

Taking Our Next Steps with Christ

Day 1: How To Change Deeply

Listen to: “How To Change Deeply” by Tim Keller

(Go to the Living FDFD website, Week Seven, to listen to this sermon.)

The goal of this seven-week study is transformation through a joyful relationship with Christ. In this message, Tim Keller addresses what it means to change deeply. The important thing that we need to grasp is that we are changed by what we love. This type of change goes beyond moralism and into a life of living out our new identity as “loved by God.” This is life change with a smile on our face and delight in our heart.

Scripture:

Romans 7:7- 8:1 | *We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. 15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. 16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 18 For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I*

cannot carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. 21 So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; 23 but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? 25 Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...

Meditate:

Conviction:

Connect:

Day 2: Understanding What God Uses to Grow Us

What is the goal of our Christian life? What is it that God wants to see produced in each one of our lives? I think the answer to these questions is FAITH and FRUIT. Let's take a look at each of these and then look at how they are produced in each believer.

"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6)

What the writer of Hebrews is telling us is that it pleases God wherever we take our next step of faith and grow more and more to trust that God is who He says He is. Also, it pleases God when we take a step of faith toward trusting Him to do what He promised He would do. Faith, or trust, is at the center of every healthy relationship. Sin was introduced into the world when Adam and Eve chose not to trust. At that point their relationship with God was broken. When we trust God, we are participating with God in His reconciling work by receiving His forgiveness and grace. The key to spiritual growth is our happy response to God's invitation to trust Him.

There are at least five faith catalysts. Two of these catalysts we have nothing to do with. In a sense, we are simply the recipients of and the beneficiary of something that God does. Those two would be: **Providential Relationships** and **Pivotal Circumstances**. (See Andy Stanley's book, *Deep and Wide*, for the source of these five faith

catalysts.) We almost never hear a person's faith story without hearing about someone who influenced them to take a step toward Christ. It could be a family member or friend, but whoever it is, they had taken their own step on their spiritual journey, then took the opportunity to share the HOPE IN THEM with someone else. We will explore Pivotal Circumstances later, but let's just admit for now that these circumstances are often difficult. There are circumstances that cause us to lose confidence in our ability to control outcomes and turn to Christ for help and hope.

The three Faith Catalysts we have some control over are:

Practical Teaching. We have a choice to either expose ourselves to good Biblical teaching that is understandable, helpful and hopeful. Once we do this the Holy Spirit takes that content and uses it to grow our faith. The important aspect of this catalyst is that we actually try to do what we hear. Listen to the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:24,26: *"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock... 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand."*

Private Disciplines. *"Personal spiritual disciplines introduce a sense of intimacy and accountability to our faith walks. Private spiritual disciplines tune our hearts to the heart of God and underscore personal accountability to our heavenly Father."* (Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide*) What are examples of spiritual disciplines? The answer to that question is this: it is anything you have to make yourself do (at least at first) that places you in a

position to recognize the wonder of God; to discover His goodness and greatness. We cannot make ourselves grow, but by reading the Bible, praying, giving, spending time in solitude, fasting (from food or something else), or simply listening to great Christian music, we can place our "cup" (our heart) in position to receive God's Living Water. By the way, as you have participated in this study by meditating on scripture, developing convictions, and connecting with God in prayer, you have done Private Disciplines.

Personal Ministry. We all fight our flesh or sinful nature. We naturally are drawn toward that we will satisfy one of our longings. Personal ministry takes us out of the selfish world we live in and puts in a world that costs us time, money and effort—the world of service. Some of us need to simply make ourselves available for service instead of picking and choosing when and where and who we will serve. We need to do this since it is easy to convince ourselves to do that which will get us noticed or applauded. We will never put a dagger into our sinful nature if we do only that which makes us feel good about ourselves. (BTW: Some people know this, but just in case no one has told you, available to all of us is an ancient cure for depression—serve someone who is less fortunate than you.)

Spiritual FRUIT is something that is organic (can't be manufactured), slow, and INDIRECT. It is especially helpful to know that the FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT (Galatians 5:22-23) is something that God does, not us. All we do is cooperate with God by doing the kinds of things that help us receive from Him what is needed

"Some people are just too lazy to be happy."—Paul Robie

for our growth. Jesus called this **ABIDING** (John 15). It is our job to stay connected to Christ through the means described above.

At SMCC we like to say, “It’s not about **TRYING HARDER**; it’s about **TRAINING BETTER**.” In other words, you cannot grow in your trust for God by trying harder. You must train better by participating in the three “faith catalysts” that God has given you to do. This isn’t hard, but it is intentional. And that is why “some people are just too lazy to be happy.” We must make ourselves do some things so that we can grow and experience the joy that is in Christ.

Scripture:

1 Timothy 4:7 | *Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly.*

Meditate:

Conviction:

Connect:

Day 3: No Pain, No Gain—The Role of Suffering and Grief In Our Spiritual Growth

“Grief is the one pain that heals all others. It is the most important pain there is.” Henry Cloud

“If one of you walked out of this meeting and a guy with a mask walked up to you in the dark parking lot, took out a knife, stabbed you in the stomach and took all your money, and left you in an unconscious state, you would call him a mugger. Someone would call the police, and they would try to catch the perpetrator. But if you left this meeting, drove down the street to the local hospital, and a guy with a mask took out a knife, cut your stomach open, took all your money, and left you in an unconscious state, you would call him a doctor and thank him for helping you. One is a mugging and the other is surgery” (Henry Cloud, *How People Grow*).

Suffering is a lot like that. There is therapeutic suffering and there is destructive suffering at the hands of evil people. The key, Dr. Cloud says, is to be able to tell the difference between the two and to apply the right kind of experience to each. When life “mugs” someone, we need to give them help and healing, support and comfort. One thing we

can do for each other is help during times like this (*Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ* (Galatians 6:2)).

A “mugging” can help us develop empathy for others and can help us not to put too much hope in this world. But there is another kind of pain that can actually grow us—“good pain.” This is the kind of pain that God uses to grow our character. Two passages of Scripture that help us see this are the following:

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope (Romans 5:3-4).

In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.” 7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? 8 If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! 10 They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however,

it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it (Hebrews 12:4-11).

Three things we can do in order to grow when experiencing GOOD PAIN:

1) **Go through it—don’t try to escape it by using drugs, pleasure, or isolation.** Remember, reality is our friend. These are coping mechanisms that we have to reject in order to grow. When we go through pain and suffering, we give God a chance to meet us there in the pain. Someone said, “You won’t realize that God is all you need until He is all you have.” There is a lot of truth in that statement.

2) **Use the reality of pain and suffering to reveal how spiritually WEAK we are.** If trials are crushing us, we can use that as an indication that it is time to start to build our spiritual strength. When we exercise, we are pushing our muscles to do what is uncomfortable. When we keep doing this, the pain becomes lessened. Here are some examples of spiritual exercises all of us can do:

- Reach out to others from a vulnerable heart
- Confess sin to one another
- Stop faking it - let others know that we are hurting
- Taking the risk of being real and honest
- Deal with trauma from our past
- Say what you mean and mean what you say
- Serve someone who is hurting
- Learn to forgive / grieve / make amends / reconcile

3) **Use this pain to push into the arms of God.** Sometimes we need to simply lament—that is, stop complaining to everyone else and go to God in our distress. Peter told us this: *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.* (1 Peter 5:7)

Scripture:

James 1:2-4 | *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

Meditate:

Conviction:

Connect:

Day 4: Permanent Transformation Is Consistent With a New Love

Today's Reading:

1 John 4:19 | *We love because he first loved us.*

John 1:13 | *Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.*

The key to our life being transformed by God from the inside out is not so much a change in our BEHAVIORS but a change in our DESIRES. The way we will stop sinning is not by being told over and over, “Stop sinning!” but by seeing God for who He really is—big, beautiful, good, great and wise.

Some of you might push back by asking, “Then why does God give us commands?” We’ll get to that, but for now, let’s see what will ultimately lead to our transformation. J.D. Greear shares this illustration:

“Think of it like a balloon. There are two ways to keep a balloon afloat. If you fill a balloon with your breath, then the only way to keep it in the air is to continually smack it upward. That’s how religion keeps you motivated: it repeatedly “hits” you. “Stop doing this!” “Get busy with that!” This is my life as a pastor. People come on a Sunday so I can “smack” them about something. “Be more generous!” And they do that for a week. “Go do missions!” And they sign up for a trip. Every week I smack them back into spiritual orbit. No wonder people don’t like being around me. But there’s another way to keep a balloon afloat. Fill it with

helium. Then it floats on its own, no smacking required. Seeing the size and beauty of God is like the helium that keeps us soaring spiritually.”(Gospel)

Puritan Thomas Chalmers called this “the expulsive power of a new affection.” You see, our affections for idols—our “over-desire” for things that won’t satisfy—are brought under control when they are taken captive by a stronger, more superior affection.

This is why we should never take our eyes off the Cross of Christ. We should never stop measuring His compassion and love for us by what he did for us on the Cross. This is why the Apostle Paul could sum up his ministry in this way: “... *but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles*” (1 Cor. 1:23). All of God’s goodness and greatness is wrapped up in this one act of grace.

If God’s love for you found in the sacrifice of His Son doesn’t draw your affections to God and produce in you a sense of His greatness, then your heart has not been transformed and you will need “smacking continuously.” Until this new affection is produced in us by the Cross, all our lifestyle changes will be superficial and all we have left to motivate us is the threat of punishment or the promise of reward. In other words, we have become a religious person, perhaps without knowing it.

Seeing the glory of God revealed in the gospel gives us freedom from both sin and religion. The gospel sets us free from the threat of condemnation and changes our

hearts so that it is “our pleasure” to serve Him. This is what is meant by **Full Devotion** and **Full Delight**. Our devotion is to know God and to see Him for who He really is. The by-product of that is our joy in honoring Him and making Him known.

God’s love provides us with the motivation for obedience, while His commands provide us with the direction for how to do for others what God has done for us—that is, love. We are now free to see God’s commands as a gift instead of a burden. Why? Because we no longer see obedience to God’s commands as a way of earning His favor.

One more benefit to God’s commands is this: they give us the direction we need in order to develop new affections. The way we learn to love certain things is by participating in the practices that expose us to that thing (or person). The commands of God turn our daily routines onto the path that leads us to God. When our day-to-day habits put us face-to-face with the beauty of God found in the Gospel, we will start to find DELIGHT IN HIM.

Remember, “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied (find the most joy) in Him.” (Thank you Mr. Piper)

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Scripture:

2 Cor. 3:18 | *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

Meditate:

Conviction:

Connect:
