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# 1

## TAKE OUT THE GARBAGE

### SAY IT IN A SENTENCE:

*True life change comes only through partnership with God and begins by rejecting all self-centered change methods.*

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I love to tell stories of change—dramatic, detailed accounts of the transforming power of almighty God. When I was writing the first edition of *Lord Change Me*, the curtain was coming down on the 20th century. The frenzy of the moment was Y2K and the fear that the end of computerized civilization was near. Among the retrospectives on the century, I don't remember much attention given to some of the remarkable people who became Christians during the previous 100 years. People like G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, Dorothy Sayers, A. W. Tozer, Billy Graham, and many other notables came to faith in Christ. All except the last one I listed have been dead for a while. The testimony of their lives is finished and sealed. They joined the race, kept the faith, and crossed the finish line. Other people came to faith in such unusual circumstances that their conversions were met with derision. Frankly, celebrity conversions are usually put in the same category with foxhole conversions and aren't expected to create lasting change. But some people change and their conversion stands the test of time. One remarkable story of God's grace features Chuck Colson. Now there's a guy who got changed! He was on President Richard Nixon's political team. He was the most brutal, ruthless, get-out-of-my-way-or-I'll-kill-you kind of guy. As a gung-ho presidential aide, he once said, "I would walk over my grandmother if necessary to assure the president's reelection."

In the early 1970s, however, Colson's whole world came crashing down. He pleaded guilty to obstruction of justice in the Watergate case and served seven

months at Maxwell Federal Prison in Georgia. He was shamed before the whole world.

In the midst of that, Chuck Colson found a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. As he went into prison and began to articulate and grow in his faith, many people thought, “Yeah, right. Chuckie’s got religion. What a joke. It’ll never last.” But you know what? It did. Chuck is no longer the celebrity he was in the 1970s but for believers, his story of change remains compelling.

Colson said, “I don’t just want to be saved. I don’t just want to be forgiven. I want to be changed.” He has been changed and has emerged as one of the greatest Christian leaders in our world today. He is a powerful force. His life touches hundreds of thousands of men and women in prison every year through a ministry he began called Prison Fellowship. He’s an author, writer, and leader who is tireless in his effort to get out the good news about Jesus. Colson has received many awards for his impact upon our world.

Chuck Colson went from ruthless political hatchet man to loving selfless minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Transformed! And you can be too!

## **TAKING OUT THE GARBAGE**

“Take out the garbage!” It was never a gentle command at my house growing up. Instead, it was a harsh order, barked at high volume, designed to produce an action that everyone loathed. Amazingly, in a family of four boys, each child usually remembered somehow having taken his turn at the dreaded task just the previous week. To this day I loathe taking out the garbage. Why? Simply because nothing was in those bags that I wanted to save, just gross food remains and wrappers and things that . . . well, garbage.

In this chapter we have to take out some garbage, and you may not like it. It’s going to be somewhat negative. The reason for the negativity is really quite simple: I believe and have observed that the number one reason we don’t change is because at some time in the past we have attempted to change, then failed, and in the process have been deeply hurt. After trying that a few times, we give up. We conclude that the only pain worse than needing to change is trying to change and failing.

Now I need to let you know: When we pursue God’s plan for change, it *always* works. If you’ve tried to change and failed, it’s because you’ve tried to change according to an unbiblical method. That’s the garbage we need to take out: faulty change methods! We need to uncover the faulty change methods, and then we

need to sweep them off the table and into the trash so that we can once-and-for-all focus exclusively on God's program for change. It's ugly work, but it's gotta get done if we're gonna change.

I've heard someone say, "If I keep doing what I've always done, I'm going to keep getting what I've always gotten." That's right, isn't it? We're going to look at three faulty psychological methods for change and three faulty spiritual methods for change—the things we've always done. We'll see how they're just trash, worthless. Are you with me? Let's do it together. Let's take out the trash!

### **Faulty Method #1: Environmental Change**

Environmental change is an approach made popular by John Watson and later by B. F. Skinner. You might recognize this concept as *behaviorism*, which is a popular—but faulty—approach to change. Behaviorism is the idea that the environment conditions a person to behave in certain ways, that you are the result of the environment that you have come from. Therefore, change the environment and you will change.

Skinner and Watson relied heavily upon the findings of an experiment conducted by a Russian psychologist named Pavlov. You may have heard of the experiment or of Pavlov himself. He was the dude with the slobbering dogs. Pavlov would put food in front of a dog and the dog would begin to salivate. Then Pavlov rang a bell just seconds before the food appeared. After countless repetitions of hearing the bell followed by getting tasty food, the dog would salivate simply upon hearing the bell, even when no food was laid out. Pavlov concluded that the dog had been changed by his environment and called it conditioning.

From these findings, Pavlov, and later Skinner and Watson, concluded that most, if not all, human behavior is the result of conditioning.

As with most psychological theory, there is some validity here. Certainly behavior is influenced by patterns of thinking formed over a long period of time. The problem with behaviorism is twofold:

1. A cause/effect relationship does not necessarily exist between environment and change. In fact, studies have been done on identical twins from the exact same environment. You would expect them to grow into very similar adults but often they turn out as different as day and night. Though it may be a factor in who you become, environment is not the determining cause in character formation or in transformation.

2. Changing the environment does not automatically change the person. A perfect environment does not lead to a perfect person. Wasn't that the original setting? Adam and Eve had a pretty good environment in Eden, a beautiful and bountiful garden setting. God Almighty Himself said that it was perfect (see Genesis 1:31), and yet Adam and Eve sinned! So environment does not control who I become.

Consider the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15. Now there was a guy who said, "You know what? I'm going to change my environment. I'm not really liking my dad these days. I'm so tired of working on this stupid farm. My brother's getting on my nerves. And their lifestyle is way too restrictive for me. I'm blowing outta here." (I'm paraphrasing now.)

You can read the story yourself in Luke 15:

**"There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need" (verses 11–14).**

He finally found a job at a farm. There he ended up feeding pigs and wanting to eat what the pigs were eating. **"But when he came to himself,"** verses 17 and 18 report, **"he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.''"**

Now here's the point: He originally thought the problem was his environment: his family, the way he had been brought up, the lifestyle that he had been given. So he took off and got a new environment. The Bible says, **"When he came to himself"** he figured out that *he* was the problem, not his environment. Maybe you have been struggling to change and tempted by the notion that a change of environment will change the way you're feeling. A new job or a new city or a new spouse. "Out with the old and in with the new and then I will be happy." It's a lie!

The depth of the lie that external fixes are the answer can be seen in the human wreckage recorded almost daily in the tabloids. A recent tragic example is

the life of Amy Winehouse, a British musical star who was found dead in her apartment at the age of twenty-seven. Her ten-year career was a mix of musical successes and troubled personal life, punctuated by drug and alcohol abuse. She is probably best known for her hit single “Rehab,” in which she made public her refusal to get help with her obvious substance problems. She represents the countless millions who deal with their inner longing for meaningful change by trying to inoculate themselves with alcohol and drugs. For Amy and so many, the environmental change offered through rehab centers is a failure highlighted by the revolving door effect of the experience. Celebrities often seem to arrange “frequent visitor” passes with rehab locations, hoping one of the stays is going to “take.” Perhaps Amy realized at some level that no amount of rehab would help her—she needed change that wouldn’t happen by going somewhere for treatment. In the end, success and the adulation of millions couldn’t overcome the struggle Amy faced and she apparently settled for an escalation of destructive behavior that led to her alcohol-related death. Her tragic end is a warning to all of us of the destructive ends of sin if it is never resolved by the Redeemer.

Our problem is inside us, not around us. We are the ones who need to change, not our environment. Behaviorism is deceptive window dressing; it does not work. That’s going in the trash.

### **Faulty Method #2: Change By Digging Up My Past**

A popular notion today is “I am the way I am because of my past.” The psychological theory that seeks to remedy our problems from the past is *psychoanalysis*. An Austrian physician named Sigmund Freud developed it well over a hundred years ago. Freud taught that human behavior is determined by painful memories that are buried in our subconscious mind. Freud believed that we force from our conscious mind any awareness of thoughts, needs, or experiences that are unacceptable to us or to others and try to bury them deep inside ourselves. What psychoanalysis says is this: “There’s something back there. You’re not aware of it, but it’s back there and it’s very dark. You may not remember it, but it’s controlling you. It’s your past. It’s your parents. It’s some painful experience. And it’s making you fearful. It’s making you angry. It’s making you depressed.”

Psychoanalysis teaches, “You’ve got to dig it up and spill your guts! Figure out what that thing is and get it out. And until you do, you will never really change.”

The problem with all of this is that you are continually cast in the victim role. But you do not have to accept that role. You are *not* a victim. Awful things may

have happened to you, but they do not control you! You may *let* them control, but they don't have that power in themselves. Romans 8:1 says, **"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** Once you are in Christ, nothing can condemn you, knock you down, or grind you under its heel. You are a son or a daughter of the Living God! You are not a victim. Romans 8:31 says, **"If God is for us, who can be against us?"** The answer is: No one can. God is for you!

Romans 8:37 says, **"In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."** *Nothing* has happened or will happen that, by God's grace, you can't climb on top of and rule over and, in the power of the Holy Spirit, be set free from. But first we've got to dump faulty plans for change that don't work, like constant digging in the past.

Instead of endless trips down painful memory lane, the biblical message is quite the opposite. Here's God's message:

THE KEY TO CHANGE IS FORGETTING,  
NOT REMEMBERING.

What does that mean? It means facing what you *do* remember, forgiving it, and forgetting it. And that's the order that it happens: face, forgive, and forget. Don't try to forget without forgiving. Don't try to forgive without facing. But after you face it, by God's grace you forgive it. And then you forget it. And don't waste time wondering about what you can't remember—let God take care of that!

Consider the life of Joseph. If anyone was a candidate for ten years of therapy because of a painful past, it was Joseph. This guy was coddled by his father and pampered as the favorite to the point that even though he developed faith in God at an early age, he was so socially awkward that he offended his brothers. Jacob's unwise preferential treatment was evident in his gift to Joseph of a coat that was the envy of his older siblings, who ridiculed and ultimately rejected him. His efforts to tell his family what God was showing him in dreams came across to them as prideful to the point that even Jacob wondered what was going on with Joseph. Finally, when they caught him alone one day, Joseph's ten brothers stripped him naked, threw him into a pit to die, then hauled him out and sold him as a slave in Egypt. They decided a living death in slavery was a more fitting vengeance on their little brother than leaving him to die in a hole. Now would that mess with your mind?

Then Joseph got a job in Egypt; he was working hard and trying to build a life for himself. He was living for God and providing good service to his owner. Soon he was managing that household with incredible efficiency. But when his boss's wife tried to seduce him, Joseph responded with words that give us a glimpse into his character: **"How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"** (Genesis 39:9). She flipped out and falsely accused him of trying to rape her. Unable to defend himself, Joseph was chained up in some rat-infested prison and completely forgotten for several years.

Now you would think that Joseph would be messed up for life or certainly would need endless hours of therapy to process all that pain. Yet the Bible teaches something quite different. In all of it, Joseph saw a sovereign God who was at work. Was Joseph devastated at times? Yes, but he was not destroyed. Were there pain and loneliness and heartache and, at times, despair? Yes, but Joseph found a better way to deal with his pain. He would forget the injustice, trust a wise and sovereign God, and move ahead with his life. He gained the trust of his jailer and was soon managing the prison as he had managed the house of Potiphar. God gave him favor. Instead of fighting his situations, he trusted God to help him advance through even the most difficult circumstances. His was not an easy journey by any means, but he ended up right where God wanted him.

Imagine the day the Pharaoh sent a limousine to the prison to transport Joseph to the palace. In one sense it was the biggest test Joseph had ever faced—put on the spot to interpret the king's dream. In another sense it was the moment God had been preparing Joseph for to display His glory. He stood before Pharaoh without missing a beat and said, **"It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer"** (Genesis 41:16). As tempting as it may have been to "work" the change opportunity, Joseph never took an ounce of credit for the news he delivered to the king. **"The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do"** (Genesis 41:25).

Later, when the famine struck and even the sons of Jacob found themselves traveling all the way to Egypt to look for food, Joseph did not take advantage of the "turned tables" to take vengeance on his brothers. In Genesis 45:8, Joseph looked into the eyes of the brothers who did so much to hurt him and said, **"It was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and ruler over all the land of Egypt."**

Just to make sure the point is made, the Scripture quotes Joseph affirming that message once more in Genesis 50:20a. **"As for you, you meant evil against**



**me, but God meant it for good.”** Did they sin against him? Yes! Was it evil? Yes! But did God use it for Joseph’s good? Yes! God did. As a confirmation that Joseph found healing by forgetting his past, he named his first son Manasseh, which means “the Lord made me forget.” Between thinking about the pain of the past and thinking about the delight of his relationship with God, Joseph chose God. The only time he even mentioned the past was when his brothers revealed their own load of guilt and kept bringing it up. Joseph lived free from his past because he let God take care of that part of his life.

There’s a lesson on change right there: asking God for the grace to forget my past. This digging-up-the-past thing is a worldly and faulty method of change. Transformation is not about remembering, and it’s not about digging up things that may or may not have even happened! It’s about forgiving and forgetting. It’s about trusting a sovereign God. It’s about focusing in on my own need to change and saying with the apostle Paul, **“forgetting what lies behind”** (Philippians 3:13).

Is it important to deal with your past? Absolutely! God doesn’t want us to pretend. He wants us to face our past and to deal with it by focusing on forgiveness, and putting it behind us. Many people do find it helpful to sit with a wise Christian counselor who will prayerfully listen and offer biblical answers and counsel from the Lord. But the answer is not in the past, and no process of examining our past will lead to the change our heart desires. Have you been seeking personal transformation by digging up your past? Find a big green plastic bag and put that approach to change where it belongs—at the curb.

### **Faulty Method #3: Change Through Self-Discovery**

Even psychologists themselves began more recently to criticize behaviorism and psychoanalysis, realizing that it was not helping people. (Research shows that those who get into this kind of therapy have a statistically worse chance of seeing personal transformation than if they did nothing at all.) Around 1960, Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers proposed a third faulty method for helping people called *humanistic psychology*. While behaviorism focuses on environmental conditioning and psychoanalysis drills for something dark and hidden in your past, humanistic psychology teaches that people are controlled by their own values and choices. The goal of this approach to change is to have people clarify their values to achieve their own potential. That’s the key word: *potential*. It’s in you. Tap into that and you can change into anything you desire!

In North America, this is the most popular faulty method for change. We

see this message every day in many forms, from TV infomercials to the Internet: “The answer is within you. Find yourself. Love yourself. Help yourself. You have the answer. Pump it up, baby! Find it inside. You’re okay. Be all that you can be.” And on and on.

I began to wonder just how pervasive this concept was, so I logged on to Amazon.com, the number one Internet bookseller, and typed into their search engine the word *self-help*. There are at least 234,000 self-help published materials on Amazon. Crazy titles like:

- *Get Out of Your Way: Overcoming Self-Defeating Behaviors*
- *When Am I Going to Be Happy?*
- *The Power of Self-Helping*

Of course the idea here is just positive self-talk. “I’m a good person.” “I’m going to buy myself something because I’m a nice guy and I deserve it.” When I did the same search a decade ago for the first edition of this book, there were 12,223 book titles on self-help, at the time a larger category than “God” or “marriage.” Self-help is definitely an expanding market.

I suppose I understand why people who don’t know any better might think that they have the power to change themselves. What troubles me, however, is to see people who claim to believe in the power of almighty God turning to pagan philosophies and ignoring the transforming ministry of the Holy Spirit, which is available to every one of us who comes to God and asks in faith.

The biggest problem with promoting self-esteem as the road to personal growth and fulfillment is that it doesn’t work. I was watching Chicago TV news the other day and heard a statistical report on how the self-esteem movement has affected public education. The reporter announced that after spending multiplied millions of dollars and man-hours on building kids’ self-esteem at school, “Self-esteem scores have never been higher and educational test scores have never been lower.” Or, to put it another way, “The better I feel about myself, the worse I do.” Chicago area public schoolteachers observed that students who feel really good about themselves have little or no interest in learning anything or improving in any way at all! High self-esteem makes me want to change less, not more. C. S. Lewis said, “Look for yourself and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness and despair.”

Many do not recognize that the Christian self-esteem movement is at its core blasphemous. It fails to account for the biblical view of fallen man. “**The heart**

**is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"** (Jeremiah 17:9). If you understand even a fraction of the depravity in your own heart, you know it's that very depravity that makes you want to believe that you *are* good enough. The motivation behind self-esteem self-talk is the result of depravity. We want to deny what we know to be true about ourselves. We can't lift ourselves or talk ourselves out of our fallen nature. The fact that God loves you and me is wonderfully comforting, but it says absolutely nothing about your and my "worth." The fact that God loves us and is committed to us does not reveal anything about us; it reveals something extraordinary about God. It's called grace!

In my office is a book on self-esteem written by a Christian counselor I know. When he gave it to me, he wrote in the front cover, "James, I hope that you will experience the wonderful truth that you are lovable, capable, valuable, and redeemable." How sad. To attempt to draw a line and say that "Because God loves me . . . because Christ died for me . . . because I am eternally a child of God, therefore I am . . ." is to pump myself up through the nature of God. That is blasphemy and a thorough degradation of the glorious grace of God.

In 2 Timothy 3:1-2, Paul described the characteristics of apostasy in the last days: **"But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves . . . blasphemers"** (NKJV). Was that a compliment? Was he saying, "Man! I can't wait for those last days to come. We're finally going to figure out how important it is to love ourselves!" No! He has listed it as a characteristic of extreme unrighteousness.

Again, psychology has an element of wisdom. When people hate themselves and think they're just trash, that is a problem. *I can't do anything. I can't change . . . I'm just nothing* are destructive thoughts. Psychology does observe a legitimate problem in low self-esteem, but psychologists act like the Keystone cops running in circles when they prescribe high self-esteem as the solution to low self-esteem. The Bible says we think too highly of ourselves (see Romans 12:3).

### THE ANSWER TO LOW SELF-ESTEEM IS NOT HIGH SELF-ESTEEM.

Yes, you read that right. The answer to low self-esteem is not high self-esteem. It's no self-esteem. No estimation of self. Jesus said, **". . . whoever loses his life for My sake will find it"** (Matthew 10:39b).

Humanistic psychology says, "Find yourself; the answer is in you!" And

Jesus says, “Lose yourself; the answer is in *Me!*” **“For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it”** (Matthew 16:25).

Be honest; those approaches to change are not two shades of the same color. They are opposites. Let’s take out the trash and reject change through self-discovery as a faulty method.

Of course, psychology is not the only villain in faulty change methods. Now let’s look at three faulty methods of change that some people have tried to prove from the Bible. They are potentially even more destructive than the three I’ve already mentioned.

#### **Faulty Method #4: Legalistic Change**

Legalistic change is the idea of change by the power of rules. In the military it works with orders that better be obeyed. “Shine your boots. Make your bunk. March in formation. Don’t talk back. Do this! Shut up! Get in line. Keep moving. Double-time!” Does that produce change? It sure does: It produces *external* change, change on the surface. “Oh, look at you; aren’t you a nice soldier! You have your boots so nice and shined and under your bunk there. Wow! You’re not like those bad soldiers; you’re really on the program!”

Inwardly, though, the soldier may be chafing, doing what he must do, not what he desires to do. Rules may produce external change, but hear this: Rules don’t change the heart!

In fact, rules by themselves just make you want to sin more. That’s the truth of Romans 7:5, **“For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.”** A couple of verses later Paul asked, **“What then shall we say? That the law is sin?”** (verse 7). He meant, “Are the rules that God laid down bad?” And Paul’s reply? **“By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’”** Paul was saying that if all we are about is just knowing the rules, it only makes us want to sin more.

I remember when I was a kid and playing in the basement after school. Mom would pop her head in the door and say, “There’s cookies on the counter upstairs. They’re for dessert. Don’t touch them!” I’m down there having a great time. I wasn’t even thinking about cookies. Then all of a sudden, I’m thinking, *Hmmm, cookies; that’s what I was smelling?* I felt my body being drawn upstairs. *Cookies! I*

*need a cookie; I must have a cookie!*

I remember the same thing when my mom would say, “Your father and I are going to the store; keep on playing in the backyard with your friends like you’re doing now. Just stay in the backyard. Don’t leave! We’ll be back in an hour.” I was very content in the backyard until I heard a rule—the rule that I couldn’t leave. I saw a friend through the fence with a ball, saying, “C’m on over here and play with me.” The fence seemed a hundred feet high, I felt so closed in, and I became desperate to get out of a place that I was content in only moments before. Why? Because the rule pricked my sinful heart, and it made me want what was forbidden. Paul stated the problem this way: **“But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead”** (Romans 7:8). Rules by themselves just amplify our desire to sin.

Perhaps you grew up in a legalistic spiritual environment as I did. With legalism, Christianity is all about conforming to a code of conduct that has been added to the precepts and principles of the Bible and then judging people on the degree to which they conform to the extrabiblical code. “I’m a good Christian because I don’t do the ‘filthy five’ (or the ‘dirty dozen’).” That kind of legalistic focus produces external conformity, like in the military, but not the kind of true life change we are looking for.

Actually, I believe there’s more disobedience to God in the legalistic Christian subculture than anywhere else, because so often there has been no real heart change. Instead, sinful patterns that God wants to change are forced under the surface—a sort of conspiracy of silence. Legalistic Christians are hiding the real truth of who they are from everyone around them. The result? Biblical fellowship is hindered and true life change becomes very difficult. Legalism is a stifling environment where lasting heart change is impossible.

Over the Christmas holidays, my family and I visited a church caught in legalism. I didn’t want to go, but I had no choice and so I went. The problem was I forgot about the dress code. I was sort of “dress casual,” if you know what I mean. Then we got in the building. Oops! Every single male from three years of age to ninety-nine had a suit on, and those ties sure looked tight. Now to their credit, they were friendly, but even the handshake itself was kind of compassionate. “Oh, poor brother. We hope you’ll soon be within the reach of the gospel.” You know, that feeling you get when people are judging you because you’re not quite like they are.

Anyway, I snuggled up my coat, brought my kids in, and sat down. Being familiar with this approach, I was doing really well until they started a baptismal service where the pastor walked right into the baptistery with his suit on, coat and all. I just wanted to stand up and go, “What are you *thinking*! It’s not about rules! Jesus died so we could have a genuine intimacy with Him, not just look the part, or what you think looks the part. Won’t you ever learn that rules by themselves don’t change us? They just force our sinful natures under the surface and help us hide behind externals and pretend we’re closer to God than we really are.”

Of course, God is not for or against suits. Dressing up for church when motivated by reverence and not religion can be good. Similarly, dressing down can be irreverent when done for the wrong reason. The key is always to remember that **“the LORD looks on the heart”** (1 Samuel 16:7).

Legalism is a faulty approach to change that has been prescribed within the church of Jesus Christ by sincere people who want to take the Bible seriously. Systems of behavior that try to produce change through external conformity may produce surface change, but they ultimately collapse, because they do not change the heart.

### **Faulty Method #5: Monastic Change**

“Monastic” comes from the Greek word *monas*, which means *alone*. The first Christian monk was a man named St. Anthony of Thebes; he was a desert dweller in AD 271. The goal of monasticism is true holiness by a complete suppression of the will. It was popular during the Middle Ages, as thousands of monasteries dotted Europe and housed men or women who took three vows: a vow of poverty — “I will own nothing”; a vow of chastity — “I will abstain from all sexuality”; and a vow of obedience — “I will be in full submission to all authority.”

Monks, men who practice monasticism, took on a very difficult life. They were committed to three main activities: work, prayer, and meditation on the Scriptures. I’ve always tried to picture a monk on a cold winter night in a monastery: lonely, hungry, battling covetousness or lust, trying to suppress the will to sin and trying to deny his human desires. Then I would imagine the monk reading his Bible and coming upon Romans 7:15–18:

**For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree**

**with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.**

I could see him bursting out of his little room and running down the stone hall, breaking the silence code (they weren't allowed to talk to each other, either) and then telling his fellow monks: "Guys! Have you checked this out? We can't do this. It doesn't work!" Imagine their frustration to realize that they had been trying to change by a faulty method.

You *cannot* suppress your will and make yourself change. Piles of discarded New Year's resolutions prove you cannot change simply because you purpose to change. In fact, when we say, "I'm not going to do that anymore," not only will we likely do it again, but we may actually want to do it more. When we fail, we feel the waves of regret wash over us, and we promise ourselves, "I'll never do that again." For a while, we really try to be different, but again we fall flat on our face. After repeated failure, there is often a backlash, and we return to our sin with accelerated vigor, thinking, "Well, if I can't change, then I'll just stop trying."

You may be thinking "I'm not a monk and I've never been to a monastery," but how often do we try to live like monks? We try to change by suppressing our will. We try to change without the power of God, using just our own human strength. We experience the frustration of Paul's words in Romans 7:18b, **"For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out."**

Possibly you are reading this book right now, and you are standing at the end of another week of defeat, wondering to yourself, "Will I ever treat my children the way I want to?" "Will I ever break this awful habit?" "Will I ever go through a week without failing in that secret sin?" "Will I ever walk with God as I purpose to walk?" You may be among the majority of listeners sitting in churches week after week and saying, "I agree with the pastor; I want to be that kind of person," who leave encouraged, only to go right out each week and fail again. No wonder so many people have stopped trying to change; it's a lot less painful than trying and failing.

Monastic change has to go. Take it to the trash; no more trying to change through my own willpower. It will never work. As Jesus said, **"The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak"** (Matthew 26:41).

## Faulty Method #6: Intellectual Change

In Robert Louis Stevenson's classic story *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, a mild-mannered doctor would drink a potion and change from a sweet innocent bookkeeper-type to a hideous monster. When the potion wore off, Dr. Jekyll would feel very ashamed. He'd say, "I can't believe that was inside me. I just cannot believe that I could live like that and do those things." Even though he was ashamed and recognized his behavior was wrong, he was strangely drawn to drink the potion again. There was this on-and-off craving and Jekyll's thoughts, "I want to do right, but I don't."

Many times we feel like Dr. Jekyll—the back-and-forth struggle of trying to change. We say to ourselves, "Why did I do that? Why did I say that? Why am I like that?" Then we say these three words: "I know better." In our minds, we agree our actions are wrong. Yet somewhere between knowing and doing, it doesn't happen for us. We begin to discover that there's a big gap between knowing what to change and actual heart change.

It takes more than knowing what God wants. It takes more than knowing how I should live. Most of us would agree there is a great gulf between what we know and what we do. Paul put it this way in Romans 7:22–23: **"For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind [working against what I've learned], and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members."** He later added, **"So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin"** (verse 25). In effect, Paul wrote, "I've come far enough to know what God wants me to do. In my mind, I'm phenomenal. Mentally, I get an A+. But when you look at my actual résumé, there's a lot of failure in my life. There is a big gap between what I know I should be doing and what I am actually doing."

*Change cannot begin until we know that knowing is not enough.* Are you as good an employee as you know to be? Are you as pure in your thoughts as you know to be? Are you as truthful and loving as you know to be? You say, "No, I'm not." That's right, and neither am I. None of us will be if we keep fooling ourselves into thinking that knowing what to change will bring about change. It won't. Churches and pastors and schools and books that promote change through information alone are really promoting frustration, and it's sad, because there is a better way.

START CHANGING HERE.



It's time to admit that we can't do it ourselves, and to recognize none of these six methods has the answer. So how do we change? Where do we begin?

The answer is simple and has two parts: admit and turn.

## WHERE TO BEGIN

### 1. Admit: I am the problem.

First, admit, "I am the problem." Let's accept once and for all that our problems are not due to other people, our parents, or our past. Let's take total responsibility for who we are going to become and bring our desires before God. When we do that, we have taken the first step in change. To take total responsibility is to admit like Paul did in Romans 7:24, "**Wretched man that I am!**" Are you willing to say that?

The word "wretched" means *distressed or miserable through exhaustion from hard labor*. I believe those words came from Paul's lips because he was exhausted from trying to change himself. He came to a desperateness where he said, "God, I want to be a different person. I'm not going to shield myself from the darkness in my own heart anymore. I really want to be the person You want me to be. I want to be righteous and godly and true. So I'm going to face up to who I really am."

"O wretched man"—or woman—realize that change begins with a genuine, humble, contrite admission: "It's me; I'm the problem."

### 2. Turn: Only God can change the heart.

Second, turn to God. Realize only He can change your heart. Notice those words in Romans 7:25: "**Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!**" Students of Scripture get very frustrated with that because they want Paul to say a lot more. "Can't you break that down for me, Paul? Can't you add any stuff? You have me at this desperate condition and I am so ready for the answer and all you say is 'I thank my God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!' Paul, isn't there more?"

It's so simple that we often miss it. The answer is Jesus Christ. He wants to do a work of change in our hearts. We need to come desperately before Him and ask Him to do what only He can do for us—and *in* us. You ask, "Does God still change people?" Yes, He does! God changes people and He wants to change you.

You say, "I want to be changed." Good! That's what this book is about—change. A key strategy in this change is to complete the activities that conclude each chapter. Do these three things: (1) Answer the questions, (2) do the work, and (3) pray the prayer. Begin below, and then join me in chapter 2.

**Teacher Questions**

1. Why is it essential that you eliminate faulty change methods?
2. Which of the faulty methods have you tried? What benefit, if any, did you experience?
3. What are you planning to do with what you learned in this chapter?

**Prophet Questions**

1. What excuses have you used for not changing?
2. What makes you think that this time things will be different?
3. If your answer to question 2 left out Jesus, why?

**Shepherd Questions**

1. What does your willingness to read this book say about the sincerity of your desire to change?
2. In what ways are you beginning to sense that God wants to help you change?
3. How would you put your heart's desire for change into a one-sentence prayer?

**LET'S GET TO WORK**

It will not be easy to read this book quickly. Each chapter will take an hour or more to complete, including answering the teacher, prophet, and shepherd questions and doing the "Let's Get to Work" exercise. Take a few moments now and plan a schedule for completing all ten chapters. Mark your dates next to the boxes below. Choose a specific time and place for reading each chapter over the next few days and weeks. Then call a friend and tell them you are reading a book on change and ask them to pray for you during this important time in your life.

- |                                    |             |                                     |             |
|------------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chapter 1 | Date: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Chapter 6  | Date: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chapter 2 | Date: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Chapter 7  | Date: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chapter 3 | Date: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Chapter 8  | Date: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chapter 4 | Date: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Chapter 9  | Date: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chapter 5 | Date: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Chapter 10 | Date: _____ |

Before you begin chapter 2, spend some time alone with the Lord. Kneel down and pray something like:

**LOOK UP!**

*Lord, I admit it. I'm not nearly as much like Jesus Christ as I should be. I'm not and I know it. The problem is me. I'm not thinking about the weaknesses of others anymore; I am asking You to change me. God, You could do so much more in me.*

*Lord, change me. I know You want to. And I know I need to. I can't do it alone. Please forgive me for blaming others. God, forgive me for trying to change in my own strength and apart from You. I admit the problem is me, and I know I desperately need Your help. I believe that, so help me, God. I do. So please help me, God.*

*Change me. I'm asking in Jesus' name. Amen.*