

CHANGED
into
HIS
IMAGE

God's Plan for Transforming Your Life

JIM BERG


P U B L I S H I N G
P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

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Second edition © 2018 BJU Press

Third edition 2023 from P&R Publishing

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Cover design by Jelena Mirkovic

ISBN: 978-1-62995-978-8 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-62995-979-5 (ePub)

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for.

To Kirsten, Angie, and Michelle, my beloved daughters,
in whom I am well pleased

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PREFACE

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

Dear Kirsten, Angie, and Michelle,

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

The Mission of Our Family

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

and for our children
in the generations to come.

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

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

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

Love, Dad

The two years I devoted to writing this book were two of the most spiritually refreshing of my entire life. Writing this book forced me to clear away the chaff in my thinking about the Christian life and drove me to consider only the fundamental issues of life with God. As I culled through sermon notes of messages I preached or classroom lectures I delivered, I was compelled to continually ask myself, “Do I consider the material I am examining essential for my daughters’ pursuit of God and godliness, or is it merely peripheral? Is this idea or that thought indispensable for their walk in the Spirit, or is it only incidental? And most important, will it stir within them a thirst for God, a hunger for his Word, and a desire to represent him well as salt in the earth?”

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

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

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

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I WOULD BE remiss if I did not give “honor to whom honor is owed” (Rom. 13:7). This has not been a solo project. I am indebted to Gail Yost and Dr. Guenter Salter who read my first, very rough draft and who provided needed insight in the beginning stages of the project. I owe special thanks as well to those who read the final manuscript and offered valuable critiques: Dr. Michael Barrett, Dr. Steve Hankins, Dr. Randy Leedy, Dr. Greg Mazak, and Ted Harris, MD. Many other friends in the pastorate—too numerous to mention—have read the manuscript in its various stages and have offered valuable suggestions and enthusiastic encouragement.

Rebecca Moore, who edited the initial manuscript so that it could be field-tested in small-group studies and individual counseling situations, and Elizabeth Berg, my sister-in-law and member of the editorial staff at BJU Press, worked grammatical miracles on the various drafts of the book. Nancy Lohr provided skillful assistance as well. They have my deepest admiration and sincerest thanks for their craftsmanship and heart for this project.

Many thanks go to the seminary faculty of Bob Jones University, who were used of God to instill within me an unshakable confidence in God’s Word. My professors provoked me to love God for myself as I observed their passion for him when they stood before me in the classroom. Although that was decades ago, the fire the Holy Spirit kindled in my heart through their example and instruction still remains, and I “esteem them very highly in love because of their work” (1 Thess. 5:13).

I have been humbled that God has chosen to bless this book with translations into multiple foreign languages and with over one hundred thousand English copies in print. I pray that he would be pleased to continue to use this book to encourage others of his children to grow in likeness to his Son, Jesus.

Finally, I am deeply grateful to and for my wife, Patty. I have watched her pursue God for the past fifty-plus years of our marriage. Her daughters have followed her example and have made the truths of this book their own and are passing on to their children the same spiritual fervor and instruction that they received from their mother. Patty's love for her Savior, her confidence in her God, and her thirst for his Word have been a constant delight to behold. She has contributed her life to this book. Her daughters "rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her" (Prov. 31:28).

1

UNDERSTANDING BIBLICAL CHANGE AND DISCIPLESHIP

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:2)

HAVE YOU EVER set out to help someone, not really knowing what you were doing or how you were going to do it? Have you ever tried to tackle some gnawing problem in your own life but didn't have a clue about how to get started? Christopher Columbus experienced this problem when he set out to find a westward passage to Asia.

Because the explorer had little idea about what he was doing, someone proposed that the Christopher Columbus Award be given to those who emulate him: "This award goes to those who, like good old Chris, when they set out to do something, don't know where they are going; neither do they know how to get there. When they arrive, they don't know where they are, and when they return, they don't know where they've been."

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

This book is about sanctification. *Sanctification* is the word used to describe the Bible's teaching about how we are made holy ("sanctified"). The Bible teaches that people become Christians by accepting

Jesus Christ as their personal substitute for the penalty of sin. Once they become children of God, God begins a process in them that changes them to become more like Christ in their attitudes, ambitions, and actions. God uses many things to accomplish this change, including temptations and trials, the local church and Christian friends, his Word and his Spirit.

Sanctification, in the sense we are discussing in this book, is progressive. A person's likeness to Christ is not something that happens all at once. It is a process of change that the Bible calls growth. As we look at various aspects of the Christian life in this book, remember that whenever you see the phrases change and grow, becoming like Christ, or biblical change, we are talking about the Bible doctrine of progressive sanctification.

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

Not Just Any Change Will Do

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

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

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

The real problem in the scenarios above is not that these people lack a car, have an alcoholic husband, lack a boyfriend, or have a foreman with poor judgment. The real problem goes much deeper. Dr. Bob Wood, a colleague of mine who is now with the Lord, used to remind us of an important Bible principle we need to understand about change. He would often say, “Our greatest problems are never *around us*; *they are in us*.”

Jesus said it this way in Mark 7:21–23:

For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride [arrogance], foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.

The apostle James tells us the same thing in James 4:1: “What causes quarrels and what causes fights [the outward, visible problems] among you? Is it not this, that your passions [the inward desires of the heart] are at war within you?”

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

We can illustrate this biblical truth this way. When we take a tea bag, place it in a teacup, and fill the cup with hot water, the water activates the tea in the bag, unleashing its taste into the water around it. The hot water didn’t create the taste; it merely drew out what was already in the bag.¹

This depicts what happens in the human heart. The pressures around us (the unfavorable circumstances, the temptations, and the

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

commands of God to love him and our neighbor) merely draw out of our hearts what is already in them. We cannot blame the hot water for the taste in the cup. The contents of the tea bag determine the flavor of the tea. If we don't like that particular taste, we need to seep a bag that contains a different kind of tea. Similarly, we cannot shift the blame for any bitterness, anger, despair, deception, cruelty, or other emotional response that we display when we are under pressure. The pressures merely expose how unlike Christ we really are.

Acts 16:22–24 tells us of a hot-water experience Silas and the apostle Paul had while in Philippi. Because of their preaching,

the crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off [Paul and Silas] and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

The hot water of suffering revealed the nature of the hearts of these two men. We see their response in the next verse: “About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them” (16:25). Although other believers might react to such mistreatment with bitterness and anger or with despair and discouragement, Paul and Silas responded with praise and thanksgiving. Why the difference? Their hearts had been changed to be like the heart of Christ, who responded in a similar fashion to his suffering (see 1 Peter 2:21–23).

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

The Goal of Change

While living on this earth, Jesus Christ exemplified the characteristics of a man controlled by the Holy Spirit and abiding in perfect fellowship with God. As the result of the sanctification process, believers look increasingly like him—they become “grown-up Christians” as they are

brought “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). When the nature of God is reflected fully through a human nature, as it was in Christ, the blend produces a person who is the Father’s humble servant. Spiritually mature humanity is in essence Christlike humility, which is the humility of a servant.

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

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

A life of self-sacrificing unselfishness is the most divinely beautiful life that man can lead. He whom as our Master we have engaged to obey, whom as our example we are pledged to imitate, is presented to us here as the great model of self-sacrificing unselfishness. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus,” is the apostle’s pleading. We need to note carefully, however, that it is not self-depreciation, but self-abnegation, that is thus commended to us. If we would follow Christ, we must, every one of us, not in pride but in humility, yet not in lowness but in lowliness, not degrade ourselves but forget ourselves, and seek every man not his own things but those of others.²

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

2. B. B. Warfield, “Imitating the Incarnation,” in *The Person and Work of Christ*, ed. John J. Hughes (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2023), 610–11.

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

Let me illustrate that power.

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

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

As believers, we can no more please and serve God effectively in our own strength than my grandfather could pull a plow in his own strength. The bulldozer enabled him to carry out his work in the field. In the same fashion, the Holy Spirit is the divine power behind everything believers do that counts for God. We need, therefore, to understand as much as we can about the Holy Spirit because of the crucial role he plays in biblical change.

The Person of Change

The Holy Spirit is not some mystical, impersonal influence or force. He is one of the three persons of the Godhead—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. He is the agent who shows us our

need of Christ and imparts Christ's life to us at salvation. He then begins the work of changing our lives to become like Christ's through sanctification, and he empowers us for service to Christ.

We are changed by him as we cooperate with his leading. Paul testified that the Holy Spirit's leadership in believers' lives is one of the chief evidences of their salvation: "All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (Rom. 8:14).

The apostle is not teaching in Romans 8:14 that we should expect the Spirit of God to give us mystical leadings and nudgings and thereby direct our lives. Rather he writes in the context of Romans 6–8, which speaks of the sanctification that God is working out in our lives—a process initiated and orchestrated by the Spirit of God. He is the divine leader whose convicting voice calls our attention to the times when we are intent on going our own way. He leads us into an understanding of the Scriptures and leads us into "paths of righteousness" (Ps. 23:3) by which we reflect Christ's life. Those who experience this kind of leadership—away from sin and toward Christ's likeness—"are sons of God" (Rom. 8:14).

The leadership of the Spirit toward Christlikeness takes place as we obey Paul's admonition in Ephesians 5:18 to "be filled with [controlled by] the Spirit." Note three things about the Greek verb for *filled* that Paul uses in this passage.

- *It is in the imperative.* That means it is a command. God must command us to yield to the Holy Spirit's control because we are not automatically so inclined. We naturally wish to control ourselves.
- *It is in the present tense.* That means it is something that should be continually happening in the here and now. Being filled with the Spirit should be an ongoing action; we should keep on being filled with (controlled by) the Spirit.
- *It is in the passive voice.* This means that the empowering is done to us. We do not do it to ourselves. The Holy Spirit is the one who empowers us when we choose to cooperate with him.

The filling of the Spirit refers to the supernatural work of the Spirit within a believer whereby that believer is enabled or empowered to become *like Christ* (sanctification) and become useful *to Christ*

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

Let's look for a few minutes at how he works in the process of change—sanctification.

The Process of Change

I heard it said years ago that sanctification is the “Christianizing of the Christian.” Preachers through the years have described it as the process by which the Spirit of God takes the Word of God and changes us to become like the Son of God.

The Bible teaches that believers have three main spiritual responsibilities in the sanctification process. God, the Holy Spirit, is the primary initiator in all these activities, but believers must cooperate with what the Holy Spirit is doing in their lives. Those three responsibilities are listed in the first column of the following chart. Take a minute to look

Our Personal Responsibility	Paul's Instruction (Eph. 4:22–24)	James's Instructions (James 1:21–25)	The Holy Spirit's Result
1. Mortification of the flesh	“put off [the ways of] your old [unregenerate] self” (v. 22)	“put away all filthiness” (v. 21)	The flesh is restrained through the Spirit's enablement.
2. Meditation on the Word	“be renewed in the spirit of your minds” (v. 23)	“receive . . . the implanted word” (v. 21)	The mind is renewed through the Spirit's illumination.
3. Manifestation of Christlikeness	“put on [the ways of] the new self [in Christ]” (v. 24)	“be doers of the word, and not hearers only” (v. 22)	Christ is revealed through the Spirit's fruit.

over them and notice the passages written by Paul and James that refer to each activity. Notice also in the last column that the Holy Spirit, when he enables believers in those activities, produces a certain kind of fruit: their flesh is restrained, their minds are renewed, and Christ is revealed through their example and ministry to others.

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

For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (Rom. 8:13)

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)

In each case, we are commanded to do something: “put to death the deeds of the body” and “live [in our bodies] by faith in the Son of God.” At the same time, God says he is doing something: the Spirit allows us to put the deeds of the body to death, and Christ lives in us.

This book is divided into three parts that correspond to the three personal responsibilities illustrated in the chart above. Understanding and practicing these three personal responsibilities are not incidental in the sanctification process. They are necessary. Every failure in Christian living is due to a failure to cooperate with God in these responsibilities by the power of the Spirit.

So essential are these truths to the biblical process of change and growth that they are the touchstone for evaluating any theory or advice offered today in the fields of Christian education, parenting, biblical counseling, and pastoral ministry. Truly biblical counsel emphasizes to believers, not merely mentions in passing, that to change they must “put off [the ways of] the old [unregenerate] self,” “be renewed in the spirit of [their] minds,” and “put on [the ways of] the new self [in Christ].”

For this reason, these three components of sanctification form the structure of this book on change. We will look at each one in great depth

and will especially note the Holy Spirit's role in the sanctification process as believers yield themselves to the Spirit's control. This is God's plan! Therefore, it is our only answer and our wonderful hope. It is the continued work of the gospel in us.

Spiritual Parenting

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

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

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

The Centrality of Discipleship

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

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

Parenting Is Discipleship

Parenting, when understood biblically, is basically a discipling relationship. When God gives children to Christian couples, they must realize that their little bundles of joy are essentially lost souls. Their biblical mission is to evangelize them and then to equip them for usefulness to Christ. This mission is, in essence, discipleship. This is what Paul teaches in Ephesians 6:4 when he tells fathers to “bring [their children] up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

Sadly, the goal of many Christian parents is merely “to raise a good kid.” Through moral training and consistent discipline, they might even rear children of whom they are proud. These children may never cause them any real heartache but still not be useful to Christ due to materialism, impatience, impulsiveness, anxiety, stubbornness, or any other fleshly attitudes and actions. In that case, the biblical parenting goal has not been reached, even though these children never got into serious trouble or seriously embarrassed their parents. The biblical goal was not reached because their parenting efforts did not produce disciples of Jesus Christ—people like the Master and therefore useful to the Master.³

Parents who do not understand the role that discipleship and sanctification play in Christian parenting often find themselves off course when their children reach the teen years. In the early years, these parents chart the wrong courses on the sea of early child-rearing and, consequently,

3. This is not to say that every failure of a child to follow God's way is entirely the fault of the parents. God himself said, “Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me” (Isa. 1:2). He certainly didn't make any mistakes in his parenting goals or methods. Every child has the inclination to turn “every one—to his own way” (Isa. 53:6). God does, however, place a heavy responsibility on parents to exemplify godliness and to saturate their child-rearing environment with the ways and the words of the living God lest their children forget the Lord (see Deut. 6:5–13).

encounter unnecessary dangers in the teen years. Tragically, they may never reach their anticipated port.

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

Edification in the Local Church Is Discipleship

The mission of the church is laid out in Ephesians 4:12–16. It is to be a place where God-called and Spirit-gifted leaders help the saints to mature “for the work of ministry” (v. 12) as they grow “to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (v. 13). This is clearly a call to disciple the flock.

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

Of course, his ministry to the flock becomes a pacesetter for every other ministry of the local assembly. Those leading Sunday school classes, special ministries to children and youth, vacation Bible school, and various outreach ministries must also have a passion not only to bring in sheep but also to help them grow. Christ called his disciples to bring forth fruit that would reproduce itself and would abide (see John 15:1–16). Without a passion to disciple believers to Christlikeness through the ministries of the church, the church will focus merely on perpetuating its programs, and the sheep will grow sickly and unfruitful. The edification ministry of the local church is therefore a discipling effort—helping believers to make biblical change toward Christlikeness.

Christian Education Is Discipleship

Christian education, an extension of the Christian home and the church, is also essentially discipleship. The following statements about Christian education point this out.⁴

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

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

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

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

For example, student misbehavior and disinterest at school are not just interruptions in the educational process—they are revelations of the students' heart condition. Spiritual processes of Christian change and growth have been stymied in the students' lives and must be addressed biblically. Christian teachers must remember that while the goal of most

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

businesses is to *please* customers, making them consumers, the goal of Christian education is to *change* customers, making them contributors, servants. Discipleship must be the driving concern. For that reason, every Christian teacher must understand the principles of biblical change.

Biblical Counseling Is Discipleship

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

Counselees may come to such counselors for relief from despair, anxiety, anger, guilt, or fear. They may want help in getting their spouses back or may desire direction in restoring wayward teens. They may be struggling with the effects of sexual abuse or the life-dominating clutches of drugs, alcohol, or homosexuality. They may be grieving after miscarriages or the discovery of malignant tumors. In each case, change and growth toward Christlikeness are the needs of the hour. When the counselor's mindset is not truly biblical, the counseling process will not intentionally move toward biblical goals.

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

In the process, the counselee may find some temporary relief from whatever was troubling her most. She may even learn some spiritual truths she had not known before. But unless the path of sanctification is clearly charted for her, she will spend months, and perhaps years, steering from one navigational heading to another looking for lasting help. What she needs is a counselor who understands that God's "recovery program" is sanctification. She can become godly and useful to Christ as an adult, no matter what her past, if the counselor helps her to learn and practice the basics of biblical change. To attempt to produce love,

joy, peace, endurance, and contentment apart from the Spirit of God is to rely on strategies that compete with God.

Management in Christian Work Is Discipleship

Paul had an enormous management responsibility on his shoulders—the daily “care of all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:28 KJV). How did he do it? A look at Ephesians 4:11–13 shows that he expected the “saints” to do the “work of ministry” (v. 12) as they were brought to maturity by the leadership of the church. Christian leaders today must have the same focus. The work must be done, but the whole job isn’t done unless the saints are developed in the process.

Some Christian organizations tolerate the anger, disobedience, harshness, or critical spirit of Christian workers or leaders just because they are productive workers or have important positions. Paul, however, demonstrated that individuals must be addressed and must be disciplined if there is no change—they cannot simply be moved to a less damaging position in the organization. He did not hesitate to personally address uncharitable and sinful behavior of the workers and leaders under his oversight (see 1 Cor. 5:1–7; 6:7–8; Gal. 2:11–16; Phil. 4:2; 2 Tim. 2:16–18), nor did he ignore the reports he received from others about selfish behavior within the ranks (see 1 Cor. 1:11; 5:1; 11:18; 2 Thess. 3:11). He was concerned that “a little leaven leavens the whole lump” (1 Cor. 5:6). Entire sections of his epistles were “staff development manuals” to specific groups, and sometimes he had to address the whole organization for its petty arguments and carnality. Concerned for the corporate testimony, he spent much time addressing individual and corporate problems.⁵

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

5. For more examples of how individual and corporate problems are addressed to maintain God’s blessing upon the group, see how Moses and Joshua dealt with the children of Israel.

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

Your Role in Discipleship

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

Keep in mind as you study this book that you cannot effectively help others to change toward Christlikeness unless you adequately understand the basics of biblical change for yourself. You must have a working knowledge of the doctrine of progressive sanctification and must, by God's grace, be practicing it in your own life. Paul gave his disciple Timothy the following instructions:

Practice these things, *immerse yourself in them*, so that all may see your progress. *Keep a close watch on yourself* and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. (1 Tim. 4:15–16)

If you have picked up this book to help someone else, resist the urge to skip over parts 1 and 2. Before you can become useful to Christ as a disciple maker, the fruit of your own walk with Christ must be apparent to others. Humbly study these opening truths, asking God to enable you to apply them to your life. Then move on to part 3 about helping others.

Understand that God has called all believers to disciple those around them. He said we are to be “teaching [others] to observe all that [he has] commanded [us]” (Matt. 28:20). Paul told his disciple Timothy, “What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). God has placed others around you who need to grow in Christ—your spouse, your children, your friends, your students, your roommate, your congregation, and your coworkers. All believers are to take up the challenge to “instruct” (Rom. 15:14) and to “exhort” (Heb. 3:13) one another.

Some have the unbiblical mindset that religion is a personal matter and that they shouldn't "meddle" in other people's lives; they think, "It's their life—if they want to throw it away, that's their business." The writer to the Hebrews warns such people in Hebrews 5:11–14, where he addresses those who "ought to be teachers" but are not (v. 12). The apostle insists that those who have an attitude of noninterference in the lives of others need biblical change themselves: they are "dull of hearing" (v. 11), "unskilled in the word of righteousness" (v. 13), and need to place themselves under basic instruction again. Avoiding the responsibility to biblically challenge others is a sure way to remain a spiritual baby.

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

A Final Word

The goal of this book is to give you a thoroughly biblical overview of the Christian life, of man, and of our relationship with God. When we do not understand God's ways and are not properly related to God, chaos results. You will not be able to lead others out of that self-centered chaos unless you understand life from God's perspective, model the proper relationship to God yourself, and know how to lead others to the change that will bring them back to a right relationship with God. There is no true biblical change toward Christlikeness unless you handle life and its problems God's way.

Take Time to Reflect

1. Do you understand the biblical teaching of sanctification? Could you briefly outline its main points for people who want to know how to biblically change something in their lives? We will thoroughly unpack this concept throughout this book; for now, ascertain what you already know.

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

2. Have you unwittingly accepted unbiblical solutions to solving life's problems? Are there concepts you need to rethink and perhaps abandon in light of God's Word? Keep a running list of them as they come to mind while you read this book. Don't let anyone's solution, including your own ideas, go unchecked against the Word of God. If you find that the idea you are espousing is not taught in the Word of God as part of the sanctification process, you must abandon it and learn God's ways to handle life's problems.
3. What is your attitude toward and involvement in your local church? The Christian home and the local church are God's primary means of providing the instruction, accountability, and practical experience necessary for Christian growth. God intends to use our meeting together as a means of "encouraging one another" (Heb. 10:25). Would your attendance and service record demonstrate a commitment to spiritual growth and mutual discipleship?
4. What is your attitude toward involving yourself in the lives of others? Do you stay out of their problems because you are unprepared to help them? If so, pay close attention to the following chapters. God intends to use every believer to help others.
5. If you are uninvolved, is it because you think the problems of others are none of your business? If so, are you willing to ask God to teach you his way of thinking about this? A position of neutrality may sound justified, but it is often a way for us to protect ourselves from the vulnerability that comes in ministry to others. Yet God uses this vulnerability to stimulate our own change and growth.
6. Perhaps you are the kind of person who is always involved in other people's lives (maybe even a busybody who has an opinion about everything), but you never see them experience lasting biblical change. Are you attempting to help by giving them your ideas and opinions? Are you "practicing medicine without a license"? Can you show biblical passages that back up your "prescriptions"? Would the apostle Paul have given the same advice you give?

A Word to Disciple Makers

How to Use This Book

THE TERM *DISCIPLE MAKERS*, as used in this book, refers to those who are helping other believers to make biblical change toward Christlikeness. This includes Christian leaders, who have official responsibilities for others, as well as Christian laypeople, who have no official authority over others but nonetheless have a biblical responsibility to help fellow believers. You can use this book in several ways when working with others.

Individual Discipleship

If you are working with individuals, have them read each chapter and then write out the answers to the questions for each chapter's "Take Time to Reflect" section. You might also ask them to find and write down *five* statements in the chapter that had the most significance to them. Having to search for the five—not four, not six—most significant statements will force them to concentrate on the material as they read it. Writing them down will mentally reinforce them one more time. Sharing them with you when you next meet will further cement them in their thinking. At the same time, the significant statements they chose and their answers to the "Take Time to Reflect" section will show you where God is currently working in their lives. If you are having the individuals read one chapter each week, encourage them to read the chapter early in the week so that they have time to reflect on what they have read and to see how their lives either measure up to or fall short of what they have learned.

Small Group Study

Small groups that could benefit from studying this book together include Sunday school classes, elder or deacon groups, members of

the church and Christian school staff, men's or women's Bible studies, church or Christian school teen leadership councils, and Christian biblical counselor training programs. Organizations that serve the local church, such as Christian camps, can use the book for staff training as well.

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

Family Bible Study

The small group process described above is a wonderful way for a father to go through this book with teenage children who can grasp the material—in fact, this was the initial intent of this book. If there is a wide range of ages and abilities in the family, he can study the book with his wife or individually with each child who is old enough to understand it.

Premarital and Early Marriage Growth

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