

Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People
Chapter 1: How Christians Change - Crisis & Process
Pastor's Notes/Review

Today we are starting a 10-week study that is all about change.

- Many times when we pray in church, we ask God to do something in our lives so that when we leave we are not the same as when we came in. The last thing we want is to come to church, sit, listen, nod our heads in agreement, and then leave, without anything happening in our lives.
- If all we manage to do by coming to church is “feel good” we’ve missed something.
- The bottom line is that the Christian life is about change; God chiseling our lives.

In the next 10 weeks we’re going to look at some very difficult, and at times very personal areas of our lives which we hope God will do a work in us.

- We’re going to look at topics such as “Restitution” or “Grudges” or “Restoration”.
- We’re going to cover these areas because we don’t want to be the same people we’ve always been.

The series of studies we’re going to undertake is based on the book “Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People” by Keith Drury.

- I believe that if we stick through this together, if we come with an open heart and ask God to speak to us, if we participate in the Bible Study, we will see some wonderful growth taking place in our lives.

This morning, by way of introduction, we’re going to begin by setting a foundation for change by looking at what happens in someone’s life when they become a Christian.

- The first thing we need to understand is that the moment we become a Christian we begin a journey of changes. Great changes begin to take place, both inside us and outside of us.

Some of the changes take place outside us. They are not changes *in* us but they affect us.

It’s a bit of a technical term, but one of the things that change, the moment we become a Christian, is that we are “justified”. Being justified basically means that God is no longer holding me liable for my sins.

- All have sinned, all fall short of the glory of God; the wages of sin is death... BUT...
- It’s “just-as-if-I’d” never sinned. We cannot justify ourselves.
- Romans 5:9 says “we have now been justified by his blood!”
- In 1 Cor. 6:11 Paul looks at the change that has taken place in the lives of the believers and says “you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

In each of these cases, something has taken place *outside* of ourselves. We didn’t “justify” ourselves. We can’t justify ourselves. It is impossible to pick ourselves up from our boot straps. It has to be done for us. It’s a change that takes place in God’s throne room in heaven. *It’s a change in how God looks at us.*

- In our legal system, when someone is pardoned, they don’t do it to themselves, someone else does it to them. It’s the same thing with being justified. You can’t do it to yourself.
- It’s kind of like being adopted. You can’t do it to yourself. Someone else on the outside does it to you.

And when you became a Christian, when you began a walk with the Lord, many things changed that are outside of you.

- You are justified by God’s grace.
- You are adopted into God’s family.
- You have a new standing in how God looks at you; not that you are better, but that you are redeemed.
- You are a new creation. You have a new standing in your relationship with God.

Those are the sorts of things that change “outside” of us. But there are also **changes that take place within us as well.**

- Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor. 5:17). There is something “new” within ourselves.

- There is a personal change that takes place within. There is a change in direction.
- Before we went our own way, did our own thing, we were the master of our own destiny, or so we thought (since we were in fact slaves to sin).
- When we became a Christian we turned our lives over to God. We became “alive with Christ”. We were “born again” or “regenerated”, in other words, we became a new person.
- That doesn’t mean all the old habits were dead and done away with, but in our heart, our intentions, our motives, our desires have changed.
- It’s like we can live again.
- It’s like being able to take a deep breath and enjoy life.
- It’s like being revived – because that is exactly what has happened.
- We see life in a new way. Life is brighter. Friends will say that something is different about you.

But it doesn’t take long for nasty old habits to take their toll on us.

- You may very well be a new creation, justified and adopted into God’s family, but it doesn’t take long to realize that you still fall short in many ways.
- The apostle Paul had this problem. He said it himself, “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do... For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing.” (Romans 7:15,18,19).

This is a problem we all find ourselves facing, the problem of our sinful nature.

- Yes, we’ve changed inwardly, and certainly God has changed our standing before Him, but we become painfully aware of attitudes, thoughts, words, and actions that are out of character with the new person that we’ve become.
- I think every new Christian faces this point in their lives.
- They’ve given their life to the Lord. God has forgiven us, adopted us, and brought us into a new life.
- But we also see some very disappointing things in our lives, and we begin to see all the things that have not changed. And we become discouraged. Satan is quick to point them out.
- It is then that we are at a crossroads. We have several options.

Some people give up.

They either give up on their Christian faith and re-settle into old ways of life, or if they don’t give up their faith, neither do they try to become the person God intended for them to be; they sort of settle for a nominal Christianity.

Some people put up (with sin).

These people will remind you that we all sin, but that since there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ, as long as we keep ourselves in a relationship with God, God will continually forgive us our sins.

- The problem is, the new Christian is dissatisfied with sin in his/her life. There’s got to be something more, and there is. God has more in store for us than simply putting up with sin.
- When we read the New Testament we find repeated calls for God’s people to put off sin, not put up with sin.
- This brings into focus a third route—the biblical solution: Become what you are!

Some people move up.

Song: Higher Ground, “I’m pressing on the upward way, new heights I’m gaining every day...”

God has a desire to do a work in us to transform us into Christ likeness. We sometimes use a big word to describe this; the word is “sanctification”.

- The moment we give our lives to Christ, God begins a work in us, changing us in certain areas, so that we become more like Jesus. He works on our attitudes, our words, and our deeds.
- But the more we change the more we learn that we need to change. And so God’s work in us continues; kind of like a spiritual journey, becoming more like Jesus, week by week, year by year.
- It is a journey of hearing God speak, making commitments, allowing God to change, adjust, correct, transform, and mold us after his will. It is God’s way of making us more like Jesus.

That's the work that we want to see happen in our lives – God working in us, chiseling us, conforming us.

- We don't want to give up because of sin, and we certainly don't want to put up with sin.
- But I do believe that as we continue to seek God, submit to Him and allow Him to change us, He will do a work in us that is beyond our imagination. That's our goal these next 9 more weeks.
- God will bring to completion the good work He began in us at conversion. "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."
(Phil. 1:6)