you navigate more skillfully the sometimes treacherous waters of daily living. A sea captain who understands the basics of navigation and sailing knows how to make progress no matter what the direction of the winds or currents. In much the same way, if you understand these basics for biblical change (i.e., sanctification), you can experience growth in your life no matter what challenges confront you at the moment. Furthermore, you can effectively help others to change and grow as well.

NOT JUST ANY CHANGE WILL DO

The title of this book announces that the subject under discussion is change—but for the Christian not just any change will do. Consider the following scenarios.

- A spoiled teen may stop his sulking (a desirable change), but only because his parents have acquiesced and have given him the car he wanted.
- A depressed wife may become her old cheerful self again (a desirable change), but only because her alcoholic husband has granted her a divorce.
- A college student may be getting better grades (a desirable change), but only because she has found a boyfriend whose affection has lifted her spirits so that she feels like studying again.
- An embittered dockworker may stop his complaining about the foreman’s decisions (a desirable change), but only because the foreman was transferred to another terminal.

As you can see, we have to be more specific about what kind of change we are talking about and how it is to be accomplished. A mere relief of the symptoms of despair, anger, fear, and so forth does not necessarily mean the real problem has been solved—as is apparent from the situations above.

The real problem in these scenarios is not lacking a car, having an alcoholic husband, lacking a boyfriend, or having a foreman with poor judgment. The real problem goes much deeper and reminds us of an important Bible principle to understand about change: “Our greatest problems are never *around* us; they are in us.”^[1]

Jesus said it this way in Mark 7:21–23: “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness [shameless sensuality], an evil eye [envy], blasphemy [slander], pride [arrogance], foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.”^[2]

The apostle James tells us the same thing in James 4:1: “From whence come wars and fightings among you [the outward, visible problems]? come they not hence, even of your lusts [the inward desires of the heart] that war in your members?”

Since the Fall of man in the Garden of Eden, man has attempted to blame someone or something for his trouble. Adam attempted to shift responsibility to Eve, and Eve pointed an accusing finger at the serpent (see Gen. 3:12–13). God’s Word is clear, however, that our real problems are not the result of pressures from someone or something outside ourselves. We do not sin because of financial, social, medical, or circumstantial pressures. We sin because each of us has a sinful heart.

Lessons from a Tea Bag

We can illustrate this biblical truth this way. When we take a tea bag, place it in a teacup, and fill the cup with hot water, the water activates the tea in the bag, unleashing its taste into the water around it. The hot water didn’t create the taste; it merely revealed or drew out what was already in the bag.^[3]

This depicts what happens in the human heart. The pressures around us (the unfavorable circumstances, the temptations, and the commands of God to love Him and our neighbor) merely draw out of our heart what is already in it. We cannot blame the hot water for the taste in the cup. The contents of the tea bag determine the flavor of the tea. If we don’t like that particular taste, we need to put into the water a bag containing a different kind of tea.

Similarly, we cannot shift the blame for any bitterness, anger, despair, deception, cruelty, or some other emotional response that we display when we are under pressure. The pressures merely expose how unlike Christ we really are.

Acts 16:22–24 tells us of a hot water experience Silas and the apostle Paul had while in Philippi. Because of their preaching, “the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off [Paul’s and Silas’s] clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.”

The hot water of suffering revealed the nature of the hearts of these two men. We see their response in the next verse: “And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them” (16:5). While other believers might react to such mistreatment with bitterness and anger or with despair and discouragement, Paul and Silas responded with praise and thanksgiving. Why the difference? The hearts of these men had been changed to be like the heart of Christ, who responded in a similar fashion to His suffering (see 1 Peter 2:21–23).

This book is about change—change that involves warring against this sinful disposition within. As we shall see, this is not a change we can make on our own. Furthermore, we must have God’s goal in mind as we seek to change. Remember, not just any change will do.

THE GOAL OF CHANGE

The result of the sanctification process is that the believer looks increasingly like Christ—he becomes a “grown-up Christian.” While living on this earth, Jesus Christ exemplified the characteristics of a man controlled by the Holy Spirit and in perfect fellowship with God. Remember this statement; we will come back to it. The believer is brought, as Paul said, “unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). When the nature of God is reflected fully through the nature of a man, as it was in Christ, the blend produces a person who is the Father’s humble servant. Spiritually mature humanity is in essence Christlike humility, which is the humility of a servant.

Please note that this biblical goal of Christlike humility is a far cry from many currently popular, but unworthy, goals of helping someone become well-adjusted or develop his moral consciousness or achieve personal happiness and success. Our Lord did not come to this planet, live a perfect life, and become a worthy atonement for the sins of the world so that those who become His children can merely be well-adjusted, live morally upright lives, and enjoy personal happiness and success. He died to redeem us from the penalty and power of a sinful heart that keeps us from being useful servants of the living God. A truly humble servant of God will be well-adjusted, will have a morally sensitive conscience, and will enjoy the blessedness of life with God—but these are byproducts of godliness, not primary goals for the Christian life.

The leading passage of Scripture describing the servanthood of Christ is Philippians 2:1–11. Theologian B. B. Warfield said about this passage:

A life of self-sacrificing unselfishness is the most divinely beautiful life that man can lead. He whom as our Master we have engaged to obey, whom as our Example we are pledged to imitate, is presented to us here as the great model of self-sacrificing unselfishness. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus,” is the apostle’s pleading. We need to note carefully, however, that it is not self-depreciation, but self-abnegation, that is thus commended to us. If we would follow Christ, we must, every one

of us, not in pride but in humility, yet not in lowness but in lowliness, not degrade ourselves but forget ourselves, and seek every man not his own things but those of others.

[\[4\]](#)

Only when a believer looks like a humble servant of the Father does he look like Jesus Christ, of whom the Father said, “Behold my *servant*, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased” (Matt. 12:18).

This change from the self-centered ways of our sinful heart to the self-sacrificing ways of our Lord will require divine assistance. This kind of change is not a do-it-yourself project. We must understand, therefore, the source of our power to change. Let me illustrate that power this way.

The Power of a “Cat”

I grew up on my grandfather’s cattle farm in South Dakota. My father was the mechanic for the many pieces of machinery that were required to farm three thousand acres. Even though my grandfather owned several tractors, two combines, and many other farm implements, my favorite piece of machinery was a yellow bulldozer, a D6 Caterpillar. My grandfather used the Cat for such things as moving small buildings, digging a water reservoir on the property, compacting silage in one of several large silage pits, or pulling an eight bottom disc plow with thirty-two-inch discs that would turn up new sod a foot deep, eight rows at one time. If there was a hard job that required much power, the Cat was the solution.

Although I loved to ride the Cat, I didn’t get to accompany anyone into the fields because of the danger of having a small boy on such heavy equipment. Dad, however, would let me walk out to the machinery yard with him and ride the Cat with him back to the shop when he needed to do repairs.

Sometimes he let me “drive.” Watching an eight-year-old boy drive a bulldozer is an interesting sight. Bulldozers do not have steering wheels. Instead, they have two brake pedals—one for each of the operator’s feet. Between the two brake pedals are two levers coming out of the floorboard and extending about three feet into the air. To turn left, you have to pull back on the left lever, disengaging the drive train to the left bulldozer track, and push down on the left brake pedal, stopping the left track. The right track would keep going and turn the bulldozer left.

“Driving” for me meant that when we needed to turn left, I would stand between dad’s knees with both feet on the left pedal. At the same time I would grasp the left lever with both hands and lean back as far as I could to disengage the clutch. Bulldozers are not much more than very large toys to an eight-year-old boy, but to a farmer with a lot of work to do, they are a great assistance.

Now suppose my grandfather wanted to plow an eighty-acre field and went out to the machinery yard to pull the several-thousand-pound disc plow by hand. What would happen? About all he would be able to do in his own power would be to lift the hitch. He could never move the plow even one inch in his own strength. On the other hand, if he were first to start the Cat’s powerful diesel engine and then hitch the plow to it, he could get out into the field. When quitting time came, he could say, “I plowed the field.” To make his statement more accurate, he could add, “Yet not I, but the bulldozer did it for me.” Without the bulldozer, he would be helpless to get any serious plowing done.

As believers, we can no more please and serve God effectively in our own strength than my grandfather could pull a plow in his own strength. The bulldozer enabled him to carry out his work in the field. In the same fashion, the Holy Spirit is the divine power behind everything the

believer does that will count for God. We need, therefore, to understand as much as we can about the Holy Spirit because of the crucial role He plays in biblical change.

THE PERSON OF CHANGE

The Holy Spirit is not some mystical or cosmic impersonal influence or force. He is one of the three persons of the Godhead—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. He is the agent who shows us our need of Christ and imparts Christ's life to us at salvation. He then begins the work of changing our lives to become like Christ through sanctification, and He empowers us for service to Christ.

We are changed by Him as we cooperate with His leading. Paul testified that the Holy Spirit's leadership in a man's life is one of the chief evidences of that man's salvation. He said, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14).

The apostle is not teaching in this verse that we should expect the Spirit of God to give us mystical leadings and nudgings, and thereby direct our lives. That is not what Paul is talking about at all. This verse is in the context of Romans 6–8, which speaks of the work of sanctification that God is trying to work out in our lives—a process initiated and orchestrated by the Spirit of God. He is leading in this process. He is the divine leader calling attention through His convicting voice to the times when we are intent upon going our own way. He leads us into an understanding of the Scriptures and leads us into "paths of righteousness" (see Ps. 23:3) that will reflect Christ's life in us. Those who experience this kind of leadership—away from sin and toward Christ's likeness—"are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14).

That leadership of the Spirit toward Christlikeness takes place as we obey Paul's admonition in Ephesians 5:18 to "be filled with [controlled by] the Spirit." The Greek verb he uses in this passage for *filled* is an imperative. That means it is a command. God must command us to yield to the Holy Spirit's control because we are not automatically so inclined. We naturally wish to control ourselves.

The Greek verb is also in the present tense. That means it is something that should be continually happening in the present—here and now. It should be an ongoing action. It means *keep on being filled with (controlled by) the Spirit*. Lastly, it is a verb that is also in the passive voice, meaning that someone else does the empowering. It is done to us. We do not do it to ourselves. The Holy Spirit is the one who empowers us when we choose to cooperate with Him. The filling of the Spirit refers to the supernatural work of the Spirit within a believer whereby that believer is enabled or empowered to become *like Christ* (sanctification) and become *useful to Christ* (service).

Many believers are virtually powerless to overcome the lusts of their flesh and of their mind because of failure in this very area. They continue for years manifesting the same anger, driven by the same pride, motivated by the same fears, crippled by the same sense of hopelessness, or consumed with the same lusts that they have had for years. How tragic that so many years of blessing and usefulness have been forfeited because these powerless believers never learned how to be or did not practice being controlled by the Holy Spirit. There is no doubt that He is the person of change. Let's look for a few minutes at how He works in the process of change—sanctification.

THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

Someone has said that sanctification is the “Christianizing of the Christian.” Preachers through the years have described it as the process whereby the *Spirit of God* takes the *Word of God* and changes us to become like the *Son of God*.

The Bible teaches that the believer has three main spiritual responsibilities in the sanctification process. God, the Holy Spirit, is the primary initiator in all of these activities, but a believer must cooperate with what the Holy Spirit is doing in his life. Those three responsibilities are listed in the first column of the following chart. Take a minute to look them over and notice the passages written by Paul and James that refer to each activity. Notice also in the last column that the Holy Spirit, when He enables a believer in those activities, produces a certain kind of fruit: the flesh is restrained, the mind is renewed, and Christ is revealed through the believer’s example and ministry to others.

OUR PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY	PAUL’S INSTRUCTION (EPH. 4:22–24)	JAMES’S INSTRUCTION (JAMES 1:21–25)	THE HOLY SPIRIT’S RESULT
1. Mortification of the flesh	“put off [the ways of] the old man [i.e., the old unregenerate self]”	“lay apart [lit., put off] all filthiness”	The flesh is restrained through the Spirit’s enablement.
2. Meditation on the Word	“be renewed in the spirit of your mind”	“receive . . . the engrafted word”	The mind is renewed through the Spirit’s illumination.
3. Manifestation of Christlikeness	“put on [the ways of] the new man [i.e., the new self in Christ]”	“be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only”	Christ is revealed through the Spirit’s fruit.

While every believer has a personal responsibility to carry out these commands, the Bible clearly teaches that these activities can be performed *only* in the power of the Holy Spirit. Keep in mind that sanctification has been designed by God to be a cooperative venture between God and us. Notice the joint responsibility in the following verses:

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live (Rom. 8:13).

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me (Gal. 2:20).

In each case, we are commanded to do something: “mortify the deeds of the body” and “live in the flesh [in this body] by the faith of the Son of God.” At the same time, God says He is doing something: “through the Spirit” and “Christ liveth in me.”

This book is divided into three main parts that correspond to the three personal responsibilities illustrated in the previous chart. The understanding and practice of these three personal responsibilities are not incidental in the sanctification process. They are core issues. Failure to cooperate with God in these responsibilities in the power of the Spirit accounts for every failure in Christian living.

So essential are these truths in the biblical process of change and growth that they are the touchstone for evaluating any theory or advice offered today in the fields of Christian education, parenting, biblical counseling, and pastoral ministry. Truly biblical counsel will emphasize to believers, not merely mention in passing, that to change they must “put off [the ways of] the old

[unregenerate] man,” “be renewed in the spirit of [their] mind,” and “put on [the ways of] the new man [in Christ].” It is for this reason that these three components of sanctification form the structure of this book on change.

We will look at each one in great depth and will especially note the Holy Spirit’s role in the sanctification process as the believer yields himself to the Spirit’s control. This is God’s plan! Therefore, it is our only answer and our wonderful hope. It is the continued work of the gospel in us.

SPIRITUAL PARENTING

While this book is about *sanctification*, it is also about discipleship. Through the years the term *discipleship* has come to mean different things to different groups. To some, discipleship is a tightly regimented curriculum complete with discussion groups and study guides. Once an attendee has filled in all the blanks and attended all the sessions, he has been discipled. To others, discipleship is something akin to taking monastic vows and moving into a religious commune removed from the rest of civilization. To yet another group, it is merely their denomination’s yearly four-week emphasis on daily Bible reading and prayer.

Biblical discipleship is not primarily a program. It is a certain kind of relationship between two believers with a very specific spiritual goal in mind. Discipleship is helping another believer make biblical change toward Christlikeness—helping others in the sanctification process. It is the spiritual parenting Paul spoke of in Galatians 4:19, when he addressed the members of the church as “my little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.”

This book on sanctification and discipleship, therefore, can serve as a beginning study for assisting new Christians in their growth in Christ. Perhaps, however, it can best function as a training manual for pastors, Christian educators, biblical counselors, and parents since these leaders are involved in helping others change. Specific sections at the end of each chapter provide the disciple maker with additional information that will aid him in his ministry to others.

THE CENTRALITY OF DISCIPLESHIP

I want us to look briefly at several common relationships in life that involve biblical change. Perhaps having an idea of how fundamental these principles of change and growth are to every significant area of your life will increase your motivation to master them and practice them at every level of your God-given responsibilities.

When relationships in the following areas are crumbling, you can be sure that biblical responsibilities for discipleship and basic issues of sanctification and life with God are being ignored or defied. You can neither effectively build the following relationships nor troubleshoot them without a biblical understanding of your discipleship responsibilities in each. You must also master God’s methods for bringing about change and growth in the lives of His people. We must understand what constitutes discipleship.

Parenting Is Discipleship

Parenting, when understood biblically, is basically a discipling relationship. When God gives a child to a Christian couple, they must realize that their little bundle of joy is essentially a lost soul. Their biblical mission is to evangelize him and then to equip him for usefulness to Christ, which is, in essence, discipleship. This is what Paul teaches in Ephesians 6:4 when he tells fathers to “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

Sadly, the goal of many Christian parents is merely “to raise a good kid.” Through moral training and consistent discipline, they might even rear a child of whom they are proud. He may never cause them any real heartache but still not be useful to Christ. His materialism, impatience, impulsiveness, anxiety, stubbornness, or any other fleshly attitudes and actions can disqualify him from usefulness to Christ. In that case, the biblical parenting goal has not been reached, even though the child never got into serious trouble or never seriously embarrassed his parents. The biblical goal was not reached because their parenting efforts did not produce a disciple of Jesus Christ—someone like the Master and, therefore, someone useful to the Master.

[5]

Parents who do not understand the role that discipleship and sanctification play in Christian parenting often find themselves off course when their children reach the teen years. In the early years these parents chart the wrong courses on the sea of early child rearing and, consequently, encounter unnecessary dangers in the teen years. Tragically, they may never reach their anticipated port.

Incidentally, many parenting failures reflect a lack of biblical discipleship between husband and wife and a failure to understand and practice the principles of biblical change and growth within the marriage itself. Husbands and wives who are not actively helping each other grow in likeness to Christ within their marriage will not see the importance of it with their children either. Neither will they know how to apply the issues of sanctification to the lives of their children since they have not had the practice of doing so in their own lives.

Edification in the Local Church Is Discipleship

The mission of the church is laid out in Ephesians 4:12–16. It is to be a place where God-called and Spirit-gifted leaders help the saints mature “for the work of the ministry” as they grow “unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” This is clearly a call to disciple the flock.

The New Testament pastoral role is much like that of an Israelite shepherd in Bible times who led the whole flock to pasture and water but often had to give individual attention to sheep that had become ill, injured, or lost. Likewise, the shepherd of the local assembly, through his Bible-preaching ministry, is to “feed the flock of God” (1 Peter 5:2) en masse; but he must also make opportunity to meet with individual members who need personal explanation, encouragement, and exhortation. Whether by public preaching or by private counseling, the pastor’s role is that of a disciple maker.

Of course, his ministry to the flock becomes a pacesetter for every other ministry of the local assembly. Every Sunday school class, special ministries to children and youth, vacation Bible school, and various outreach ministries must also have a passion not only to bring them in but also to help them grow. Christ called His disciples to bring forth fruit that would reproduce itself and would remain (see John 15:1–16). Without a passion to disciple believers to Christlikeness through the ministries of the church, the church will focus merely on

perpetuating its programs, and the sheep will grow sickly and unfruitful. The edification ministry of the local church is, therefore, a discipling effort—helping believers make biblical change toward Christlikeness.

Christian Education Is Discipleship

Christian education, an extension of the Christian home and the church, is also essentially discipleship. The following statements about Christian education point this out.^[6]

In following God they [the students] imitate both His nature and His works. The imitation of God's nature results in holiness of character. . . . The fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23) is the expression of the holiness of God in the believer's character. The imitation of God's works results in service.

Academic subjects—whether in the humanities or in the natural sciences, whether general or strictly vocational—are studied not as ends in themselves but as means of improving the student as a servant of God.

In endeavoring to fulfill the purpose of Christian education—the development of Christlikeness in redeemed man—the Christian school teaches, as a consequence of the knowledge of God, the imitation of God. Students learn of God so that they may imitate Him. They are to become “followers of God” (Eph. 5:1).

When principals, teachers, parents, school board members, and students forget this driving motive behind Christian education, the results are disappointing, even disastrous. Well-ordered classrooms, high academic achievement, cultural appreciation, and athletic accomplishment are not the measure of success in Christian education. If those overseeing the sports, fine arts, student discipline, and classroom instruction do not see their arena of responsibility as a means of developing Christlikeness and do not actively and consciously pursue them as such, Christian education will produce only highly trained rebels.

For example, student misbehavior and disinterest at school are not just interruptions in the educational process—they are revelations of the student's heart condition. Spiritual processes of Christian change and growth have been stymied in the student's life and must be addressed biblically. Christian teachers must remember that while the goal of most businesses is to *please* the customer, making him a consumer, the goal of Christian education is to *change* the customer, making him a contributor, a servant. Discipleship must be the driving concern. For that reason, every Christian teacher must understand the principles of biblical change.

Biblical Counseling Is Discipleship

Discipleship must be the primary concern in the realm of biblical counseling as well. Too many who attempt to counsel do not have the biblical process of progressive sanctification in mind when they try to help someone. They do not see themselves involved primarily in a discipleship relationship of helping their counselee grow in likeness to Christ.

A counselee may come to such a counselor for relief from his despair, anxiety, anger, guilt, or fear. He may want help in getting his spouse back or may desire direction in restoring a wayward teen. He may be struggling with the effects of sexual abuse or the life-dominating clutches of drugs, alcohol, or homosexuality. A woman may be grieving after a miscarriage or the discovery of a malignancy. In each of these cases, change and growth toward Christlikeness are the needs of the hour. When the counselor's mindset is not truly biblical, the counseling process will not intentionally move toward biblical goals.

For example, when a woman who was sexually abused as a child by her uncle comes to such a counselor for help, he may think she needs to recover hidden memories or build her self-esteem. Or he may believe her “damaged emotions” need to be healed or her “inner child” needs to be re-parented. He may suppose that a “Christianized” twelve-step recovery program is the solution or assume that giving her “insight” into why her uncle was abusive in the first place can help her more easily forgive him.

In the process, she may find some temporary relief from whatever was troubling her most. She may even learn some spiritual truths she had not known before. But unless the path of sanctification is clearly charted for her, she will spend months, and perhaps years, steering from one navigational heading to another looking for lasting help. What she needs is a counselor who understands that God’s “recovery program” is sanctification.^[7] She can become godly and useful to Christ as an adult, no matter what her past, if the counselor will help her learn and practice the basics of biblical change. Any attempt to produce love, joy, peace, endurance, and contentment apart from the Spirit of God is reliance upon strategies that are in competition with God.

Management in Christian Work Is Discipleship

Paul had an enormous management responsibility on his shoulders—the daily “care of all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:28). How did he do it? A look at Ephesians 4:11–13 shows that he expected the “saints” to do the “work of the ministry” as they were brought to maturity by the leadership of the church. Christian leaders today must have the same focus. The work must be done, but the *whole* job isn’t done unless the saints are developed in the process.

Some Christian organizations tolerate the anger, disobedience, harshness, or critical spirit of a Christian worker or leader just because he is a productive worker or has an important position. Paul, however, did not hesitate to personally address uncharitable and sinful behavior of the workers and leaders under his oversight. (See 1 Cor. 5:1–7; 6:7–8; Gal. 2:11–16; Phil. 4:2; 2 Tim. 2:16–18.) He did not ignore the reports he received from others about selfish behavior within the ranks. (See 1 Cor. 1:11; 5:1; 11:18; 2 Thess. 3:11.)

Sometimes he had to address the whole organization for their petty arguments and carnality. He demonstrated that individuals must be addressed and must be disciplined if there is no change. They cannot simply be moved to a less damaging position in the organization. He was concerned that “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (1 Cor. 5:6). Entire sections of his epistles were “staff development manuals” to specific groups. He was concerned for the corporate testimony and therefore spent much time addressing individual and corporate problems.^[8]

We may speak today within Christian organizations about our “personnel problems.” There is nothing at all wrong with this terminology, but we must remember to look at these problems biblically. Paul called the believers with “envying, and strife, and divisions” he saw within the church “carnal” (1 Cor. 3:3). He did not pacify or arbitrate divisions. In Philippians 2:1–16, he called the conflicting parties to repentance and to a like-mindedness that reflected the mind “which was also in Christ Jesus” (2:5).

Christian leaders must humbly address fleshly actions and attitudes within the organization and help wrongdoers make biblical change through the remedies offered in God’s plan of progressive sanctification. This emphasis upon developing Christlikeness within the Christian worker is called discipleship.

YOUR ROLE IN DISCIPLESHIP

As you can see, God's concern about godly living encompasses every area of life. Believers must share that concern and be committed to God's purposes and plans for themselves and for other believers.

Keep in mind as you study this book that you cannot effectively help others change toward Christlikeness unless you adequately understand the basics of biblical change for yourself. You must have a working knowledge of the doctrine of progressive sanctification and must, by God's grace, be practicing it in your own life. Paul gave his disciple Timothy the following instructions: "Meditate upon these things; *give thyself wholly to them*; that thy profiting may appear to all. *Take heed unto thyself*, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both [spare] thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4:15–16).

If you have picked up this book to help someone else, resist the urge to skip over chapters 2 through 9. Before you can become useful to Christ as a disciple maker, the fruit of your own walk with Christ must be apparent to others. Humbly study these opening truths, asking God to enable you as you apply them to your life. Then move on to chapters 10 through 13 about helping others.

Understand that God has called every believer to a ministry of discipleship with those around him. He said we are to be "teaching [others] to observe all things whatsoever [He has] commanded [us]" (Matt. 28:20). Paul told his disciple Timothy, "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2).

God has placed others around you who need to grow in Christ—your spouse, your children, your friends, your students, your roommate, your congregation, and coworkers. All believers are to take up the challenge to "admonish one another" (Rom. 15:14) and to "exhort one another" (Heb. 3:13).

The writer of Hebrews warned that those who "ought to be teachers" based on the length of time they have been saved, but who are not actively teaching others, should place themselves under some basic instruction again. He charged them with becoming "dull of hearing" and of being "unskilful in the word of righteousness" (Heb. 5:11–14).

This passage contradicts those who have the unbiblical mindset that "religion is a personal matter; I don't meddle in other people's lives" or "it's their life; if they want to throw it away, that's their business." The apostle insists that those who have this attitude of noninterference in the lives of others need biblical change themselves for their self-centered lack of ministry to others.

The church at Thessalonica was of an entirely different persuasion. They were so grateful for what God had done for them that they ministered to anyone who would listen.^[9] May God use this book on biblical change to help you become like the Thessalonians whom Paul commended for becoming "followers of [the apostles], and of the Lord, having received the word" (1 Thess. 1:6).

A FINAL WORD

The goal of this book is to give you a thoroughly biblical overview of the Christian life, of man, and of his relationship with God. When man does not understand God's ways and is not properly related to God, everything is chaos. You will not be able to lead others out of that self-

centered chaos unless you understand life from God's perspective, model the proper relationship to God yourself, and know how to lead others to the change that will bring them back to a right relationship with God. There is no true biblical change toward Christlikeness unless life and its problems are handled God's way.

TAKE TIME TO REFLECT[\[10\]](#)

1. Do you understand the Bible teaching of sanctification? Could you briefly outline its main points for someone who wanted to know how to biblically change something in his life? This question is merely a test of what you already know since a thorough discussion of the concept is the subject of this book.
2. Have you unwittingly accepted unbiblical solutions to solving life's problems (e.g., trying to build your low self-esteem or trying to experience the healing of memories)? Are there concepts you need to rethink and perhaps abandon in light of God's Word? Keep a running list of them as they come to mind throughout this book. Don't let anyone's solution, including your own ideas, go unchecked against the Word of God. If you find that the idea you are espousing is not taught in the Word of God as part of the sanctification process, you must abandon it and learn God's ways of handling the problems of living.
3. What is your attitude toward and involvement in your local church? The Christian home and the local church are God's primary means of providing the instruction, accountability, and practical experience necessary for Christian growth. God intends to use the "assembling of ourselves together" as a means of "exhorting one another" (Heb. 10:25). Would your attendance and service record demonstrate a commitment to spiritual growth and mutual discipleship?
4. What is your attitude concerning involvement in the lives of others? Do you stay out of their problems because you are unprepared to help them? If so, pay close attention to the following chapters. God intends to use every believer to help others.
5. If you are uninvolved, is it because you think the problems of others are none of your business? If so, are you willing to ask God to teach you His way of thinking about this?[\[11\]](#)
6. Perhaps you are the kind of person who is always involved in other people's lives (maybe even a busybody who has an opinion about everything), but you never see lasting biblical change take place in them. Are you attempting to help by giving them your ideas and opinions? Are you "practicing medicine without a license"? Can you show biblical passages that back up your "prescriptions"? Would the apostle Paul have given the same advice you give?

A WORD TO DISCIPLE MAKERS[\[12\]](#)

You can use this book in several ways when working with others.

Individual Discipleship

If you are working with an individual, have him read each chapter and then write out the answers to the questions in the "Take Time to Reflect" section at the end of each chapter. You might also ask him to find and write down five statements in the chapter that had the most

significance to him. Duplicate the “Five Significant Statements” study sheet on pages 291–92 in Appendix A and have him record his answers for each chapter. Tell him you do not want him to write out three or six, but five. Having to search for the five most significant statements will force him to concentrate on the material as he is reading it. If he has more than five, he will have to sift through the ones he previously selected to narrow it down to five. If he has fewer than five, he will be forced to return to the text and add to his list. This process causes him to think carefully about what he is reading. Writing them down will reinforce them in his mind one more time. Sharing them with you the next time you meet will further cement them in his thinking. At the same time, the significant statements he chose and his answers to the “Take Time to Reflect” section will show you where God is working in his life right now. If you are having him read one chapter each week, encourage him to read the chapter early in the week so that he has time to reflect on what he has read and to see how his life either measures up to or falls short of what he has just learned.

Small Group Study

Small groups within the local church or Christian school that could benefit from studying this book together include Sunday school classes, deacons, members of the church and Christian school staff, men’s or women’s Bible studies, church or Christian school teen leadership councils, church Bible institute classes, and Christian biblical counselor training programs. Organizations that serve the local church, such as Christian camps, can use the book for staff training as well.

If you are working with a small group of people reading through this book, you can ask them to follow the same process described above and then have them share with the group what statements were significant to them and why those statements had an impact upon them. Sharing it with others reinforces the truth they have seen while encouraging others who saw the same ideas. It also highlights that truth for others who missed it in their reading.

Family Bible Study

The small group process described above is a wonderful way for a father to go through this book with his family if the children are teenagers and can grasp the material—in fact this was the initial intent of this book. If there is a wide range of ages and abilities in the family, he can study the book with his wife alone or individually with each child who is old enough to understand it. If he is working with one family member at a time this way, he can follow the helps explained in the previous page in the section entitled Individual Discipleship.

Premarital and Early Marriage Growth

Engaged couples and newlyweds can study through the book following the process described on page 21 for individual discipleship. Individually answering the questions in the “Take Time to Reflect” sections, writing out the “Five Most Significant Statements” for that chapter, and then discussing the results together will pay huge dividends in their relationship. They will find out a great deal about each other while at the same time learning of God’s ways of handling the problems of living. If there are areas that seem to puzzle them or points of disagreement between them about something they studied, they can seek out the help of their pastor or other mature Christian friend to clarify the issue. Growing together spiritually in this way will help them launch their marriage with a biblical like-mindedness that forms the bedrock of a solid Christian marriage.

REPRODUCIBLE STUDY SHEETS
FIVE SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS

Chapter _____

Write out five significant statements from this chapter.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Write out your answers to the Take Time to Reflect questions for this chapter.

[1] Bob M. Wood, Bob Jones University. Used by permission.

[2] Throughout this book all italics are the author's except for italics in quoted text where the emphasis belongs to the author of the quotation. Words in brackets are added by the author to clarify meaning.

[3] Tea bag illustration adapted from J. Allan Petersen, *Your Reactions Are Showing* (Lincoln: Back to the Bible, 1967), 14–15.

[4] B. B. Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950), 571.

[5] This is not to say that every failure of a child to follow God's way is entirely the fault of the parents. God Himself said, "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me" (Isa. 1:2). He certainly didn't make any mistakes in His parenting goals or methods. Every child still has within him the inclination to turn "every one to his own way" (Isa. 53:6). God does, however, place a heavy responsibility on parents to exemplify godliness and to saturate the childrearing environment with the ways and the words of the living God lest they "forget the Lord" (see Deut. 6:5–13).

[6] Ronald A. Horton, ed., *Handbook of Christian Education* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2017), 12.

[7] By using the phrase "God's recovery program," I certainly do not wish to legitimize any popular obsession with recovery programs. Instead, I want to make the point that any *recovery* for a believer is going to come through following God's plan of sanctification, not through completing some manmade steps. A believer cannot please God by following the teachings of competing, manmade solutions, even if the *solutions* seem to work. Whether something *works* or not is not the issue—obedience to God's plan is the only appropriate goal.

[8] See how Moses and Joshua dealt with the children of Israel for more examples of how individual and corporate problems were addressed to maintain God's blessing upon the group.

[9] See 1 Thessalonians 1 and 2 for the remarkable ministry of both the apostle Paul and of his converts in this church.

[10] Each chapter will close with application questions like these. Take some time to reflect on them, asking God to make His truth operative in your life. For each chapter reproduce the study sheet entitled "Five Significant Statements" found on pages 291–92 in Appendix A. Write out your answers so that you can later review the things you have learned (Prov. 10:14) and share them with others.

[11] Somehow this position of neutrality sounds justified, but often it is merely a way to protect ourselves from the vulnerability that comes in ministry to others (e.g., "If I challenge him about his problem, he will point out some problems and inconsistencies he knows about in my life" or "If I try to help him, he will ask some questions I don't know how to answer"). No matter what our argument, God intends to use this vulnerability to stimulate us to further change and growth ourselves. Avoidance of the responsibility to biblically challenge others is a sure way to remain a spiritual baby.

[12] The term "disciple makers," as used in this book, refers to anyone who is helping another believer make biblical change toward Christlikeness. Of course, that includes Christian leaders who have official responsibilities for others (e.g., parents, teachers, counselors, pastoral staff, and Christian leaders/managers). It also includes Christian laymen who have no official authority over others but, nonetheless, have a biblical responsibility to help fellow believers make biblical change toward Christlikeness (e.g., coworkers, roommates, fellow church members, relatives, classmates).