

-Grace Presbyterian Church -

How People Change

A Guide for Gospel-Centered Change

*Written by Rev. Brian Prentiss
(modeled extensively on the
Christian Counseling and
Education Foundation's
curriculum, How People
Change written by Dr. Paul
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HERE'S WHERE WE'RE HEADED

The circumstances of life often prompt us to ask, "What's the point? What's the purpose? Why is this happening?" As humans we long for purpose, for a better future, for personal change, etc. but are often unsure where to even begin. In answer to these questions, the Bible points us beyond circumstantial change; it asks each of us to consider the need for deep internal change. But, what this lesson will suggest is that we can begin to identify the internal change that is needed by looking at our circumstances. It is in beginning to see God's purposes IN the circumstances of daily life where the Bible says real and lasting change begins to take root.

Discuss Make It Real

Each lesson will contain a *Make It Real* section which invites you to reflect upon the material as you go about your daily life in between group meetings. Each discussion time will begin with a discussion of things that different participants discovered through the *Make It Real* questions.

Review

This week, the *Review* section is an overview of the workbook format and the various components. (The Group Leader will provide this.)

Central Point and Application

1. **Central Point.** Everyone has some ultimate meaning or hope which provides perspective to their daily lives. God is inviting you to begin to see your life through his perspective and thus to have hope, comfort and peace in the midst of daily life.
2. **Personal Application.** You need to know what kind of hope is directing your daily life. Functionally, what are you living for?
3. **Relational Application.** As you interact with others, you can begin to discern what is functionally guiding your life by noticing how you respond to other people when they criticize or complement you, hurt or betray you, uphold or challenge you values, etc.

The Big Question: What hopes and goals give direction to your life?

Lesson Content

Human beings are "meaning makers." We are constantly searching for answers and seeking meaning and purpose for the events and activities of our lives: terrorist actions seen on TV; a major illness; the divorce in a

friend's family (or in our own); the familial and societal cost of sexual abuse, materialism and workaholism; the ravaged landscape of a war-torn country. As we are confronted by these things, as we personally struggle or suffer, achieve or prosper, we ask ourselves, "What is the point? What's the purpose? Why is this happening?" The answers that we give to these questions reveal how we think about meaning and purpose in general; they reveal our philosophical and/or religious presuppositions about life.

In little, everyday ways and in hugely significant moments, we try to make sense of our lives, and we often cry out for some kind of change. As we see brokenness in our own lives and in the world at large, we almost instinctively realize that things are not the way they should be. This realization leads us to long for what could be, and often to actively pursue positive change. But the change we seek is often either superficial, or we relate it completely to others – the problem is with "those" people. If only the boss were more patient. If only my spouse was less demanding. If only my children were more obedient. If only the President were more liberal or conservative (or moderate!) If only I had more disposable income. If only my metabolism were faster. If only my father had not been an alcoholic. If only...

None of these assumptions is necessarily incorrect! If what we longed for in all of these situations were to come true, our personal lives probably would become less stressful and more fulfilling, at least on a surface level. But the reality is that change in all of these areas at the same time, and to the degree that we would desire, is highly unlikely. The Bible confronts us with a hard-to-accept reality: The change most needed in our lives is not change in our circumstances and relationships, but in *us*. The Bible presents God as being most intent not on changing our circumstances but in *rescuing* us from ourselves. The problem, in other words, is not relationships or situations, but people. The problem is *us*.

Even Christians who believe the Bible become frustrated with this reality; they are often at odds with the wise and loving Lord they follow because the change he is committed to is not the change they have envisioned. And each of us, no matter what our religious commitments, sometimes struggle with those in authority or in power over us because they are perceived as preventing desired change or are asking for change in us that we do not desire. Both Christians and non-Christians must decide how they are going to deal with this state of affairs. The Bible presents internal transformation as the solution. In other words, in order to deal with a world we cannot change, we can either grow potentially more and more discontent with other people and our circumstances, or we can change.

The Bible does not simply state this change as an imperative, but indicates that God is *using* circumstances to actually *bring about* this change. What does he want to change us from and to? He wants to change us from people who "*live unto themselves*" to people who are

literally *like him*. The Second Book of Peter (1:4) puts it this way, “...*that you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*” This is real change! This is a selfish nature being replaced by God’s divine nature; this is God re-shaping a person into his own image. In the midst of daily life, God is ever-present and his focus is you. He desires to radically transform your heart so that you are able to live in the middle of a broken world and yet to think, desire, act, and speak in ways consistent with who he is and what he is doing on earth. Positive personal change begins to take place when your dreams of change begin to line up with God’s purposes for change. Leaving behind the narrow goals of personal fulfillment and comfort, God wants you to reach out for him, seeking to bring his perspective into your daily struggles, and to do so by his strength. The directive of personal change in the Bible is not simply an imperative, but a call to realize and rest upon the empowerment of God himself. In other words, he is the one committed to changing you and will make available all the resources that you need.

Digging Deeper: The Apostle Paul’s Letter to the Philippians expounds upon this concept.

Philippians 1:3-11 *3I thank my God every time I remember you. 4In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. 7It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. 8God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, 11filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.*

The Philippian church is made up of people just like us, people who have pressures, problems and imperfections. Yet, as Paul thinks of these people he is brimming with hope and confidence. This confidence is not founded on his readers’ ability to “get their act together”, to try harder at being more understanding towards one another, or to simply set better priorities. Paul’s confidence is completely *vertical* and *personal*. His hope rests fully on the person of Jesus Christ and knows that Jesus is able to transform the Philippians just as he has transformed Paul!

He sees the lives of the Philippians through the eyes of the transformation that Jesus brings as people submit their lives to him. Just as an astute home-buyer can look at a run-down house and envision what it would look like after a skillful remodel, in the same way Paul can envision what a life transformed by the love of Christ will look like and he wants the Philippians to envision this very same thing – for themselves!

One of the central features of this lesson is to help you realize that what you say you believe effects the way that you live your life. What you believe about the future informs how you deal with both the positive and negative circumstances of daily living. For the Christian taking part in this study, you should be challenged to ask whether God's vision of seeing you transformed *through* your daily circumstances, actually provides you with a growing ability to have hope, peace, and grace as the circumstances of life become difficult and/or painful. Do you see a growing willingness to "self-critique", to hold your life up to the mirror of Scripture? Do you see less anger and bitterness in the face of disappointment? Do you see less willingness to simply "give up" on the possibility of change? Certainly, there are times when you will not be able to answer all, or even one of these questions affirmatively. But, as you become more and more acquainted with God's purposes of making you more like him in the midst of your circumstances, you will have greater stability to handle both the joys and sorrows of life with spiritual and emotional equilibrium.

If you are not yet a follower of Jesus, please be encouraged to continue this study as it will have a lot for you to think about as well. Jesus was constantly speaking to both his followers as well as to those who were simply interested, and even to people who were downright skeptical. Whether you are curious or dubious, these lessons will be beneficial for you and will cause you to look at life from an interesting and fresh perspective. Jesus is interested in you and would love to help you work through the deepest questions of life. And, if you are willing, will come alongside you to help you answer the questions that opened this lesson, "What is the point? What's the purpose? Why is this happening?"

The question for you to consider from this lesson might be summarized in a series of questions, "What real basis for stability and peace do you have in the midst of life's greatest trials?" "Have you seen the circumstances of your life leading to one coherent and positive end-goal?" "From what you have heard of Jesus' commitment to lovingly and patiently change people, would you consider investigating further how he might can help you find hope and peace in your daily circumstances?"

Group Discussion

1. Central Point restated: *Everyone has some ultimate meaning or hope which provides perspective to their daily lives. God is inviting you to begin to see your life through his perspective and thus to have hope, comfort and peace in the midst of daily life..*
 - What are the common "meaning makers" of our local culture?
 - How is the hope of transformation described in this chapter different from these dominant "meaning makers?"

- What hope for the future do most Christians seem to live by?
2. Personal Application restated: *You need to know what kind of hope is directing your daily life. Functionally, what are you living for?*
- How might one's hope for the future direct their lives in a functional way?
 - Have there been any major crises, tragedies, or losses that have significantly altered the way you think about the future? What meaning did you invest in these events?
 - What meaning and purpose does this lesson suggest we should look for in life's trials? in life's joys?
3. Relational Application restated: *As you interact with others, you can begin to discern what is functionally guiding your life by noticing how you respond to other people when they criticize or complement you, hurt or betray you, uphold or challenge you values, etc.*
- How would noticing the things above help you to identify what is functionally guiding your life?
 - How might the content of this lesson (including the Scripture passages) change the way you respond to the criticism, rejection, or approval of others?

Make It Real

1. What real basis for stability and peace do you personally have in the midst of life's greatest trials? Do you find it difficult or easy to employ this hope in the middle of trial?
2. Is there a discernible primary hope for the future as you look at the patterns, priorities, perspectives of your life? How might these things change if you believed the content of this lesson?
3. Pick one place of opportunity or pressure, difficulty or blessing. If you viewed yourself as changed and carried by Christ, how might you respond differently to this situation?

Acknowledgments

This study is an adaptation of the *How People Change* curriculum designed and written by the Christian Counseling and Education Foundation in Philadelphia, PA (ccef.org). It has been adapted as a cooperative effort of the Community Group Leaders of Grace Presbyterian Church of Silicon Valley under the guidance and editing of Rev. Brian Prentiss, Associate Pastor. Rev. Prentiss felt that the *How People Change* curriculum was the best small-group study available on the topic of gospel-centered change. However, it seemed that the original study was conceived of for use in groups where all the participants were necessarily Christians, and this is not the reality for the groups of Grace Church in Silicon Valley. Rev. Prentiss asked Dr. Tim Lane, one of the authors of the original curriculum, for permission to rework the material so that it could be contextualized for a more diversified audience. This study is the result of taking the basic concept of the *HPC* curriculum and attempting to make it relevant to both believers and non-believers. In doing this, we are operating under the assumption that both Christians and non-Christians want to change, are dealing with largely the same life concerns, and have the same general problems regarding efforts at change. Both Christians and non-Christians naturally tend to go about change in largely external and circumstantial ways and so it was felt that with a little “tweaking”, the *HPC* approach could be offered to a larger audience. In this material, both believer and non-believer are offered the hope of the gospel and the process of Christ-centered change as the solution to their common struggle. So, hopefully both the originally-intended audience as well as those participants who have not necessarily fully-aligned their life with the gospel story, and may in fact have some doubts, can truly benefit from this study.

A careful reader of both our curriculum and the original will notice vast changes in the particulars but will hopefully find that the overall “spirit” of the study has been retained. Any failure to reproduce this spirit is the fault of Rev. Prentiss alone. Much thanks is given to each of the original authors, and to *CCEF* in general for their commitment to gospel-change and their willingness to be in conversation with us as we learn how to speak this hope into our secular context. A special word of thanks is also offered to each of the Community Group Leaders who participated in the workshop where the basic contours of this rewrite were conceived.

A MARRIAGE TO CHRIST AS A SURE BASIS FOR CHANGE?

Among all world religions, Christianity gives a most unique offer – an intimate marriage to God himself. Though it sounds a bit strange, the Bible describes the Christian as actually being married to God’s Son, Jesus Christ, and it is this extraordinarily intimate relationship that provides the framework for the change which we talked about in Lesson One. Because of who Jesus is and what He has done, those who are united to him in marriage are able to change.

Discuss Make It Real

Review

In Lesson One we examined the difference that it makes when we approach life with our ultimate destination in view. We each have a variety of hopes and dreams and we normally do our best to live by them. The Christian hope is founded on the person of Jesus and his willingness to lovingly change those who will submit to him - this is a transformation by grace.*

Central Point and Application

1. **Central Point.** The hope of real personal growth and lasting change rests on a relationship with a person, Jesus Christ, who is able and willing to powerfully act to change your heart and make it more like his.
2. **Personal Application.** Eternal change can take place when you embrace the person and work of Christ in the context of your struggles.
3. **Relational Application.** The shape of your relationships would be significantly different if you were completely convinced and aware of God’s infinite love for you.

The Big Question: What daily benefits come from a marriage to Jesus?

Lesson Content

Everyone is looking for change in their personal lives and we each employ a variety of methods as we seek to achieve this change. For a Christian, personal transformation may be sought in a variety of ways: church attendance, devotional practices, reading Christian books, studying theology, or partaking of the sacraments. A non-Christian probably will not first seek change through these activities but may instead seek out self-help books, investigate a variety of world religions, or change jobs or hobbies. These

* That is, by his unmerited favor and love.

things can be quite helpful, but for both the Christian and non-Christian, the “means” to personal growth and change can easily become an “ends” in themselves. In fact, they can sometimes stifle true self-examination and growth because we can fool ourselves into believing we are changing simply because our activities have changed or intensified. The perspective of this study is that while Jesus may choose to use many of these means to change us, it is first and foremost a relationship with him alone that will change in a deep and lasting way.

How Does the Bible Describe This Relationship With Christ?

If Jesus is committed to changing people through a loving relationship, how does the Bible describe this relationship? The following passages talk about the nature of a relationship with Christ and how fundamental change takes place in a human being.

Married to Christ

2 Corinthians 11:1-3 *1I hope you will put up with a little of my foolishness; but you are already doing that. 2I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. 3But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.*

Even persons who have been Christians for many years still think of Jesus primarily in terms of “insurance.” Often he is a safety net, a genie of sorts, who is consulted when life becomes difficult. In the passage above, Paul is arguing that a relationship with Christ is something different entirely, it is the central and defining feature of a believer’s life. The Christian is described as having been reconciled by God through Jesus Christ and brought into a relationship that is intensely personal. The Bible actually uses the imagery of marriage to describe the way that God desires people to know and relate to Christ. In this metaphor, Christ is the loving and faithful husband and his follower is his deeply valued and loved bride! This means that if you are in Christ, you are the object of God’s intense affection and delight, and in turn, you are to make him the ultimate object of your joy and love. Even a human marriage changes the way we approach everything in our lives, and a marriage to Christ is no different. It means, that at a foundational level, the story of Christianity is not people being fenced in by a largely rule-based religion, but a beautiful drama involving persons who are being invited into a delightful and intimate relationship with God himself. This relationship is meant to be the center of a Christian’s life and meaning. And though, like any marriage, there are certain boundaries and regulations that must be followed, as the Christian begins to understand God’s unmitigated love for them, they will learn to submit to these regulations with joy and gladness.

Christ the Bridegroom

Colossians 1:15-23 *15He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17He is before all*

things, and in him all things hold together. 18And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. 21Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— 23if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

In this passage, Paul is describing the person to whom you are invited to be married – Jesus Christ.

- He is God (v.15)
- He is the firstborn over all creation (v.15)
- He is the creator of all things (v.16)
- All things were created for him (v.16)
- He is eternal (v.17)
- He is the sustainer of all things (v.17)
- He is the head of the body (v.18)
- He is the beginning and firstborn among the dead (v.18)
- He is supreme (v.18)
- He is the fullness of God (v.19)
- He is the reconciler of all things (vv.20,22)
- He is the peacemaker (v.20)

What an amazing description of a groom! How could anyone who is married to Jesus be discontent? There is nothing and no person more wonderful and powerful in all of creation, and the Bible indicates that this person invites us to be married to him!

The Blessings of Union with Christ

Romans 5:1-11 *1Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. 3Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. 6You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. 8But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! 10For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of*

*his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! **11**Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

What makes a marriage truly enjoyable is when your spouse really knows you and loves you anyway. Jesus is the one who perfectly embodies this *contra-conditional* love. But, for this love to truly be appreciated, you must come to understand (and in fact continue to be reminded of daily) just who you truly are.

Apart from Christ, we are:

1. Guilty of sin* and alienated from God (5:8-10). Sin stains and separates everyone from God.
2. Enemies to God (5:10). Before salvation, everyone lives in opposition to God.
3. Powerless (5:6). Sin makes us incapable of being and doing what God intended.

Yet Christ brings:

1. Justification (5:1) For anyone who will put their confidence in him, Jesus' life and death will free them from the guilt of sin and alienation from God.
2. Jesus gives love in the face of opposition (5:6-8). Christ offers his life and love even to those who are his enemies!
3. Jesus redeems, saves, reconciles (5:10-11) All those who trust him are saved from God's wrath towards their sin and though they once were enemies of God, they begin to *rejoice* in him.

For the Christian, reviewing these passages will hopefully remind you that the Christian life is built on the foundation of accepting who you really are and believing who Christ truly is. *Everything* you do will be shaped by the degree to which you believe and act upon the blessings that are yours in Christ. How you deal with uncertainty, how you handle disappointment at work, how you respond to the needs of others, will all be founded upon whether you truly believe that you were an enemy of God who received God's absolute mercy. If you are still investigating whether Jesus is someone worth following, these verses make an amazing offer! Great literature often dramatizes self-sacrifice; we are drawn to stories of persons who are willing to give their lives for a fellow-human. These stories are attractive because they are so rare. But what is offered here is something wholly outside of our experience and imagination; God himself offers to die for you. And what this passage argues is that in doing so, he is offering to sacrifice himself (in the person of his son - Jesus) for one who is not a loving servant but someone who has thusfar lived in opposition. He invites you to be a son or daughter, and offers to change you from the inside-out so that you will begin to desire the things he desires.

*Sin is anything in a person which is contrary to the love of God and his law.

Group Discussion

1. Central Point restated: *The hope of real personal growth and lasting change rests on a relationship with a person, Jesus Christ, who is able and willing to powerfully act to change your heart and make it more like his.*
 - In the view of popular culture, what type of change does Jesus want to bring to his followers?
 - How might this be different from the change we have been discussing in these lessons?

2. Personal Application restated: *Eternal change can take place when you embrace the person and work of Christ in the context of your struggles.*
 - Do you have any fears or concerns regarding the type of change that Jesus wants to manifest in your life?
 - Any fears or concerns regarding the *means* that he might want to employ to bring about this change?
 - How are we to reconcile the fact that this change is described as *eternal* and yet even committed and maturing Christians experience seasons of struggle and skepticism?

3. Relational Application restated: *The shape of your relationships would be significantly different if you were completely convinced and aware of God's infinite love for you.*
 - How are our relationships affected by our own sense of self-worth?
 - If we were convinced of the constant love and affection of God himself, how might we relate to others differently? (Without necessarily naming them in discussion, it may be helpful to consider this question in light of specific relationships or conflicts.)

1. Most people do not think of Christianity as a marriage to Christ. Even if they are familiar with this metaphor, living before God in this way is difficult. Think through the relationships listed below. Whether you are already a Christian or just curious, which one(s) describe the general way you view a relationship with God?
 - Employee to Boss (do what you are told, get promoted or demoted based on your performance)
 - Neighbors (try to get along by staying out of each others' business)
 - Student to teacher (knowledge transfer is the primary goal)
 - Drill Sergeant and New Recruit (don't make any mistakes so that you don't get "yelled at.")

2. If Christianity is primarily a loving marriage to the Son of God, then for the Christian, spiritual adultery is loving anything apart from or more than Christ. The non-Christian also has central loves in his/her life which become functional Gods and are served with religious devotion. Either group can discover their particular idols by asking, "What things function as defining loves in your life? What things make you feel valued and significant? What things receive your most intense devotion?" (Examples: career, recognition, success, approval of other people, comfort/ease, health, pleasure, obedient children, knowledge, financial prosperity.)

3. Why are you drawn to the false views of God in question #1, and/or the ultimately empty lovers in question #2? Why are they attractive? How are they destructive? In order to experience Christ in fullness, or to become married to him in the first place, false loves must be identified and confessed before God. Then he is able to ascend to the throne of your heart, drawing you away from sinful objects of affection and giving meaning to the essentially good things of life that have become idols. Take a few moments to ask God to help you examine your own heart and to show you in the coming days and weeks how he can become the central love of your life.

CHANGE IS A COMMUNITY PROJECT

God uses people to change people. Relationships are a primary means that he uses to illuminate our need for change and then to work out the change that he desires.

Discuss Make It
Real

Review

In *Lesson One* we saw that each of us approaches life with a certain perspective; we have a worldview by which we try to make sense of our world. We said that this worldview is often different, and sometimes opposed to the manner in which God sees our lives. We examined what it might look like to approach life with God's perspective instead of our own and argued that if we see life from his perspective (that he wants to change us into his likeness through our circumstances) that our daily lives could be instilled with hope and meaning. *Lesson Two* examined the metaphor of marriage as a basic description of how God desires to relate to each of us and showed how our understanding of this relationship is foundational to understanding and experiencing change in the direction that God desires.

Central Point and
Application

1. **Central Point.** God's work of personal transformation is intended to take place within a community of committed relationships.
2. **Personal Application.** You will see the greatest degree of positive change in the midst of a circle of mutually-helpful relationships.
3. **Relational Application.** As you begin to see the value of other people to challenge and encourage you, it is only logical to consider how to help others in this way.

The Big Question(s): What daily resources are available to you today in your current relationships and community? Are you taking advantage of these potential relationships? What contributions can you make toward meeting the relationship needs of others around you?

Lesson Content

The "rugged individualist" is a western archetype which is found in all forms of pop, and even high-art. The self-made man which embodies this archetype has been a common hero in the history of film, and today in a more equal society, the woman who sheds attachment to others and succeeds completely on her own terms is the ideal woman. Is it any wonder then that we who live in the West often place a huge value on privacy and attempt to maintain a

very tight border on our public and private personas? Even though most of us are surrounded by people in our everyday lives, it may be rare that we feel truly connected with and known by those around us. Accordingly, we tend to set very individualistic goals and do not normally evaluate our personal worth and meaning based upon any particular communal identity.

As we begin to investigate in this Lesson how the Bible talks about community and the way in which God uses it to change individual people, this subject of Western individualism is an important issue to remember because it is often in tension with the Bible. While God certainly relates to each person as a valuable individual, individualism is actually a barrier to the kind of growth and personal change that God desires to bring about. Change is something God intends people to experience together; it is a corporate concern.

God Himself Lives in Community

God himself lives in community as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Love, fellowship, harmony and unity have existed eternally between the members of the Godhead, and the Bible indicates that God is interested in creating human communities that represent this perfect communal existence. Reflecting God's nature, the Christian Church has described him as the Trinity; God is one being and yet exists in three persons. Within the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit do everything in union with each other, including bringing individual sinners into the family of God. The Gospel of John, chapter 15 speaks of "the vine and the branches" where Jesus refers to himself as the "vine", and to his people as the "branches." The branches are thus in union with God himself and as an implication, are in union with one another, just as a vine has many unique branches all of which are part of the same organism. Later in that same book, in John 17:20-22, Jesus speaks of the fellowship that he enjoys with his heavenly father and prays that his people may enter into that very same community, being placed in union with God and with each other.

So, entering into the Christian life does not eliminate a person's individuality, but understood rightly, it does begin to move them out of selfish individualism and into a community. For anyone who has been a Christian for a while, this may not sound like anything radical, at least at a concept-level. But, we often know things theoretically which do not really change our daily lives or perspectives all that much. As it concerns living in community, this is often the case for many Christians. It may seem rather self-evident to think that you are organically-related to other Christians and yet you may still evaluate your Christian life in primarily individualistic ways. If you are just exploring Christianity, this idea of the Christian life as a life in community is very different from how it is often depicted in the popular culture, and you may have to adjust your perspective accordingly. The Christian community is rightly described as a family. This can be a tremendous safeguard against loneliness and isolation, but will also bring other people into your life at a deep level, people who have idiosyncrasies, quirks, and real problems.

Belonging to God's Family

There is not one passage of the Bible that comprehensively deals with the idea of community, or of what it means to belong to God's family and how it pertains to the topic of "How People Change", but Romans Chapter 12 is one of the best summaries. Here, Paul outlines what living in God's family is meant to look like, and what it is meant to accomplish in the lives of individual people. In this passage we see that gospel-centered individual change* happens best when individuals understand their corporate identity.

Romans 12:3-8 *3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. 4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. (TNIV)*

In order to change people need a starting point; they first of all need to soberly determine present shortcomings and deficiencies. According to this passage, this best happens in the midst of a loving community of people who are committed to each other's good. In these communities people are able to notice their brokenness and sin as they interact with other people. This both requires and fosters *humility*, what Paul describes in verse 3 as not thinking of yourself more highly than you ought. This is because the one who chooses to seek out life in community will find that their flaws and weaknesses are actually magnified; more people will see their failures and sin. Whereas one who lives in isolation from real relationships is far more prone to pretend certain defects are absent, and therefore miss the opportunity to change. So, it takes humility to willingly enter into community. You are choosing to allow *more* people to see your faults. But this willingness also can foster humility, for as you enter more deeply into community you will inevitably come to understand your sinfulness in a far more comprehensive way. So, in an ironic way, it is the person who lives in community that can best understand themselves as an individual.

The second important thing to see in this passage is that each member of God's community has certain gifts that are given for the sake of the community. (See verses 4-8.) We each tend to see our possessions, resources, and gifts in relation to how they serve our own objectives, but what Paul is saying here is that the gifts that God endows people with are not primarily for their own betterment, but for the community. This is a corrective towards selfishness and is in line with God's objectives of moving people away from self-concern and individualism and into a lifestyle of *love* towards other people. Tim Keller, who is a pastor in Manhattan says that gospel

* "Gospel-centered change" is a shorthand explanation of the overall purpose of this curriculum, that lasting personal change best takes shape as a response to God's gracious initiative in the person and work of Jesus.

centered change does not mean we should think less of ourselves but think of ourselves less.

So far in Romans 12, we have seen that God uses community to foster *humility* (v.3), and the *love* of other people (vss. 4-8.) These two critical virtues are primary goals of gospel-centered change, and are best learned in community. But, there is a third in this passage that may not be quite so obvious. The last virtue that Paul argues must be present and growing in a vital community, and that therefore should be a goal of individual change is *cheerfulness*. After a series of “do” commands in verses 6-8: serve, teach, encourage, contribute, etc., Paul gives a “feel” command at the end of verse 8: do these things *cheerfully*. Our English translation here is perhaps a bit weak, the Greek word denotes “hilarity”, or “overflowing joy.” Paul is not asking his readers simply “do something” in the community, but he is saying that they should “feel something” towards the community. Perhaps it is possible in some cases to contribute or govern or lead in your own strength, but it is impossible to feel something simply as an act of will. In the infamous words of Woody Allen, “The heart wants what the heart wants.” It will only become truly cheerful, it will only respond towards God’s commands with overflowing joy if God himself reaches into the human heart and changes it. This is finally gets us to one of the primary unique characteristics of this curriculum and its perspective on *How People Change*. The change that the Bible calls for is internal, heart-level change. This type of change is brought about only as a work of God for only he can truly change the orientation and affections of a human heart. And, the main point of this particular lesson is that God does this primarily and most comprehensively through a vital connection with his community.

Group Discussion

1. Central Point Restated: *God’s work of personal transformation is intended to take place within a community of committed relationships.*
 - Does this vision for community growth surprise you? Intimidate you? How is it different from the way you have previously understood Christian growth?
 - After reading the lesson, do you have any objections to the idea that change happens best in the midst of community?

2. Personal Application Restated: *You will see the greatest degree of positive change in the midst of a circle of mutually-helpful relationships.*
 - The Church is the most obvious community to promote Christian change, what other communities shape your worldview and foster change in your life? Is this change positive or negative?
 - Can you share about a person or community that helped you grasp a key truth or insight about yourself that you had not seen before?

- Do your present relationships in the church or in other communities provide an environment of mutual trust that fosters gospel-centered change?
3. Relational Application Restated: *As you begin to see the value of other people to challenge and encourage you, it is only logical to consider how to help others in this way.*
- If you were to begin to prioritize helping others in community, what challenges would emerge?
 - How is it possible to begin to encourage, and at times challenge others without simply becoming annoying?
 - When you see yourself as a servant to others in the church (or another community), how does this actually foster the type of personal change that we discussed in this lesson? (Refer to discussion of Romans 12.)

1. How does your life reflect your commitment to meaningful relationships that help you grow and change? What things get in the way of this, or do you replace these relationships with? These replacements might include:
 - The busyness of life (keeping relationships distant and casual)
 - Being immersed in friendships that are activity and happiness-based (vs growth-based)
 - Conscious avoidance of close relationships (too scary or messy)
 - Formal commitments to meetings/activities, but no real connections to people.
 - One-way relationships (investing in/giving advice to others but not allowing others to do this with you)
 - Self-centered, self-absorbed relationships that allow others to meet your needs, but you rarely invest in giving back to them.
 - A private, “just me and God” approach to the Christian life
 - Theology as a replacement for community (Knowing “about” God rather than a relational pursuit of God and his people)

2. What opportunities for redemptive relationships are already in your life? (Marriage, friendship, parents, coworker, small group, extended family, spiritual leaders, etc.) The perspective of this curriculum is that God desires to use these relationships to transform you. Are you committed to and experiencing personal transformation through these relationships? If not, what things are in the way?

3. If you do not have relationships of this sort in your life, what steps can you take to participate in a redemptive community? Do you need to more deeply involve yourself at a local church? Do you need to make new relationships, or strengthen/restructure present ones? Do you have relationships that need to be restored?

LIFE AS GOD SEES IT, CHANGE AS GOD DOES IT

The Bible gives more than directions, it gives “the Big Picture” (God’s perspective on your life.) Practical hope, comfort, direction, and the foundations for change are found in seeing this big picture.

Discuss Make It
Real

Review

In **Lesson One**, we learned that a relationship with Christ brings a *valid reason to hope for change*; it really is possible for those who will cling to Christ and invite him to transform them. **Lesson Two** was a consideration of the person of Jesus. He does not simply provide resources for change, he offers himself as well. Then in **Lesson Three**, we saw that the context for change is living in community with other human beings. God uses other people and his church to bring forth individual change. With this foundation in place, we can begin to examine the *process of change* itself.

Central Point and
Application

1. **Central Point.** Practical hope, comfort, and direction come from looking at our lives and our world from God’s big picture perspective.
2. **Personal Application.** In order to change in the manner that God desires, I need to evaluate myself in light of what God says about himself, me, my world, and change.
3. **Relational Application.** Seeing life from God’s perspective will radically alter the way I relate to other people and what I expect of them.

The Big Question: How does having a “Big Picture” of life change the way we understand and respond to the details?

Lesson Content

The Big Picture

It is not unusual to feel lost right in the middle of our own lives. We may understand a lot about our own personal history and temperament, a good deal about God, and others, but often it is difficult to frame these elements in one coherent picture or narrative. We are puzzled as to why our marriage continues to have problems, we are surprised by a teenage child who has

become adversarial, we question why a serious illness has entered into our lives just at the moment we are beginning a new job. This lesson, and the basic trajectory of this entire curriculum, attempts to put these experiences into meaningful perspective.

Think of it this way. If you were lost in the middle of a large city, what do you need? Our first response would be, “directions.” But, directions would only get us to our next destination, then we would be lost again. What we really need is a view of the city from the “helicopter” perspective. A map of the entire city would give us *the Big Picture*. Though the Bible can often seem like a disparate and somewhat haphazard collection of stories, poems, teachings, and commands, it is meant to be a map that gives us the big picture of our lives. When carefully examined, the Bible shows us God’s perspective on the human experience and invites the reader to adopt this same perspective. In looking carefully at the parts and the whole of Scripture, we can begin to see life as God sees it and understand change God does it. Then we can begin to make sense of the details of everyday life. The details can then be viewed as the means that God uses to bring forth growth and change into people’s lives.

Jeremiah 17:5-10 *5 This is what the LORD says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD. 6 He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. 7 "But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. 8 He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit." 9 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? 10 "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve."*

The Bible typically uses concrete images to illustrate spiritual truths. This passage is a good example. Look at the main images in this passage. In verse 8, the image of *Heat* is used to describe life in a fallen world. In verse 6 the image of a *Thorn bush* in the wasteland represents the person who turns away from God. In verses 5 and 7, there is a clear reference to the Lord. He is the Redeemer who comforts, cleanses, and empowers those who humbly trust him. We could represent this part of the passage by the *Cross* to denote God’s redemptive activity. In verses 7 and 8, the image of a *Fruitful tree* emerges, representing the person who trusts in the Lord. In the midst of these images, verses 9 and 10 show us a God who does not simply focus on our behavior. Though he does not ignore behavior, his focus is on our hearts. He is the searcher of hearts, because they are central in the change process he undertakes in those he redeems. This passage gives us a simple but helpful view of life that describes four basic elements of life metaphorically.

Heat (What is your situation?)

You and I are always reacting to things that are happening around us. Whether it is the scorching heat of difficulty or the unexpected rain of prosperity, we are always responding to whatever is coming down on us. The Bible understands this and presents a shockingly real picture of a broken world. It is honest about the things that happen here.

Thorns (How do you react? What do you want and believe?)

The “thorns” metaphor is meant to describe how you and I most naturally respond to the “heat” (or “rain”) in our lives. The Bible indicates that we each respond to this “heat” in our hearts and in our outward behavior and that this response yields a harvest of consequences. For example, when someone criticizes us, our quickest most natural reaction is one of self-defense, anger, and sometimes retribution. What the Bible is arguing is that the outward behavior is linked to an internal reality, a sinful heart which in this situation has placed too much significance in someone else’s opinion. The criticism did not CAUSE the anger, but simply gave opportunity for an unsettled heart to reveal its interests.

Cross (Who is god and what does he say and do in Christ?)

The God of the Bible presents himself as “an ever present help in time of trouble.” The ultimate example is Christ, who came to a fallen world to live, die on a CROSS, and rise again. This is the basis for Christian hope, but as we will see in this an future lessons, it also provides the foundation for beginning to respond to the “heat” of life in extraordinarily different ways. When one aligns their life with the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, they are given a new heart that begins to evidence new strength and wisdom in the face of daily trials.

Fruit (New responses from a new heart)

When God changes a person from the inside out, this person can begin to respond to the same old pressures in a brand new way. Hearts which are renewed by him respond differently to the circumstances of life and these new responses produce a harvest of fruitful consequences.

These four elements: *HEAT*, *THORNS*, *CROSS*, *FRUIT* will form the backbone of subsequent lessons. But before moving on, let’s take a look at another passage in which they are seen.

Galatians 5:16-26 *16* So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. *17* For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. *18* But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. *19* The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; *20* idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions *21* and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. *22* But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, *23* gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. *24* Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its

passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Heat (The circumstances)

- Temptations to gratify sinful desires (v. 16)
- Difficulty of living by the Spirit* in a fallen world (vss. 16-17, 25)
- Conflict within the Galatian Church (v. 26)

Thorns (Natural/Sinful responses)

- Sinful desires (v. 17)
- Inner confusion/conflict (v. 17)
- Sinful actions (vss. 19-21)

Cross (God's redemptive work in a person's heart/life)

- Gift of liberty/freedom (v. 18)
- Guidance by the Spirit (v. 18)
- Belonging to God's family (v. 24)
- Union with Christ in his crucifixion (v. 24)

Fruit (new responses from a heart changed by Christ)

- Resistance to temptation (v. 16)
- New desires (v. 17)
- Loving/profitable actions (vss. 22-24)

Group Discussion

1. Central Point restated: *Practical hope, comfort, and direction come from looking at our lives and our world from God's big picture perspective.*
 - In what ways is this true, how does God's perspective on our lives help in a practical sense?
 - What are some normal places that people in our culture look to find hope, comfort, or direction in life's difficulties?

2. Personal Application restated: *In order to change in the manner that God desires, I need to evaluate myself in light of what God says about himself, me, my world, and change.*
 - If you really believed that God was lovingly administering the events of your life, how might this change your reaction to trial? To blessing?
 - Is there a particular "heat" (or "rain") in your life right now that *the Big Picture* of this lesson might help you to understand and manage?

3. Relational Application restated: *Seeing life from God's perspective will radically alter the way I relate to other people and what I expect of them.*

* "Life in the Spirit" is shorthand in the New Testament for a life that is led and empowered by God himself in the form of his Spirit.

- If you began to adopt God's *Big Picture* for your life, how would this change your expectations and desires towards other people?
- If you began to view other people as part of the "heat" that God himself brings into your life, how might you relate to them differently? Would it cause you to handle conflict differently?
- Looking at this dynamic in reverse, you are often the "heat" and "rain" that God brings into others' lives! How does this change your view of present relationships? Everyday encounters with strangers?

Make It Real

1. What real basis for stability and peace do you personally have in the midst of life's greatest trials? Do you find it difficult or easy to employ this hope in the middle of trial?
2. Is there a discernible primary hope for the future as you look at the patterns, priorities, perspectives of your life? How might these things change if you believed the content of this lesson?
3. Pick one place of opportunity or pressure, difficulty or blessing. If you viewed yourself as changed and carried by Christ, how might you respond differently to this situation?

HEAT 1: GOD IN THE REAL WORLD

In this lesson we are focusing specifically on the HEAT, or circumstances of life. Amidst the stress, trials, disappointments of life we can find comfort in the fact that God knows and understands our struggles.

Discuss Make It Real

Review

Let's consider what we have covered so far. In Lesson 1, we discussed the promise and hope of being changed by God's grace and his power, so that more and more we embody the ideals and perspective of Jesus amid our struggles and relationships. And, discussed how viewing our present situation from the vantage point of eternity (God's perspective) provides hope because, even when change is not occurring as quickly as we might like, we remember that God is still working change in us! In Lesson 2, we saw that lasting change does not happen in a vacuum, but is the byproduct of being known and loved by Jesus. Change is not accomplished by mastering a technique or following a system; it takes place as we are in relationship with Christ. In Lesson 3, we saw that living in redemptive relationships with others (Christian community) enables us to see our need for communion with Jesus more clearly. Lesson 4 then introduced a model of the way God brings about change in peoples' hearts and lives.

1. God knows the pain, struggles, and brokenness of my world in detail (HEAT).
2. God understands my heart and how I naturally respond to the heat (THORNS).
3. God meets me and changes me in the midst of life's challenges (CROSS).
4. God changes me from the inside out (my heart not only my behavior) thus producing a harvest of good things in and around me (FRUIT).

In Lessons 5-12 we will look at these four basic elements in detail, starting with HEAT in this lesson.

Central Point and Application

1. **Central Point:** God understands the full range of joys and sorrows that make up our lives.
2. **Personal Application:** There is comfort in knowing that God understands my world and can provide help that fits my need.

3. *Relational Application:* Only to the extent that I believe and understand God's gracious work in my life will I be equipped to help others accordingly.

The Big Question: What are the issues that you are struggling with – the burdens, pressures, joys, hardships, temptations, responsibilities, opportunities, and pains? Do you feel alone in the struggle?

Lesson Content

God Understands Our Lives and Struggles

If you have ever felt alone in your struggles, then you should find comfort in knowing that God knows, understands and cares about what you are going through. The Bible is not a book about perfect people in idyllic situations. It is filled with real people struggling with real problems and committing gargantuan sin. But, when these people cried out for help, God listened and responded to their cries. One of the goals of this lesson is to help you take comfort in the fact that you don't have to hide your issues from God; he already knows you and your life in every detail.

The Psalms are filled with examples of real people in the midst of real struggles and how they relate these struggles to God. In *Psalm 88*, the psalmist sings a litany of his despair, and yet, there is something comforting in hearing him list out his troubles to God. Though there is no specific redemptive summation at the end, reading this Psalm can help us to find comfort in believing that nothing in my life, no matter how dark and broken, comes as a surprise to God.

Psalm 88 **1** O LORD, the God who saves me, day and night I cry out before you. **2** May my prayer come before you; turn your ear to my cry. **3** For my soul is full of trouble and my life draws near the grave. **4** I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am like a man without strength. **5** I am set apart with the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom you remember no more, who are cut off from your care. **6** You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths. **7** Your wrath lies heavily upon me; you have overwhelmed me with all your waves. Selah **8** You have taken from me my closest friends and have made me repulsive to them. I am confined and cannot escape; **9** my eyes are dim with grief. I call to you, O LORD, every day; I spread out my hands to you. **10** Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do those who are dead rise up and praise you? Selah **11** Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Destruction? **12** Are your wonders known in the place of darkness, or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion? **13** But I cry to you for help, O LORD; in the morning my prayer comes before you. **14** Why, O LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me? **15** From my youth I have been afflicted and close to death; I have suffered your terrors and am in despair. **16** Your wrath has swept over me; your terrors have destroyed me. **17** All day long they surround me like a flood; they have

*completely engulfed me. 18 You have taken my companions and loved ones from me; the darkness is my closest friend.**

Let's consider the experience of the writer by imagining ourselves in their situation. (The numbers represent verse or verses.)

3-5: you are in deep inner despair

6-7: you feel abandoned by God

8a: you have lost your friends

8b: you feel trapped and helpless

9-12: you feel like you are crying out for help but no one comes

13-14: you feel as though God has turned his back on you

15-17: you feel like bad things are always happening and nothing changes

18: you feel like you wake up every morning to a dark world

Does it bother you that the Psalm does not end on a positive note? that God does not appear to take care of one of his children? Is it difficult to imagine how this Psalm could be used as a hymn in worship? What can we learn from this?

- From the greatest joys to the most crushing sorrows, God understands the full range of human experience.
- The promises and story of the Bible address people like us who live in a world where such things take place.
- God's honesty about these experiences invites me to be honest about the things I face. Biblical Christianity is never blind, indifferent or stoic in its response to life.
- Being a Christian is not then about denying our struggles or internalizing them, so that we look presentable on the outside.
- Going to God with my struggles and even skepticism is an act of faith that presumes he really does meet us in the midst of difficulty. This Psalm calls us to run TO God in desperate moments rather than away from him.
- Even God's children can feel abandoned by him at certain times.
- The Bible does not describe a peaceable world inhabited by noble people who always make the right choices. Rather, the Bible describes a world we are likely to recognize, where very good and very bad things happen, and where people make wonderful and terrible choices. It is a world full of rich delights, but a world also full of pain that at times makes us want to cry.

In light of all of this, can you see how God wants you to bring your struggles to him? Can you be honest with God? Or are you afraid to examine how you are responding to the *HEAT* that you face? If you are simply investigating Christianity, you are invited to take an honest look at all the places of your mind and heart that you prefer to keep secret from others, to consider all

* The Psalms are poetry and are structured as such. This structure has been jettisoned in this particular Psalm in order to save space. Please see a copy of the Bible for the line breaks, punctuation, etc.

your doubts and even anger towards God. If you are ready, Psalm 88 invites you to bring these things to God without fear and ask him to comfort and change you. If you are presently a Christian, do you often feel like you have to publicly portray an unwavering faith and love towards God? Do you feel the need to pretend you “have it all together” and that life has no real problems? You should see that this desire is a desire to be more “spiritual” than the Bible, that you are free to inhabit God’s world as a real human being. Though Psalm 88 does not end with consolation, the writer willingly brings a very grim view of their present reality to a God who saves. (v. 1)

Our Struggles Have a Purpose

Thus far, we have deiscussed the fact that God understands our struggles. Not only is it important to believe this to be true, but the Bible also teaches us that our struggles actually have a purpose in and of themselves. The Epistle of James describes a time that was very tumultuous for God’s people. James is writing shortly after one of the central figures of the early church had just been stoned. Stephen had recently become the church’s first martyr and virtually the entire Christian church was feeling the burden of persecution. Yet James opens his Epistle with a strong note of hope, *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”* (TNIV) James is arguing that God allows his people to undergo trials so that they will become complete. Though we normally see trials as something to be avoided, James says they are critical for our development as human beings; they bring us something that we need. Though hardship and struggle, sickness and loss are indeed painful, God uses these things to bring people to maturity, Christ-likeness, and deeper peace.

Returning to the metaphors which were introduced in Lesson 4, a trial is an external situation (*HEAT*) that reveals the heart and leads to one of two results (*FRUIT* or *THORNS*.) When faced with *HEAT*, we respond at a heart level. In our natural state, we are quick to distrust God’s goodness in this moment, becoming angry with him or a person we view as responsible. These “thorny” responses are what the Bible calls sin and they actually compound the problem rather than softening it. The troubling (but normal) *HEAT* of life then gives rise to deeper despair, cynicism, and bitterness. Alternatively, we can believe that God’s absolute goodness and vigilant care is being expressed towards us even in the midst of the *HEAT* of daily life, including the truly painful events. This affords a “calm within the storm” effect, which God can use to produce greater certainty, comfort, and what the Bible calls *Shalom* – full peace and rest of the soul. This is the *FRUIT* that God is seeking to produce in and through his followers in the midst of all of life’s circumstances.

Psalm 88 and James 1 both remind us that the Bible speaks of a real God who meets and comforts real people in the midst of difficulty in the real world. Psalm 88 emphasizes that God knows and understands what we are going through. James 1 provides an example of a pastor applying this truth

the the lives of people he dearly loves. In both passages, the reality of *HEAT* is acknowledged and responded to in ways that are truly liberating. We are not alone. God does understand!

Group Discussion

1. Central Point Restated: *God understands the full range of joys and sorrows that make up our lives.*
 - How is this comforting?
 - If God knows everything (omniscience), then God knows everything about each of us, even the stuff we try to hide. Is that liberating or worrisome?

2. Personal Application Restated: *There is comfort in knowing that God understands my world and can provide help to that fits my need.*
 - If you are a Christian, what are some of the ways that God has actually provided comfort to you?
 - In difficult but daily circumstances what are some ways that you can be reminded of God's perspective on your life and invite his comfort? What about in a more intense struggle or personal tragedy?

3. Relational Application Restated: *Only to the extent that I believe and understand God's gracious work in my life will I be equipped to help others accordingly.*
 - In the midst of previous struggles, what are some things that people have said that have been particularly helpful?
 - In light of this Lesson, how might you counsel and comfort someone who was going through a "rough time?"
 - Concerning giving comfort to someone else, how do you know when it is appropriate to give verbal counsel and encouragement and when it is best to simply listen compassionately?

Make It Real

1. Take some time to think about the HEAT in your life? Use the questions below to add detail to your thoughts.
 - What pressures do you regularly face?
 - What temptations are you facing?
 - Who are the difficult people in your life?
 - What aspects of modern culture tempt/challenge you values?
 - In what situations do you feel alone or misunderstood?
 - Do you see tendencies towards selfishness when you are around certain people or in certain circumstances?

2. Do you see any patterns in your answers to the previous questions? In other words, what part of the HEAT of real life gets to you? (Relationships, work responsibility, temptations to certain sins, finances, physical suffering?) Think through the Lesson Content and Group Discussion in light of any patterns, themes or trends.

HEAT 2: THE REAL YOU IN THE REAL WORLD

In this lesson we are dealing with brokenness of all humanity, as well as the world around us.

Discuss Make It
Real

Review

Lesson 1: God is committed to changing people from the inside-out. Understanding this, and that he changes people in the midst of their daily circumstances can bring hope into our daily life.

Lesson 2: God changes people by bringing them into a relationship with his son, Jesus. For the Christian, significant personal change takes place as they understand and relate to Jesus more deeply in the midst of daily life.

Lesson 3: God's work of personal transformation is intended to take place in the midst of a redemptive community.

Lesson 4: Practical change takes place as we begin to see life from God's perspective (HEAT, THORNS, CROSS, FRUIT.)

Lesson 5: God understands the full range of joys and sorrows that make up our lives and intends to use them to bring about personal change.

Central Point and
Application

1. *Central Point.* The Bible describes the world as a broken place and indicates that as inhabitants of this world, we will struggle daily.
2. *Personal Application.* I need to recognize the specific areas where I struggle in this world which does not operate as it was intended.
3. *Relational Application.* Understanding the world in this way means that our relationships with other people will inevitably suffer setbacks and will be the setting of significant disappointment.

The Big Question: How is God using the HEAT of this broken world to show me specific things about my life and thinking that I need to change? Where is God calling me to personal change right now?

Lesson Content

Life in the Real World

Romans 8:20-22 *For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope **21**that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the*

children of God. 22We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."

Paul captures the essence of life on earth with three vivid phrases:

1. "Subjected to frustration" (v. 20) This describes the futility we all face by virtue of living in a broken world.
2. "Bondage to decay" (v. 21) This phrase reflects the fact that everything is dying in some way, and that we are unable to reverse the process.
3. "Groaning as in the pangs of childbirth" (v. 22) Life is filled with intense struggle and pain. The picture of childbirth reminds us that this pain is part of a process; there is redemptive purpose working in the midst of the pain.

As you consider these verses, notice that Paul is saying that this frustration, decay, and pain are true of "the creation." Everything that God has made has been touched by sin and curse of mankind's rebellion.* Everything is broken and no longer functions in the way it was originally intended. We see this brokenness and tendency towards decay in nature, in our physical bodies, in relationships, in human culture, in our work, etc.

On top of all this, there is another sobering dimension: the existence of real, personal evil. **First Peter 5:8** says that Satan is "our enemy, prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." In the midst of life in this broken world, there is also a real enemy who is working to direct people away from God and prevent them from changing in the way God intends.

Lessons from the Wilderness

Numbers 11:4-23 *4 The rabble [probably non-Israelites] with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! 5 We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. 6 But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!" 7 The manna was like coriander seed and looked like resin. 8 The people went around gathering it, and then ground it in a handmill or crushed it in a mortar. They cooked it in a pot or made it into cakes. And it tasted like something made with olive oil. 9 When the dew settled on the camp at night, the manna also came down. 10 Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance to his tent. The LORD became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled. 11 He asked the LORD, "Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? 12 Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers? 13 Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, 'Give us meat to eat!' 14 I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. 15 If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now—if I have found favor in your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin." 16 The*

* Here in Romans 8, as well as in various places of Scripture (Genesis 3, Romans 5) the Bible teaches that the first act of rebellion against God threw the entire universe into disarray. The perfect peace which characterized God's initial creation was marred and distorted by this first sin and the consequent entrance into the world of pain, suffering, and the need for redemption.

LORD said to Moses: "Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you. 17 I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone. 18 "Tell the people: 'Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow, when you will eat meat. The LORD heard you when you wailed, "If only we had meat to eat! We were better off in Egypt!" Now the LORD will give you meat, and you will eat it. 19 You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten or twenty days, 20 but for a whole month—until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it—because you have rejected the LORD, who is among you, and have wailed before him, saying, "Why did we ever leave Egypt?" ' " 21 But Moses said, "Here I am among six hundred thousand men on foot, and you say, 'I will give them meat to eat for a whole month!' 22 Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them?" 23 The LORD answered Moses, "Is the LORD's arm too short? You will now see whether or not what I say will come true for you."

The Bible often describes life in this fallen world as a wilderness, where people struggle with their difficult circumstances. The wanderings of the nation of Israel after they were rescued from slavery in Egypt are a primary example. The startling thing in this passage is that the “trial” (a monotonous menu) is relatively minor. But the Bible does not just focus on the nature trial, but also calls the Israelite’s response into question. Did they receive God’s provision of food with thankfulness? Did they remember God’s recent rescue of them or take the first opportunity to grumble, second-guessing God’s leadership and care? Did they see hardship as an inevitable part of life in this world, or begin to distrust God even in a relatively minor inconvenience?

In this passage, we see the Israelites endure a specific, but relatively minor experience of what we have been calling *HEAT*. As we have already said, it seems clear that this narrative is more than mere chronology. The narrator is certainly inviting the reader to consider the Israelites’ response, and their response is illustrative of what we have been calling *THORNS*. Moses, writing in Deuteronomy chapter 8, comments on this episode, and others similar to it in Israel’s wilderness days (see also Numbers 14:1-4, and 20:1-5) when he says, “Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. **3** He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”

Not only do we inhabit a broken world and therefore inevitably experience pain, stress, difficulty, and loss (*HEAT*), but God uses these things to reveal the affections and allegiances of our heart (Dt. 8:2.) These are demonstrated by our responses to the various circumstances of life, whether *FRUIT* or *THORNS*. The Israelites as depicted in Numbers 11, responded with

THORNS: they felt sorry for themselves (v. 4), they longed for past days of slavery (v. 5), they rejected God's provision (v. 6), they were demanding to Moses and God (v. 13), they distrusted God's leadership (v. 18), and they rejected God's Lordship (v. 20) because their hearts were not fully given to their God. Frequently, we will see this type of response to difficult situations in our own lives. What we must remember that it is not the circumstances that cause our response, but that our response simply reveals the inner orientation of our heart; it reveals what we worship and are most committed to. Responses of fear, doubt, panic, rejection of God, misplaced longing for a change of circumstances, etc. are *THORNY* responses to difficult but normal circumstances of life that reveal we are longing for something other than God to provide meaning, comfort, and perspective.

The purpose of this passage and this lesson has been to provide guidance in interpreting what God is "up to" in our lives. But, before we conclude, we should see that not only is God using the events of life to reveal the inner compass of our hearts, he is also using the *THORNS* to humble us so that we will turn from self-reliance and trust the him instead. When we notice these destructive responses which further complicate life, God is drawing us to consider the availability of his redemptive work on the *CROSS*. The cross will be investigated at length in Lessons 9-10, but it is important to remember that God is using life's circumstances to not only reveal but to redeem, to help us see our need for his work of redemption offered in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Group Discussion

1. Central Point Restated: *The Bible describes the world as a broken place and indicates that as inhabitants of this world, we will struggle daily.*
 - In what ways do you see the world as broken?
 - Where do people in our culture tend to locate the cause of this brokenness? Is the presence of sin an adequate explanation?
2. Personal Application Restated: *I need to recognize the specific areas where I struggle in this world which does not operate as it was intended.*
 - What specific *HEAT* do you see in your life right now?
 - How do you normally respond to these difficult responses?
 - Though the following might not be the way in which you normally respond to *HEAT*, what might a response of anger, fear/anxiety, escapism, or distrust of God reveal?
3. Relational Application Restated: *Understanding the world in this way means that our relationships with other people will inevitably suffer setbacks and will be the setting of significant disappointment.*
 - What insights or perspective have these lessons had concerning difficult relationships?
 - How do you normally handle the *HEAT* of relationships?

- What do your responses to relational stress and conflict show you about your heart?

Personal Growth Project

This Make It Real begins a process of self-examination that will take you through the remainder of this curriculum. This will be the most personally searching and rewarding aspect of it. What you do with this assignment and those that follow will in great measure determine how much you personally benefit from this course.

Your assignment is to choose an area of struggle from your own life. From here forward, you will begin applying what you are learning from the *HEAT, THORNS, CROSS, FRUIT* model lesson by lesson. In each subsequent *Make It Real* section, you will be given a guided opportunity to take the principles of each lesson and apply it to your particular area of struggle. As you do this, the hope is that you will see measurable progress in that particular area of your life, while learning to apply this model to other areas in the future.

Here is some guidance on how to choose what to focus on.

1. You may pick a relatively minor habit (tardiness), or a major behavioral pattern of thought, speech, or emotion (a tendency to be shy and evasive around people; a tendency to be aggressive and controlling; a tendency to judge or stigmatize people).

Either choice has its benefits. Small habits are easily observed bits of life that can lead you to think about more substantial issues. For example, biting your fingernails could lead you to consider how you handle stress and tension in general. Larger, more general themes and problems bring a larger cross-section of your life into God's light right from the start. If you pick a larger issue, like strained relationships with people, you will find it more helpful to narrow the focus, for example, by focusing on one relationship in particular.

2. Some suggested focus areas:

Driving Habits: your driving reveals a lot about your personality and expectations about life.

Sports: The way you play competitive sports is a window into your fears, pride, deceptiveness, tendency to live on the basis of your performance, etc.

Money and Possessions: Are you obsessed with wealth? Fearful of poverty? Do you daydream about money? Are you selfish? Generous? Given to impulsive or compulsive buying? Covetous? Continually in debt?

Work and Rest: Do you alternate between workaholic and self-indulgent love of comfort? Are you driven and restless? Do you procrastinate and avoid responsibility? Do you pursue leisure in a way that pleases the Lord?

Grumbling: Do you tend to be negative, pessimistic, complaining, irritable, unhappy, or discontent? When do you grumble, and about what?

Secret sin: Is there an area of sin and temptation that regularly defeats you? Have you found it difficult to admit it and seek the help of others?

3. Take time to pray. Ask God to give you insight and wisdom as you choose your project. Ask God to help you choose an area that will bear significant fruit and have far-reaching implications. Ask Him to make you willing to be honest before him and others.
4. Once you have chosen your focus, write down everything you know right now about your struggle. When and where does this problem take place? How long have you struggled with it? What have you done to get control over it? What do you think Scripture says about it? How do you think it has affected you and the people around you? What do you think it reveals about you and what is important to you? In what ways right now, do you think God is calling you to change in this area?

Now, if you have time, you can think through your focus area with the *HEAT, THORNS, CROSS, FRUIT* model.

HEAT: In what situations and relationships does this struggle most often reveal itself?

THORNS: How do you respond when the *HEAT* comes? What do those responses reveal about your heart? What are the everyday consequences of responding in that way?

CROSS: What specific things does Christ offer believers in their struggle? (refer to previous lessons.) What passages in Scripture speak directly to your struggle?

FRUIT: In what ways does God want to change your heart? How will a heart change result in a new set of responses to the same *HEAT*? If those changes take place, what would the consequences be?

Don't be discouraged if you can't answer all of these questions. Your understanding will grow with each lesson. Be thankful that God has given you this opportunity to meet him and experience his grace, right in the middle of life's difficulties. Take time to pray that God will use this project to change and mature you, and position you to be used by him in the lives of others.

THORNS 1: WHAT ENTANGLES YOU?

Our *THORNY* responses to life's circumstances are a window into the orientation of our hearts. Through considering the way we typically respond to trial and positive blessings, we can see what holds the worship of our hearts and can thus identify those areas of life that God is wanting to transform.

Discuss
Homework

Review

In the last lesson, we saw the Bible's dramatic and realistic portrayal of life in a fallen world and our struggle in the midst of it. It's not a pretty picture, but this accurate and honest depiction of difficulty and struggle is given in order to provide hope. The Bible tells us that God truly understands the world that we live in and his presence and promises meet us right in the midst of daily life.

Previous lessons also introduced the metaphors of *THORNS* and *FRUIT* as representing the two general ways that people respond to life – the *HEAT*. The *THORN* bush represents the fact that we all tend to have wrong responses to the circumstances of life. We bend and twist the truth, we become angry, bitter, selfish, manipulative, judgmental, prideful, or vengeful. The *FRUIT* tree metaphor represents the way in which the Bible calls us to respond, a way possible only through the work of Christ. In the next two lessons, we will look particularly at the metaphor of *THORNS*, believing that BY identifying our own *THORNY* responses God can begin to produce the *FRUIT* of change.

Central Point and
Application

1. **Central Point:** The biblical picture of the *THORN* bush captures how we tend to respond to both the difficulties and blessings of life.
2. **Personal Application:** God calls me to an ongoing recognition and confession of my *THORNY* responses to life.
3. **Relational Application.** Because we all suffer from spiritual blindness, it is an act of mercy to lovingly help another recognize his *THORNY* responses.

***The Big Question:* How do I typically respond to the circumstances and relationships in my life? What happens as a result?**

Lesson Content

For most Christians, or even persons who are slightly familiar with the church, it is counterintuitive to think that God would ask someone to be

dissatisfied, or that he would consider it a good thing that they be discontent or restless. But actually, Christians are called to live in a state of thankful *discontentment* or joyful *dissatisfaction*. That is, they are to live every day thankful for the transforming grace that has fundamentally changed their lives; but they are not satisfied! Why? Because, when Christians look at themselves honestly, they have to admit that there is still a deep need for change and growth. They realize their goal is to be completely transformed into Christ's likeness, and that God calls them to strive endlessly but hopefully towards that goal. The ***Personal Growth Project*** that was begun in Lesson Six reflects this hopeful perspective. This life of joyful discontent should not be confused however with a life of paralyzing self-condemnation. On the contrary it is a call to diligently take hold of the hope Christ offers in the gospel.

Contrasting Lifestyles

In this Lesson's *Review* section, it was stated that one of the steps in seeing more *FRUITFUL* responses to life is to first identify the *THORNY* ones. In Ephesians 4:17-24, the Apostle Paul gives us a list that is very helpful in recognizing the destructive and harmful ways in which we typically respond to life's difficulties. He describes these responses as originating from an internal condition that is altered only by spiritual transformation, and then describes a new life founded on the work of Christ in the gospel.

Ephesians 4:17-24 *17*So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. *18*They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. *19*Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. *20*You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. *21*Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. *22*You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; *23*to be made new in the attitude of your minds; *24*and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. *25*Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. *26*'In your anger do not sin': Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, *27*and do not give the devil a foothold. *28*He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. *29*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. *30*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. *31*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. *32*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

In these verses Paul contrasts two ways of living. In the first verse he uses the term “Gentiles”, which for him was not simply an ethnic designation, but was shorthand for the way of life of those who were not followers of Christ. This first “way of life”, a life separated from God, is that which the Ephesian church has professedly left behind. Paul says effectively, “don’t live like this any longer.” Notice however, that he is NOT simply calling the church to change its behavior; he is arguing that their behavior is actually a symptom of a deeper issue. Wrong responses to life’s circumstances are rooted in wrong thinking (v.17) and wrong desires (v.19). This is where the work of Christ begins, and for anyone who wants to move from *THORNS* to *FRUIT*, we must start here as well. The list of behavior that follows then, could be seen as “indicators” that the person is still *thinking* wrongly, and *desiring* the wrong things. The catalog of wrong responses is not meant to be comprehensive but includes: indulging in every kind of impurity (v.19), lying (v.25), destructive anger (v.26), stealing (v.28), unwholesome communication (v.29), fighting, slander, and an unforgiving spirit (v.31, 32). These outward behaviors are those things in our life which seem to demand the most immediate attention, but being that they are symptoms of a deeper root problem (verses 17 and 19), will continue, even perhaps in a modified form, unless a deeper change takes place. This lesson, and in fact this whole curriculum, has been arguing two things related to this: First, that the deeper change needed is new life in Christ. And secondly, that those who do have this new heart and life in Christ, need to constantly be recalibrated and reoriented by the gospel in order to live in expression of this new reality. Paul describes this dynamic in verses 20-24; he contrasts the *THORN* bush responses that were cataloged earlier, with the *FRUIT* tree responses of a new life. These *FRUIT* tree responses are rooted in a new way of thinking (vs.20-22) and a new set of desires (vs.22-24) which are a result of a life being changed through the grace and power of Christ. These new thoughts and desires result in fundamentally new responses to the *HEAT* of life: speaking truthfully (v.25), anger without sin* (vss. 26, 27), a willingness to give to those in need (v.28), a desire to encourage others (v.29), a commitment to kindness, compassion, and forgiveness in relationships (vss. 31-32). These *FRUIT* tree responses are the behavioral evidence that God is at work reshaping thoughts and desires.

What Paul does next (Ephesians 5 and 6) is to show how the Christian’s new thoughts, desires, and attendant responses apply to typical everyday human situations: their everyday relationships (5:3-7), their interaction with the surrounding world (5:8-14), relationships with other Christians (5:15-21), marriage (5:22-33), parenting (6:2-4), and the workplace (6:5-9). The point is that when a one begins to humbly address the *THORN*

* It is often assumed that Jesus calls people to be nice. And yet, the Bible often points to his own anger over the presence of sin in the world. Thus, we must believe that anger is permissible in certain circumstances. It is proper for example to be appropriately angry towards injustice and oppression, but it is wrong to be ruled by anger towards someone who has offended or slighted us.

bush responses, the results will be manifested in the circumstances and relationships of their lives.

Making It More Personal

This lesson began with the concept of thankful discontentment. This was meant to suggest that growth happens as a person is honest and humble about the lingering presence of sin in his/her life while grasping the firm hope of the gospel (that Jesus himself is graciously transforming people). This lifestyle of joyful discontent is to look at ourselves in light of the contrast between the *THORN* bush and the *FRUIT* tree that we saw as we applied out metaphors to Paul's teaching in Ephesians 4. Here, each of us is called to self-critique so that we can see those patterns of thought, those desires, and those specific behaviors that are *THORNY*. Then, in light of Jesus' un-reluctant offer of grace and the power to change, we are to consider what our thoughts, desires and behavior could become by bearing in mind the *FRUIT* delineated in Ephesians 4. But, it should be fairly obvious, that we do not each respond to obstacles, temptation, suffering, and difficulty in the same way. This is because, as we have been saying, our responses are controlled by the thoughts and desires of our hearts, and these are different in everyone. However, we can look at some typical ways people respond to life and organize them into categories that will likely include each of us..

THORN Bush responses could include:

- **Deny, avoid, and escape** – Here we pretend that things are okay when they aren't, or we find ways to avoid confronting our problems. We may refuse to deal with a particular issue by escaping into highly-destructive behaviors such as drug or alcohol abuse, or in an attempt to simply distract our minds from the reality of our problems we will over-work, over-spend, or get “lost” into our hobbies.
- **Magnify, expand, catastrophize** – Suffering as the only lens through which we see our world and individual lives and thus we see only pain, loss, and want. We convince ourselves that we are alone in our suffering and have a very difficult time putting a “positive spin” on God and his dealings with us.
- **Become prickly and hypersensitive** – We live defensively, seeing suffering even where it doesn't exist. We become hyper-vigilant in self-protection and are always “on the look-out” for possible disrespect or mistreatment. We become known as “touchy” or overly-guarded.
- **Return evil for evil** – We meditate on both real and imagined offenses, and how sweet vengeance would be. We may not act out in a socially-unacceptable manner, but we may seethe with anger, criticize the offender to others, or take secret pleasure in their misfortune.

- **Bogged down, paralyzed, captured** – We simply withdraw from relationships, or neglect responsibilities when we experience suffering.
- **Self excusing, self-righteousness** – We fail to see our sin and brokenness clearly and thus begin blaming others for our problems and responses. We have a difficult time admitting our shortcomings and find it easy to be critical of others.

As we face our *THORN* bush responses, God never intends us to stop there. He calls us to repent, to receive his forgiveness and to rely on his power to replace *THORN* bush responses with *FRUIT* tree responses like the ones below. *FRUIT* Tree reactions could include:

- **Facing reality** – We remember that the gospel message extends us an invitation to come out of hiding and be honest with God and others, because a) if we are in Christ our sins are paid for and b) we all have serious struggles and sin present in our lives.
- **Responding with appropriate intensity** – We put things into proper perspective; even in the midst of heart-ache, a Christian can believe that their relationship with God, their identity in Christ, the truth of God's Word all remain secure.
- **Being alert** – We are aware that suffering is meant to wake us up from spiritual complacency. It is a time where God is attempting to shape us into his image, and we have the opportunity to grow deeply rooted in his love.
- **Constructive activity** – In the midst of suffering, our first response becomes one of running to God and the resources he provides instead of panicking and saying or doing things we will later regret.
- **Remembering** – In the midst of pain, we find ourselves remembering the gospel and thus placing our faith in Christ's presence and power. Then pain and suffering are viewed as the means through which Christ completes the transforming work he has begun in our heart and life.

Group Discussion

1. Central Point Restated: *The biblical picture of the THORN bush captures how we tend to respond to both the difficulties and blessings of life.*
 - Is it easier to notice other people's THORNY responses or your own? Why?
 - Which THORNY responses (or which category) are the most socially-acceptable? Which are not tolerated? (Don't limit the discussion only to the ones discussed so far.)
2. Personal Application Restated: *God calls me to an ongoing recognition and confession of my THORNY responses to life.*
 - Considering the list of THORNY responses above, is there one that you really identify with?
 - What negative consequences have you seen as a result?
 - How have you attempted to "deal with" this way of responding in the past? What about now?
3. Relational Application Restated: *Because we all suffer from spiritual blindness, it is an act of mercy to lovingly help another recognize their THORNY responses.*
 - How have you reacted in the past when someone has confronted you about your response to a situation or conflict?
 - Are you in any relationships that allow you to lovingly help them recognize their THORNY responses? How might you go about this?

Make It Real

Think about the struggle you have chosen for your **Personal Growth Project**. Use the categories from this lesson to identify where you may be responding to life in *THORN* bush ways.

1. Where do you see patterns of denial, avoidance, or escape?
2. When or where have you magnified, expanded, or catastrophized your struggle?
3. Are there situations or relationships where you are prickly and hypersensitive?
4. Are there situations where you are tempted to return evil for evil?
5. As you face this struggle, do you feel bogged down paralyzed, captured?
6. Where do you tend to be self-righteous or self-excusing?

Be humble and honest as you answer these questions, but don't allow yourself to become discouraged and overwhelmed. The point of this curriculum is that Christians using this material would come to understand and utilize the resources that are available to them in the power and promises of God. For the non-Christian, it is hoped that this exercise might lead you to consider whether you are satisfied with your life's current "state-of-affairs" and whether Jesus might have something significant to say to your present situation. For the Christian, remember that God is already working good *FRUIT* in your life, even if presently, it is difficult to see. Secondly, take heart, the one who calls you to change has already given you everything you need so that change can actually take place (2 Peter 1:3-4).

THORNS 2: WHY DO YOU GET ENTANGLED?

In this lesson we are dealing particularly with the root of *THORNY* behavior.

Discuss
Homework

Review

In Lesson 7, we looked at how *THORNS*, what we've been calling our destructive and sinful responses to the circumstances of life, are rooted in the heart. These *THORNS* come from a heart that has attached itself to something other than Christ. Therefore, real growth and change come only to people who are able to look at their outward behavior and determine what it reveals about the true orientation of their hearts. This is where the message of Christ, the gospel, is to be applied. The gospel calls each of us to identify our idols, and by God's grace, to turn from them, giving our heart's affections to Christ alone. This is *true* change!

Central Point and
Application

1. *Central Point.* *THORNS* spring from a heart that has been captured by something other than Christ.
2. *Personal Application.* If I am to grow and to shed my *THORNY* responses to life, I need a deeper awareness of the things other than Christ that I tend to worship.
3. *Relational Application.* Relationships are the catalyst for a large proportion of our *THORNY* responses because we tend to place a heavy burden on relationships to provide us with meaning, affirmation, significance, etc.

The Big Question: What has captured your heart? What cravings, desires, and beliefs rule your heart, thus producing ungodly reactions?

Lesson Content

Why are there *THORNS* at all? Why do we sin? Why do we do things we know to be destructive? Why do we seethe internally because a coworker gets a promotion ahead of us? Why does a married man or woman give in to the sexual overtures of an acquaintance even though they know the consequences will be disastrous? Why do teens become discouraged and angry when friends avoid them? Why do *you* do the things you do? This question has both a simple and complex answer.

The simple answer is that we all exhibit these sinful and harmful behaviors because we desire something more strongly than we desire to please God and avoid the negative consequences that these behaviors often produce. This is an answer that most parents know and they seek to employ this in the way they discipline their children; bad behavior leads to bad consequences. Governments, companies, and psychologists also employ this method as they seek to influence the behavior of citizens, workers and clients. The Bible also gives “proverbial” wisdom, which in a similar way encourages readers to avoid bad behavior by reminding them of the bad consequences. But the Bible, does not stop there, it is far more nuanced in how it answers the question of “*why do I do the things I do?*” The biblical answer is not only that your behavior reflects your most central desire, but also that your most central desire should not simply be “pain avoidance” but God himself! Anytime someone sins or behaves in an ungodly way, they are not only sowing painful seeds, but they are in fact serving an alternative God. When we sin, we are captivated by something other than God and until this changes, we will never be able to change our behavior in any lasting way.

Digging Deeper

How do we tend to explain or excuse our behavior? Do we blame our circumstances? Do we blame people around us? These factors should not be ignored, but the Bible says these things are only the *occasion* for the sin, not the *cause*. They simply create a venue for us to express our inner thoughts and desires in words and deeds. Instead, it is our heart that is always the *cause* of our response to our environment and it is in the heart then where the spiritual battle must be waged. As we have said before, it is obviously possible to alter our behavior to a certain degree. But, if we do not address the orientation of our heart, we will simply exchange one sinful behavior for another. We may stop yelling at a family member because their tears are too painful to us, but if we do not understand the idolatry that produced this behavior in the first place we will simply find another outlet. (And normally, we will exchange one harmful behavior for another one that doesn’t make us feel quite as guilty or have negative social implications.) This is such an important concept to grasp, as it will determine how we go about changing our behavior and who will get the credit - Christ or us. If instead, we view our problems as mostly circumstantial, our solutions will be also. See the chart on the next page:

Problem	Example Problem Assessment	Solution
Other people	"I would be nicer to them if they didn't treat me so poorly." "He started it!"	Develop new relationships, avoid problem ones
Family ties	"I get angry because I grew up in a dysfunctional family"	Find a new family of some sorts
Suffering	"I was traumatized by something, and I've never been the same. I can't help thinking and acting this way."	Seek out an endless supply of comfort
Circumstances	"I've had a hard day (finances, relationships, work, etc.) and you caught me at a low point."	Avoid people or responsibilities at certain times
Unmet "needs"	"I wasn't loved as a child, so I'm always living out of a deficit."	Find people to serve my needs
Physiology	"I blew up because I haven't been sleeping well."	Get more sleep, change diet and exercise regimen

These “solutions” may at times be appropriate, but they fall far short of helping someone change in a significant and lasting way because they only deal with external factors - *they miss the heart*. A person who simply changes circumstances, still brings their neediness and brokenness into the new set of circumstances. By not dealing with the heart, they are missing the power of the gospel; Christ is rendered unnecessary or relegated to just one part of the solution. As we have been learning, the Bible consistently points us “inward” as we seek to discover the root of our *THORNS*. The real problem area is not psychological, sociological, historical, or physiological, but spiritual; we have forgotten the person of Christ and what he says about us, and some other object has become our object of worship. Let's look at a few biblical texts that illustrate this concept.

Deuteronomy 5:6-21 - Heart Idolatry: The Sin Beneath the Sin

Though it may come as a surprise, the Ten Commandments are one of the most central teachings on the heart in the entire Bible. The first three commands (1. *You shall have no other gods before me.* 2. *You shall not make for yourself an idol.* 3. *You shall not misuse the name of the Lord.*) focus upon worship. Before God asks that we turn away from murder, adultery, lying or stealing, he commands us to worship him, to attach our hearts to him alone. God is teaching us that our worship (the faith commitments of the heart) directs our external behavior; it is the worship of him alone that is to be the fuel by which the commandments are kept. Conversely, what we have been calling *THORNS* arise because we first break commandments one through three; we worship something other than God himself.

Romans 1:25 - Good Things Morphing into Bad Things

“They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator - who is forever praised.” We may think of idolatry as worshipping and indulging in things that are obviously evil and sinful, but according to Romans 1:25 we can often make idols out of things that are intrinsically good. In doing this, we are taking the *good* things in creation and

making them *ultimate* things. The sin of idolatry is the exaltation of anything to God's rightful place in our lives. For example, it is proper and virtuous to raise obedient children, desire a spouse, save for the future, excel at work, etc. These are all good things that can easily become ultimate things that we look to for meaning and happiness. When this happens, we actually become enslaved to these things. This enslavement will result in *THORNS* of anxiety, codependency, and frequently resentment towards anything seen as preventing the acquisition of our idol. When these *THORNS* emerge, it should become clear that we are grounding our fulfillment and joy in a created thing rather than the creator.

James 4:1-3 - An Example

"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." External conflicts between people are outgrowths of the war inside each person's heart. When strong desires and expectations are not being met, people will go to great lengths to satisfy those desires. So, for example, if our heart is placing ultimate meaning and hope in security, we will become anxious and worried when we perceive a lack of ability to control our environment. If having well-behaved children is an idol, we will get irritated and upset when our children do not cooperate. If simple pleasure seeking or comfort is a driving and captivated desire, we will become antagonistic towards threats to our source of pleasure. These are examples of the implications of James' argument in these verses. When a particular object of desire eclipses our desire for God himself, the object has become an idol that steers us away from devotion to God and will lead to behavior that is contrary to expressed belief. But, in seeing that our *THORNS*, arising from the events and circumstances that God has allowed into our lives, also reveal our idols, we can understand where God wants to change us. When we notice sinful behavior we should ask God to show us what idol is being served and that he would change not just our behavior, but also our hearts so that we would worship him alone.

Group Discussion

1. Central Point restated: *THORNS spring from a heart that has been captured by something other than Christ.*
 - Why is it important to link external behavior with the heart?
 - What idol might be revealed by the following *THORNS*: anger in traffic, fear of tragedy, discouragement at work, inordinate desire for affluence, dwelling on critical thoughts towards other people, prejudice towards people different from you, not being charitable towards others' motives?
2. Personal Application restated: *If I am to grow and shed my THORNY responses to life, I need a deeper awareness of the things other than Christ that I tend to worship.*

- What do you find yourself daydreaming about? What captures your undivided attention? What gets your most intense energy and devotion?
 - Are these daydreams, wishes, desires, etc. expressions of contentment in God or of selfish ambition?
 - How do you normally respond to things or people that are viewed as impediments to these desires?
3. Relational Application restated: *Relationships are the catalyst for a large proportion of our THORNY responses because we tend to place a heavy burden on relationships to provide us with meaning, affirmation, significance, etc.*
- Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
 - What type(s) of idols are served in relationships with other people?
 - How are the gospel and a relationship with Jesus seen as a solution to the idolatry served by relationships?

1. As we have seen, one way to identify idolatry in your life is to look for what evokes in you strong emotions like anger, fear, worry, and despair. Ask yourself questions like “Is there something I want too much?” “Is there something I’m afraid of losing?” “Is there something I’m afraid of getting?” Take a recent situation when you felt any of these strong emotions and write down what you think the object of your idolatry was. Try this with several situations to see if there is a common thread(s). Also, think through questions in relation to your **Personal Growth Project**.

2. Answer the following questions and look for common themes. Try and determine if one of the questions or a theme that emerges is particularly relevant to your **Personal Growth Project**.
 - What things tend to function as replacements for God in my life?
 - What is my greatest nightmare? What do I worry about most?
 - What, if I failed or lost it, would cause me to feel that I did not even want to live?
 - What keeps me going, what is my motivation in daily life?
 - What do I rely on or comfort myself with when things go wrong or get difficult?
 - What do I think about the most? What preoccupies me?
 - What makes me feel the most self-worth? What am I proudest of?
 - In what situations do you feel pressured or tense? When do you feel confident and relaxed?
 - Whose approval do I need the most? Whose criticism hurts the most?
 - Am I able to be fully honest with people? Do I tend to hide significant parts of myself from friends, family, coworkers?
 - What annoys you most? What irritates you in other people?
 - Are you charitable towards other people and their motives?
 - What do I really want and expect out of life? What would really make me happy?
 - When do you say, “if only?”
 - In what do you place your trust or set your hopes? Where do you seek refuge? Who is the redeemer and controller of your world?

CROSS 1: NEW IDENTITY AND NEW POTENTIAL

In this lesson we are dealing with new life/identity in Christ being the beginning of freedom from idolatry. Christ not only saves from sin (justification) but transforms from the inside-out (sanctification). This reality is of course true only for Christians and they continually struggle to understand and live out this new reality and relationship. If you are participating in this study and are not yet ready to become a Christian, as said before, keep reading and contributing – you are a welcome participant. Just keep asking yourself, have all my desires to change led to any conclusion? Am I able to change in the deep places of my heart and life?

Discuss
Homework

Review

In Lesson 8 we looked more deeply at how our THORN bush responses to circumstances reveal the basic commitments of our hearts. When someone has devoted their affection, founded their meaning upon, or seeks security in created things, what we have been calling THORNY responses will emerge when the availability of these created things are threatened by people or circumstances. But, how does one grow more capable of dealing with these root issues once they are identified? In this lesson we begin to look at this question through the lenses of the considerable resources that are available to the Christian through their new life in Christ. We will see how the CROSS of Christ is a firm hope for change once we realize that the most important and persistent problems in life are inside, not outside of us. Second Corinthians 5:15 says that Jesus came so that “those who live should no longer live unto themselves, but for him who loved them and gave himself for them.” The focus of this lesson is how this promise of new life in Christ is able to deliver people from life-shaping, behavior-controlling idolatry.

Central Point and
Application

1. **Central Point:** The Christian is able to respond to daily life in new and redemptive ways because of the “indwelling” of Christ himself.*
2. **Personal Application:** Change begins by consistently asking where God is calling you to respond to the *HEAT* in your life with a CROSS-centered perspective.
3. **Relational Application:** Insofar as I see my own need for change through the *CROSS*, I can give people freedom and forgiveness even when they annoy or anger me.

* Christ is said to “indwell” a Christian by the Holy Spirit in that he takes up residence in the deepest places of their being – the heart. (2 Cor 6:16, John 14:17)

The Big Question: In what specific ways are you failing to let the CROSS shape your situations and relationships?

Like most human beings, you are probably constantly measuring your potential. In life's little moments and significant transitions, we are all prone to be overly self-conscious about how we measure up against other people and the tasks at hand. How do you measure your potential? Is it based on your past, your education, your talents, or accomplishments? Of course, certain character traits, knowledge, and past achievements do at times enhance our ability to be "successful" in life. But, the Bible would encourage us to only glance at these things as indicators of our potential in a given situation, and instead set our gaze at who Jesus is and what he says that he has done and will do for us. This is what this lesson is about.

A New Potential: In his letter to the Galatians, Paul says many foundational things about the gospel and the implications of Jesus' work in the everyday lives of those who belong to him by faith. Galatians 2:20 is perhaps one of the best-known passages in this letter and is one of its most succinct summaries of new life in Christ. There Paul says, "*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me*".

Paul is arguing that the CROSS defines the Christian's *identity* and *potential* not only in the spiritual realm, but in the midst of daily life. He says that he has been crucified with Christ and that this shapes the life he lives now in a fundamental way. Let's consider how the three main elements of Paul's statement demonstrates that the CROSS of Christ fundamentally changes people and creates potential for a radically different way of life.

1. The Redemptive Fact: "*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live.*" Paul is saying that when Christ was crucified, he (Paul) was crucified as well! This means that when Jesus died physically, Paul (and all believers) died spiritually. Paul sees himself so united to the death of Christ that he can say, "I no longer live." Because of his death in Christ, Paul is utterly different at the very core of his personhood. When a Christian grasps the fundamental nature of this change within them, they will begin to grasp their true potential. Because the guilt of sin is done away with they can begin to live with freedom and joy. Because God's law no longer stands as an accuser over them, they are free from an unbiblical fear of God that holds them hostage to worry about his opinion of them. Their "starting point" in other words is entirely different from the one who is constantly worried about proving themselves to God or others, constantly concerned about how they measure up against various standards of judgment or opinions. Thus, the Christian has a completely different potential. But, the Christian needs not only to believe this intellectually, they must act upon this new potential.

2. The Present Reality: *“but Christ lives in me”* If you are Christian, the person you were before Christ has died, and has been replaced not simply by a “new and improved” you, but with Christ himself! The very thing that stood in the way of believing and following Christ in the first place, the heart, has been replaced with a new heart which has the potential to love and pursue Christ and his mission. Because their heart is no longer dominated by sin, but by the gracious rule of Christ, the Christian begins to see new desires, attitudes, and priorities: they begin to find it possible to be compassionate towards people who have hurt them, they find it possible to give true love to persons who before seemed unlovable, they desire to be a part of Christ’s work of redemption in the church and in the world. These things are not done simply as an adoption of a new moral code, and not as an attempt to win God’s approval. Instead, the Christian begins to desire those things Christ desires because they have been re-created in Christ, re-made into his image, and because Christ is an everpresent reality in their life. In other words, they are working *out* what Christ has worked *in*.

3. The Results for Everyday Living: *“The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* If the Son of God loves you enough to lay down his life for you, the significance you once looked for in your own talents, achievements, or education, should be extraordinarily less compelling by comparison. The same would be true for the security you once looked for in money or the approval you once so diligently sought in other people. In fact, if it is believed that God himself is madly in love with you then all the former “meaning makers” will begin to lose their attractiveness. How can these idols compare to the abiding love and affection of the Creator himself that does not waver based upon your performance? Thus, the Christian life is an exercise of bringing this truth God’s love to bear upon all corners of our life. With a heart that is no longer beholden to former idols and which has been given a new power to love and cherish God in response to his love, you can begin to live in a God-ward trajectory without being flummoxed by difficult circumstances or as overwhelmed with the *HEAT* of life which used to crush you. The expression of this in our daily lives is not a once and for all matter where you will never struggle with living out this *CROSS*-centered perspective, but as you truly grasp the significance of your crucifixion with Christ and begin to apply it to daily life, you will also see suprising *FRUIT* in our lives. (The concept of *FRUIT* will be developed in more detail in Lesson 12.)

Group Discussion

1. Central Point restated: *The Christian is able to respond to daily life in new and redemptive ways because of the “indwelling” of Christ himself.*
 - As Christian grasps the new reality of Galatians 2:20, how specifically might they respond to life differently? How does this passage form the basis of true inward change and not simply behavioral change?

2. Personal Application restated: *Change begins by consistently asking where God is calling you to respond to the HEAT in your life with a CROSS-centered perspective.*
 - How would a consideration of the CROSS enable you to identify areas where God was calling you to change?
 - How does the CROSS change the way in which you attempt personal change? How is it seen to be more-effective?

3. Relational Application restated: *Insofar as I see my own need for change through the CROSS, I can give people freedom and forgiveness even when they annoy or anger me.*
 - How is this statement true?
 - How exactly does the CROSS change your perspective towards a person who annoys or angers us?
 - How are you able to see Jesus and his work for you more clearly as you work through difficult relational situations?

Make It Real

1. In the area that you chose for your **Personal Growth Project**, do you really believe that you can change? Do you deeply believe that Christ's indwelling power has broken the power of sin in this area? Try to carve out a few minutes this week to devote to praying about this question. Ask God to help you see where you might have doubted his power, why this may have been the case, and how to begin to bring his strength to bear upon it.

2. How do you normally think about your own potential, how do you measure yourself? For you personally, how is your new potential as a child of God relevant to the issue you have identified in your **Personal Growth Project**?

3. Where, specifically would a CROSS-centered perspective change your relationships? (Forgiveness, patience, grace, compassion, gentleness, making peace, speaking the truth, humble service, saying no?)

CROSS 2: THE CROSS AND DAILY LIVING

How does Jesus' sacrifice equip us to address the sins in our daily life?

Discuss
Homework

Review

In the previous Lesson, we looked at how Jesus works to change into people through his *CROSS* – the way in which the a believer becomes a new creature with a new heart through Jesus' death and resurrection on their behalf.* Theologians call this transaction, “regeneration”, denoting the fact that a person is being reborn spiritually. They receive a new heart which is able to truly love God and a will which is receptive to his commands for the very first time.

Central Point and
Application

1. *Central Point: CROSS-centered living* involves an ongoing process of repentance and faith – examining and confessing personal sin while remembering and clinging to the work of Christ.
2. *Personal Application.* Repentance and faith centered on Christ's work on the *CROSS* is a continual exercise to deal with the lingering presence of sin.
3. *Relational Application.* Because the *CROSS* shows us the depth of our own sin, we can live compassionately and patiently towards others. Because the *CROSS* illustrates the extent of Christ's mercy and love, we can also have hope that he might use us to help others change.

The Big Question: How can I learn the discipline of continual repentance and faith as a means to growth?

Lesson Content

The *CROSS*-centered Life

What do we mean by a *CROSS*-centered life? It has to do with living according to an identity rooted and built upon the work of Jesus on our behalf. Everyone conducts their lives based upon some identity that has been formed in a dynamic and somewhat reflexive way over the course of many years. Our temperament, experiences, important relationships, education, geographic location, etc., all become assimilated into an identity by which we “place” ourselves in the world and respond to the circumstances of life. In and of itself this is not sinful but a completely normal, human activity. But, the problem is that most of us are more than simply aware of our identity, we

* This event is called regeneration. It is the moment that God gives a person a new heart and will so that they turn from sin and embrace Christ. (cf: 2 Corinthians 5:14-17)

take this knowledge of how God has made us and an awareness of the various circumstances that he has used to shape us begin using this identity as a source of pride and self-righteousness. This identity begins to serve as the basis by which we compare ourselves favorably (or unfavorably) towards other people and the means by which we determine our standing before God. Understanding this we are able to see that pride and self-loathing are really symptoms of the very same root issue. When we pridfully assess ourselves favorably towards other people, whether we base this assessment on achievement, intelligence, race, spiritual performance, wealth, or any other worldly standard, we are worshipping ourselves instead of God. However, when we meet someone who excels us in these very same categories we may tend to feel insecure or anxious because again, our focus and adoration is on ourselves and something or someone is seen as a threat to our self-image.

The Bible calls this idolatry because in both our pride and insecurity we are looking to something other than God to form the basis of our self-opinion, in fact, we are actually worshipping something other than God. Jesus does not simply say, “STOP IT, THAT’S SINFUL!” Instead, his gospel invites people to define themselves in an entirely different way - as a child of God! The Book of 1 John says to Christians, *“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”* (3:1) If believed, the gospel completely recalibrates our identity. No longer do we have to establish our identity, and thus our security, own achievements or merits or performance – things whose value is constantly in flux – but, in the Gospel we are given the status as a deeply loved child of God – regardless of our achievements, merits, or performance.

Though Christians immediately receive this new status at the moment of conversion, we must daily rely upon God to enable us to establish our identity, security, and self-worth in Gospel realities rather than temporal things. Bringing this truth to bear upon how we view ourselves (and others) is in fact a life-long process that could be summarized by the activities of faith and repentance. Daily repenting of self-trust and renewing our faith in the work of Jesus on our behalf is how Christians are said to “convert more deeply” – living more fully as children of God.

Faith and Repentance is Key

1 John 2:1-2 “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world.” Faith is simply believing the gospel and repentance is admitting and turning from sin. The Apostle John says in this passage that we are all sinful, but he is not arguing that we should just admit our sin and be “okay” with this reality. In fact he says that he is writing so that his readers “*will not sin.*” Most Christians most naturally think that the way to get themselves or someone else not to sin is to heighten their perception of the law - to raise their understanding and awareness of the moral obligations found in the Bible. For example, if a person is dealing with the sin of pride,

the solution is to look up all the verses in the Bible that say that the Christian is not to be prideful and to review them over and over. But, as we have seen previously, this method does not really address the real reasons for this persons pride. At its root, pride emerges from a heart that is fixated on the self rather than God. At some level the prideful person is building their identity and meaning on something that they have achieved, or some quality about themselves that measures favorably towards other people. So, simply being reminded that God says, “don’t be prideful” will not really help, and in fact, if somehow the prideful person were to be successful in “stopping” would this accomplishment not tend to exasperbate the problem if the root issue of idolatry is not dealt with?

Instead, what needs to take place is that this person needs to repent. They need to repent not simply of the behavioral symptom but also of the fact that they are guilty of self-worship and self-adoration. If this person is a Christian, they need to see that this sinful behavior is a denial of their conversion and initial repentance by which they entered the kingdom. But, true repentance is not only admission of guilt, but replacing hope in the only person who can once and for all put and end to guilt – Jesus Christ. *“But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.”* This person does not simply need to confess the failure of living up to the Bible’s moral code, but they need to confess again (faith) that they look to Christ only as the only one who is fully righteous – the only one who can pay their debt of sin. Thus, the gospel is not, “bring a good record to God and he will reward you with salvation”, but instead, “come to God despairing of your own record, and he will give you salvation.” True repentance and faith is believing and appropriating the gospel; it is intentionally distrusting one’s one righteousness and trusting instead in the “atoning sacrifice” of Jesus as one’s only hope of salvation.

Group Discussion

1. **Central Point:** *CROSS*-centered living involves an ongoing process of repentance and faith – examining and confessing personal sin while remembering and clinging to the work of Christ.
 - How is repentance and faith a different approach to spiritual growth than what you are familiar with?
 - How are repentance and faith suggested to be a better model for encouraging personal change?
2. **Personal Application.** Repentance and faith centered on Christ’s work on the *CROSS* is a continual exercise to deal with the lingering presence of sin.
 - How does the material represent the *CROSS* as shaping and informing the process of repentance and faith?
 - What “sort” of sin does this Lesson suggest should take “center-stage” in the process of repentance and faith?

3. *Relational Application.* Because the *CROSS* shows us the depth of our own sin, we can live compassionately and patiently towards others. Because the *CROSS* illustrates the extent of Christ's mercy and love, we can also have hope that he might use us to help others change.
- How do you see repentance and faith taking place in the public worship setting? How might it change the way you interact with the various elements of worship or partake of the Lord's Supper?
 - How would deep repentance and faith change the way in which I interact with other people?

Make It Real

By now, you have worked on your **Personal Growth Project** for a number of weeks. Have you had success, or have you failed, perhaps badly? If you have had success, to what do you credit it? Are you the hero? What happens if, someday soon perhaps, things go terribly wrong? How would you deal with this?

If you've failed, what do you do? Do you blame yourself? Or do you blame someone or something else? If things are going very wrong, what does that say about you? If you are not making "progress" are you now tremendously discouraged? Does this Lesson provide any encouragement that might soften this disappointment?

At some point you may have to confront real failure in your **Project**. What will get you to beyond it? What will give you the willingness to continue with the Project?*

* [Please discuss your answers to these questions in your next group meeting and/or with another person who is currently taking this course or understands its concepts.]

FRUIT 1: REAL HEART CHANGE

In this lesson, we look more deeply at the fact that God desires that a Christian's obedience issues forth from a heart of worship and love.

Discuss
Homework

Review

Now that we have covered ten of the twelve lessons, let's take some time to look at The Big Picture by stating the central point of each lesson covered so far:

Lesson 1 God uses the daily circumstances of life to point out need for change. **Lesson 2** The Christian life is not a system of doctrine or behavior but a call to a loving, lasting relationship with Jesus.

Lesson 3 God uses relationships and communities to bring about positive changes.

Lesson 4 Practical hope, comfort, and direction result from seeing life from God's perspective.

Lesson 5 God understands the full range of joys and sorrows that make up our lives; He offers to love us in the midst of them.

Lesson 6 The Bible describes life in very realistic ways; it readily admits that the world is a broken place and that people regularly experience struggle and hardship.

Lesson 7 In order to change in a lasting way, we must identify our *THORNY* responses to life.

Lesson 8 Everyone's heart is attached to something; identifying our *THORNY* behavior enables us to uncover what these heart commitments are.

Lesson 9 Christ offers himself as an alternative heart commitment, the only one which totally fulfills our deepest longings and provides a sure basis for change.

Lesson 10 The *CROSS* is a central motif in the Bible and in the change process; in it we see new life/identity in Christ secured once and for all.

This summary reminds us that the love of God for his people completely recalibrates the reality of sin and brokenness in our world. Good *FRUIT* in our lives is indeed possible, even in difficult circumstances, because God is working change both in the world and in individual lives. Any person who relies on Christ can see God's power at work. In this lesson, we focus on good *FRUIT* with an eye toward the kind of heart that produces it.

Central Point and Application

1. *Central Point:* God's primary concern is obedience from the heart, not outward conformity to his law.
2. *Personal Application:* I need to pay deliberate attention to the issues of my heart as I seek to live in a *FRUITFUL* way.
3. *Relational Application:* When I am critiqued by others, I need to look beneath the behavior they are confronting and inspect my heart. I also need to remember that other people are more than their behavior; they have deep longings and internal brokenness that I can sympathize with even when their behavior is painful to me.

The Big Question: What type of heart produces good FRUIT?

Lesson Content

“Out of the Overflow of the Heart”

In this curriculum, we have constantly focused our attention on the “heart” as opposed to behavior. This should not communicate that God is unconcerned about our behavior, far from it, but that the avenue to true behavioral obedience runs through the heart. Most Christians are somewhat uneasy about this notion and often reject teaching that is not strictly, or at least centrally rule-based. So, doubtless there are some taking this course who would prefer that it would be much more specific about regulations, giving a comprehensive guide of what activities God requires and restricts.

But, the general posture of *How People Change* has been to talk about obedience as an issue of belief rather than simply behavior. Or, to say it another way, obedience is a more comprehensive issue than a survey of one's behavior can adequately describe. It has been assumed that a person can live in a very ethical or moral manner, that someone can look quite “holy” if you simply observe their behavior, and yet not really be any closer to biblical obedience than the person who frequently makes immoral behavioral choices. This is because we often can follow the right rules for exactly the wrong reasons; we can abstain from certain immoral behaviors for example because it makes us feel superior to other people. We can do works of mercy because we feel that God will reward us if we do them. This would mean that the moral achiever and the moral failure could possibly be in the very same place before God. The moral person could actually be using his or her morality to avoid God, to avoid owing up to his own need for salvation. So, a person can behave biblically while having a “heart” that is not fully consecrated to God, and in fact, might be pointed away from him.

The Bible often uses the word “heart” to capture who we are at our core. Our “heart” is the seat of our emotions, affections, and worship. God, does not call people into relationship with him simply so that they will change their behavior, but so that they will begin to worship him as the

Creator and King of the world - he wants them to place him on the throne of their heart. So, as we saw previously, converting to Christianity is most centrally an issue of worship. There is no question, as we have seen and will see in this Lesson, that one's behavior must change when they become a Christian, but one can change their behavior without truly worshipping God. Let's look at some scriptural passages that will bear this out.

Mark 12:28-31 *28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" 29 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 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: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."*

Note the centrality of obedience from the heart in the passage above. Jesus is quoting from the Old Testament in this passage. Interestingly, the passage he is quoting is from a section of Deuteronomy (6:5) that immediately follows a restatement of the Ten Commandments. It is as if Jesus is saying, "Don't miss this, you must follow the Ten Commandments, but you must do so as an act of love and devotion to the Lord, not as an abstraction." In other words, it is not enough simply to refrain from murdering someone (6th Commandment), you must do so because your heart is completely attached to God – you must do so because you love and worship him.

This dynamic is also seen in the book of First Samuel. In chapter 16 of this book, God has commissioned the prophet Samuel to anoint the next king of Israel. God tells him to go to Bethlehem. Upon arriving, he visits the family of Jesse and upon seeing Eliab, apparently a very impressive physical specimen, God tells Samuel to "keep looking."

1 Samuel 16:6-13 *6 When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed stands here before the LORD." 7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. **The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.**" 8 Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, "The LORD has not chosen this one either." 9 Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, "Nor has the LORD chosen this one." 10 Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, "The LORD has not chosen these." 11 So he asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" "There is still the youngest," Jesse answered, "but he is tending the sheep." Samuel said, "Send for him; we will not sit down [a] until he arrives." 12 So he sent and had him brought in. He was ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; he is the one."*

Not only does God look at the heart, he asks that when we evaluate our own faithfulness to him, that we do the very same thing. David, the king eventually anointed by Samuel, prays to God and asks that God evaluate his inward devotion. We should see in the following passage, that not only does God address our faithfulness at a “heart” rather than “behavioral” level, but that we actually need God’s help in discerning the true orientation of our heart. Sometimes our good behavior can actually prevent us from seeing the darkness of our hearts.

Psalm 139:23-24 *Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. 24 See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

The “heart” is a central theme in the New Testament as well. In the following, note the emphasis of the heart in Paul’s prayer for the Ephesian church:

Ephesians 3:14-21 *For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

When he prays for the Ephesians, he does not ask God that they “behave”, but instead focuses his intercession on who they are internally, and on those things which provide the foundation of their approach to life and view of the world. He prays: that they would be strengthened in their *inner being* (v. 16), that “Christ may dwell in their *hearts* through faith” (v. 17), that they would have power (internal) to *comprehend* the love of Christ (v. 18), that “the eyes of their *hearts* may be enlightened” (v. 18), that they would *know* this love beyond simple facts and data (v. 19), and finally that Paul’s prayers would be answered according to the power that is at work *within them* v. 21.)

When we think about our own desire to change, to produce *FRUIT* instead of *THORNS*, we must focus our primary attention upon our hearts. We should learn to ask God to show us the true orientation of our hearts and then to change us there. If we don’t, though our outward behavior might be quite orthodox and spiritual, it may not truly conform to God’s desires. The Prophet Isaiah describes this as false worship, “*These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.*” (Is. 29:13) God does desire that our behavior conform to the ethical demands of Scripture, but we can “obey in disobedience.” We can follow the Law not as an expression of worship and love of God, but because we know people are watching, because we think it

will encourage God to do what we want, because it is what our community expects of us. We will only begin to change in the holistic way that God approves when our obedience is an expression of our deepest desires. Therein lies both the problem and the hope of spiritual growth as the Bible describes it – we cannot do it! But God can! God must “enter in” and work deep heart change. He must root out sinful motivations, desires and affections, and replace these with a heart that longs for God’s glory, loves him deeply, and longs for his will to be done. When our heart begins to desire these things, our ethical behavior will be an expression of this inner delight, and thus we will see true and inevitable *FRUIT*.

Group Discussion

1. Central Point Restated: *God’s primary concern is obedience from the heart, not outward conformity to his law.*
 - How does the focus on the internal obedience differ from the general perception of Christianity? from major world religions or cults?
 - If God cares mostly about issues of the heart, does this mean that he is unconcerned about our obedience? How are these related?
 - How does Jesus claim to change people’s hearts?
2. Personal Application Restated: *I need to pay deliberate attention to the issues of my heart as I seek to live in a FRUITFUL way.*
 - How are the motives and desires of the heart demonstrated by your actions?
 - What are ways of examining one’s own heart that this curriculum has highlighted?
 - How would you define “obedience” as described in this Lesson?
3. Relational Application Restated: *When I am critiqued by others, I need to look beneath the behavior they are confronting and inspect my heart. I also need to remember that other people are more than their behavior; they have deep longings and internal brokenness that I can sympathize with even when their behavior is painful to me.*
 - Do I seek to truly understand other people, dealing with them as complex human beings rather than seeing them simply through the lens of their behavior?
 - Are there ways I can help others seek to examine the thoughts and desires of their hearts?

This week's **Make It Real** centers on a **Philippians Bible Study** assignment. It is designed to help you think practically about the pressures of life and how your heart responds to these pressures.

In light of the passages studied in this lesson, we look now at a person who diligently sought to embody these truths – the apostle Paul. The Bible does not claim that Paul did this perfectly, by no means! Paul actually referred to himself as the “Chief of Sinners!” (1 Tim 1:15) But, we can see from his writings that becoming a follower of God who gave his entire life and heart to Jesus was Paul's ultimate aim.

As you now look at Paul, it is important to remember the circumstances in which he wrote. **Acts 16** tells us that Paul and Silas planted a church in the city of Philippi. While there, they were thrown in prison for healing a slave girl. Paul later wrote back to the Philippians while was in a Roman prison for his faith. (He spent lots of time in prison!) He wrote to encourage the Christians in Philippi to have joy even in the midst of their difficult circumstances. In light of this, remember that we have been stressing that good *FRUIT* is not just a remote possibility for the believer, but something the Bible assumes can be present in our lives even in the most difficult circumstances.

- I. Try to carve out some time this week to read the entire Letter to the Philippians (ask your leader for a Bible if you do not have one.) For most people, it should be possible to read this short book in one sitting so it would be best to read it straight through once and then read it again at some point during the week with the following questions in mind.
 1. **What is Paul's situation?** (*HEAT*) What are his burdens, pressures, hardships, pains and temptations, both actual and potential?

 2. **What responses might you expect to see in people who are in difficult circumstances?** (*THORNS*) Think about how you and others typically react to the kinds of pressures Paul was under. What would be your thoughts, words, attitudes, emotions, and actions? Think also about how people typically react when things are going well. What temptations do blessings present?

3. **What cravings and beliefs tend to rule the human heart, producing ungodly reactions?** (*THORNS*) What false hopes, goals, or idols can rule our hearts in similar situations? What do verses like Philippians 1:17, 28, 2:3, 2:21, 3:3-7, 3:19, 4:6, 4:12, Acts 16:16, 16:19, 16:27 say about what these false masters?

4. **What consequences follow sinful reactions?** (*THORNS*) What vicious cycles threaten the Philippians? That is, how would bad reactions compound hardship, create new problems or spoil blessings? What do you reap when you react sinfully?

5. **What changes lives, inside and out? What rules the heart and produces godly lives?** (*CROSS*) What specifically does God reveal about himself in Philippians? What stands out? What captures Paul's attention when he looks at Christ? What rules Paul? How is Paul's life determined by faith? What is Paul's "secret" of contentment, peace, thankfulness, joy? How does his faith in the Jesus the Redeemer make the whole world look different?

6. **What specific fruit do you observe?** (*FRUIT*) How does Paul respond and what does he call all believers to do? How does Paul respond to negative and positive circumstances? What are concrete ways you are called to obey God in this book?

7. **What good effects result from the way Paul handled his situation?** (*FRUIT*) That is, what positive, gracious outcomes does his faithful obedience create? How do these influence others around him? What positive consequences do you see or envision in your life? What challenges still remains?

II. In light of the answers, take an area of struggle you have chosen for your **Person Growth Project** and ask yourself “What are the things that rule my heart and therefore shape my behavior?”

1. How would your struggle change if you really embraced the promise of a new heart?
2. How would believing, trusting, and embracing Christ as Paul seemed to in this book change your actions, reactions, and responses?
3. What new thoughts and desires in your heart would issue forth in *FRUIT* rather than *THORNS*?
4. If hope, love, contentment, grace, forgiveness, self-control, peace, kindness, gentleness, patience, compassion, humility, and forbearance ruled your heart in this area of struggle, what new *FRUIT* can you envision?

FRUIT 2: THE INEVITABILITY OF REAL CHANGE

The Holy Spirit is constantly at work in Christians' lives to conform their core motives, thoughts, and values to those of Christ. This transformation inevitably results in positive changes in their external behavior - what we have been calling *FRUIT*.

Discuss
Homework

Review

In Lesson Ten, we said that when someone becomes a Christian; they are given a new heart and a new nature and accordingly their desires, affections, and worship is forever altered. *FRUIT* then, is the behavioral result of this interior change. Bearing *FRUIT* is a cooperative effort between the Christian and God; it is essentially working out what God has already worked in. The Christian is a new creation who is seeking to allow the transformative work of God to fully run its course in their outward life. So, there is a certain inevitability of change for the Christian who simply cooperates with what the Holy Spirit is doing in their life.

Central Point and
Application

1. *Central Point:* If I have become a follower of Christ through repentance and faith, the Holy Spirit is working in my life *presently*; he is already bearing *FRUIT* in the midst of the *HEAT* of life's circumstances.
2. *Personal Application:* God is calling me to a life *FRUITFULNESS* but I cannot bear *FRUIT* on my own. I must rely upon the power and personal work of God himself through his Spirit.
3. *Relational Application:* The Holy Spirit not only wants to bear *FRUIT* in my life, but to use me in the lives of others. He wants to use me to point them to the *CROSS* so that they too can find hope in the *HEAT* and see *THORNS* being transformed into *FRUIT*.

The Big Question: Is there one place in your life where you long to see FRUIT? Are you ready to ask God to truly change you and then trust in and rely on him to do it?

Lesson Content

On the Run, But At Rest: Producing FRUIT in the midst of the HEAT
King David was the second king of the nation of Israel. He was a powerful and respected ruler who had solidified the borders of Israel through many

impressive military victories. Though his position and anointing by God demanded the allegiance of all in his kingdom, his own son Absalom rebelled against him and even began to plot to assassinate him (2 Samuel 14-18). At one point David is forced to flee from Jerusalem and the King is driven to hiding in a cave in a remote wilderness area with a small band of followers – in fear of his own son! **Psalm 4** was written by David to express his spiritual condition at this time.

- 1 Answer me when I call to you,
O my righteous God.
Give me relief from my distress;
be merciful to me and hear my prayer.*
- 2 How long, O men, will you turn my glory into shame?
How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?
Selah*
- 3 Know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself;
the LORD will hear when I call to him.*
- 4 In your anger do not sin;
when you are on your beds,
search your hearts and be silent.
Selah*
- 5 Offer right sacrifices
and trust in the LORD.*
- 6 Many are asking, "Who can show us any good?"
Let the light of your face shine upon us, O LORD.*
- 7 You have filled my heart with greater joy
than when their grain and new wine abound.*
- 8 I will lie down and sleep in peace,
for you alone, O LORD,
make me dwell in safety.**

Although David certainly had times where he did not respond to his circumstances with faith and hope, we can see how in this situation God's Spirit brings David to the following positive response to the *HEAT* in his life:

1. He turns toward God, placing himself in God's hands (vv. 1, 2) rather than running away, which is a common inclination.
2. He remembers that he is God's child (v. 3); "the Lord will hear when I call to Him."
3. He honestly examines his own motives (v. 4).
4. He worships God, i.e. puts God at the center of things (v. 5).
5. He considers the needs of others, despite his own spiritual turmoil (v. 6)
6. He rests in the knowledge that God will take care of him (v. 7,8).

* What "selah" means is debated. Most argue that it is either a liturgical or musical term which signifies an appropriate place for a pause. Or, it could bear similar meaning to "amen", which is a concluding request that summarizes a preceding portion of prayer.

Streams in the Desert

We chose to look at Psalm 4 because we can get an accurate indication of whether or not we are truly changing in a positive way as we take notice of how we respond to the trauma of life. In the Psalm above, David was experiencing trauma. He was in the desert, literally, and he was under the constant threat of losing his kingdom and even being killed by his own son. Yet, he was somehow able to worship God and turn to him for comfort and perspective. David was a follower of God, who experienced “*streams of living water*” flowing within him. The normal human response to a situation like that which David faced would be despair and hopelessness, and perhaps a deep sense of being abandoned by God. But, instead of doubting God’s nearness and love for him, David invites God into his predicament, takes solace in the “greater joy” of knowing God, and then rests in the Lord’s care.

But, despite the fact that we have been extolling the virtues of David’s reaction of worship, he is not the hero in this Psalm! Jesus teaches us in The Gospel of John 7:38, “*Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.*” Because David was a believer*, he had streams of living water flowing in his heart. God, not David is the hero of the Psalm because it was God who regenerated David’s heart, who enabled him by the Holy Spirit to respond to this intense *HEAT* with *FRUIT*. If you are a Christian, what is true of David is true of you as well. You have been given a new heart, a new will, a new life! You yourself are a *FRUIT* tree! Streams of living water are now flowing over the once course and dry ground of your heart and you are able to respond to life’s *HEAT* in the same way that David did in Psalm 4. One of the primary battles of change is truly believing that this is the reality for you and then asking God to be the hero in your work of personal transformation.

Building on what we observed in David’s response to life, what might this look like? How do we realize and measure whether or not we are changing? In one sense, this entire curriculum has been an one long answer to these questions, but often people have very specific ideas of what type of change they want, but the change they envision is not the type of change the Bible calls them to. We need to be very careful to have biblical, Christ-centered goals, or we will grow frustrated, or will pray for change that will further concretize our idolatry. For example, we may pray that we would be more confident and secure around other people. But, though this prayer has a trace of godliness, we may be praying this because we idolize other people’s opinions. God does not want to answer prayer that feeds our worship of things besides him. He would rather have us pray that he alone would become the center of our affections so that the opinions of others actually matter less. The point is that we can often seek to change in ways that leads us further away from Christ, all the while thinking that we are honoring him

* David was a “believer” in the same sense that Christians are believers – he believed God’s promises and trusted in him alone for salvation. The primary difference is that he (and other Old Testament believers) looked “forward” to the promised Redeemer while Christians look “back” to the Redeemer who has already come.

with our efforts. We should ask God not only to empower our efforts at change, but to also show us how to desire change in the right areas.

New And Surprising Fruit

So, if God is changing us, what will it look like? What *FRUIT* should we see? This list is not meant to be comprehensive, but rather thematic. It should not be thought of as a summary of everything that the Bible says should be present in a maturing believer's life, but simply a compilation of sign-posts that may help you notice that God really is working in your life.

1. You are able to exhibit personal integrity. This does not mean that you have no character deficiencies or lingering evidence of sin; it simply means that you can look at yourself truthfully and honestly. The Gospel tells you that you are more sinful than you can possibly imagine, but that in Christ, you are more deeply loved than you could ever dream. The first part allows you to confess your sin fully and truthfully to God and to others. The second part means that God will not reject you under any circumstances, he loves and adores his people even when their brokenness and sinfulness is profound!
2. You see your relationships being increasingly shaped by grace. (Mt. 18:21-35) Because God has fully forgiven you of a debt you could never pay, you can forgive others even when their actions have hurt you deeply and have created a huge debt. You can choose to pay the debt for them by absolving them in forgiveness. And not only can you forgive actual debts, you can begin to "forgive" those who are simply annoying or whose personality seems to naturally conflict with yours. These people don't need forgiveness, they need patience and love, two things which are yours in infinite measure in the love of Christ. You give grace to others because you remember the grace that is yours in Christ.
3. The way that God relates to you will begin to inform the way in which you relate to others. Because God sought peace with you, you will begin to seek personal and institutional peace. (James 3:13-18) Because God is always truthful with you, you will be more truthful with him, with yourself, and with others. (Ephesians 4:25) Because God loves and serves you, you will in turn seek to serve others. (Galatians 5:12-14) Understanding God's continuing mercy to you, you will begin to consider how you can be an instrument of mercy to others, particularly those in the Church. (Romans 12, Galatians 6:10) Because God says you are a dearly loved child of God, you will be able to form a stable and rooted self-image on his view of you rather than upon the inconsistent and fickle opinions of others. (Romans 8:15-17)
4. You will see the fruit of the Spirit replacing the acts of the sinful nature. (Galatians 5:16-26) As we have said, a change in your outward behavior is not necessarily indicative of inner change, but you can't have inner spiritual change without also seeing evidence in your behavior. But, this behavioral change is not work we offer to God to

earn his approval, it is work in response to his approval that is done in his strength.

5. You will begin to grow in faith, hope and love. (1 Corinthians 13:13)
These three virtues were the central and summary spiritual gifts that Paul recommended the Corinthian Church to seek. In broad strokes, they can be described in the following ways: Faith is the means by which believers receive the gospel and are connected with Christ, both at their initial salvation and in an ongoing way. Hope is the anticipatory looking ahead to things that are promised in Scripture but yet to come; it is an ordering of one's life on the assuredness of the return of Jesus and of the resurrection of all believers. Love is joyful surrender to God and a commitment to serve him with the whole personality. Directed toward others, it is a willingness to put their interests above your own, it is anointing them with the favor, mercy, and charity of Jesus. This passage suggests that Paul considers the presence of these spiritual gifts to be indicative of a state of general spiritual health and progress. Though these virtues will not be practiced with perfection, any believer who is submitted to God's work of transformation, will see them in increasing measure over the course of their lives.

What if I fail?

Keep the Psalm 4 pattern in view. Producing FRUIT is not about what you do to meet God's requirements; it's about turning to God to let His Spirit work within you. Remember to preach the gospel to yourself regularly. Remind yourself that if you are in Christ, God has put an end to your sin once and for all. You are positionally-righteous before God – the one person whose opinion really matters! Instead of despairing over the change that has yet to come, ask God to bring the following truths to bear upon your inward and outward life: you are a dearly-loved child of God, you are righteous and holy, you are delightful to God and he will never turn you away, God is not angry with you, you can approach the throne of God with confidence and peace, you will one day be resurrected and glorified by God and to live with him on the New Earth forever and ever.

Group Discussion

1. Central Point Restated: *If I have become a follower of Christ through repentance and faith, the Holy Spirit is working in my life presently; he is already bearing FRUIT in the midst of the HEAT of life's circumstances.*
 - Why is it important to believe that the Holy Spirit is bearing FRUIT presently?
 - Does this FRUIT sometimes go unnoticed? Explain.
2. Personal Application Restated: *God is calling me to a life FRUITFULNESS but I cannot bear FRUIT on my own. I must rely upon the power and personal work of God himself through his Spirit.*
 - What unexpected FRUIT have you seen in your life that can only be attributed to the work of God's Spirit?
 - How does this lesson define and describe FRUIT in a way that is different from what you normally (or most naturally) think?
3. Relational Application Restated: *The Holy Spirit not only wants to bear FRUIT in my life, but to use me in the lives of others. He wants to use me to point them to the CROSS so that they too can find hope in the HEAT and see THORNS being transformed into FRUIT.*
 - How can I help someone who is struggling with behavior patterns that they want to change?
 - How does the "help" of these lessons differ from the help offered by secular counseling? How is it different from the help offered in most religious counseling?

Make It Real

Take a final look at yourself in light of what you have learned through this course and your **Personal Growth Project**. Responding to the list below may take a while; it's okay to spread this assignment out over a number of days or even weeks. However long it takes, make a point of discussing your list with a friend who has been through this study and/or with a Pastor. This will help you to remember that though the **Growth Project** has been personal, it's not meant to be individualistic. You are a part of a larger community and if you are to grow and change as the Bible calls you to, you will need this community and the leaders over you. Also, think through this list as you participate in public worship. What resources has God given you in the public meeting(s) of the church?

- New things you have learned about life in a fallen world (*HEAT*).

