



Is your life stuck in the mud? It's time to get off the hamster wheel of Christian expectations. With wisdom drawn straight from Scripture, Chip Ingram offers hope that your life really can change. But only when you understand your acceptance by a loving God can it begin to happen.

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Why Do So Many Christians Change So Little?

The world is full of promises of change.

Advertisers hawk products and services that are said to be able to renew your youth, change your appearance, create a new lifestyle, fix your body, improve your mood, make your life easier, and enhance your relationships. They all promise some form of change that will make your life better. But the people who buy into those promises very often end up disappointed—and looking for a new change.

Politicians run their campaigns on promises of change. Since few people are completely happy with the status quo, the most effective political platforms promise to end it. So new waves of leaders are swept into office from time to time, and before long, most voters find themselves still disappointed with the status quo. The next time elections roll around, they vote for more change.

We even promise change to ourselves. Every year as New Year's Day approaches, millions of people vow to make the changes they've been longing and needing to make. They resolve to eat better, exercise more, read certain books, quit certain habits, or take

better vacations. Christians may resolve to read the Bible or pray more consistently, both of which greatly increase the possibility of lasting change. Yet sometime around February, if not sooner, many of those resolutions are long broken and maybe even forgotten, and no matter how many “starting points” we set for ourselves during the year, we often find ourselves facing the next New Year with the same set of resolutions.

The gospel promises change too. The Bible assures us that those who are in Christ are new creations—that old things have passed away, and all things have now become new (2 Cor. 5:17). Many people throughout history and today have experienced radical transformation; their testimonies and examples inspire us to keep believing and hoping for radical transformation in our lives too. Yet the church is also filled with numerous people who haven’t changed much at all. And if we’re honest, most of us can testify that as much as our faith in Jesus as our Savior has changed us, there are still huge areas of our lives that remain frustratingly unchanged.

Polling research by the Barna Group and Gallup tells us that multitudes of people in the Western world who claim to know Jesus as their Savior have not experienced much change in terms of the way they live their lives, the decisions they make, and the character they demonstrate. Some polls have indicated very little difference between Christian and non-Christian divorce rates, family lives, destructive behaviors, and spiritual vitality. More recent polls that account for levels of Christian commitment suggest some significant differences; people who regularly go to church, read their Bibles, pray, and discuss spiritual issues at home actually do have significantly lower divorce rates, fewer addictive behaviors, and more satisfying relationships. But that’s about 10 to 20 percent of the American church, which leaves quite a few Christians who are struggling with failing families, personal chaos, and addictions like pornography,

workaholism, infidelity, and spiritual stagnancy. In many sectors of the church, and in many individual lives, something is very wrong.

What are we to make of that? Is the gospel just one of those promises that ultimately disappoints? Is it the religious equivalent of ambitious advertising, hopeful campaign rhetoric, and personal New Year's resolutions? Have millions, even billions of Christians bought into a false hope of genuine, lasting change?

The problem is not a lack of desire. In my experience, most true Christians have experienced at least some degree of change at some point in their lives and have longed for more. But somewhere along the way, they lost momentum, enthusiasm, and a sense of progress. They grew fatigued and frustrated. Many have had visions of continuous growth, only to experience lots of ups and downs and fall far short of their ideals. Many have never even gotten off the ground to begin with, slipping into old ways of life soon after believing. Yet the promises of God in Scripture remain. The gospel is all about change, and our longings are real. We really do become new creations. So how does that reality play out in our lives?

That's where many Christians are struggling. I can certainly relate to that, and I suspect you can too. How can we claim that Jesus makes a difference in our lives when our lives don't look much different from the society around us? Or, more personally, how can we claim that Jesus makes a difference in our lives when we keep struggling with the same problems and feel frustratingly, achingly unchanged? Many people long for the kind of change that comes with being a new creation. Few are experiencing it. Why?

The Problem of Passive Faith

Before we begin exploring the nuts and bolts of genuine life-change, let's dig a little deeper into the root of the problems that prevent it. Why do so many Christians experience so little change?

Perhaps it comes from living in a traditionally semi-Christian culture in which people go to church, sit still for an hour or two, sing a few songs, listen to a sermon, nod their heads in agreement, assume that their agreement equals faith, and go home living just as they did before—and just as their nonchurchgoing friends do. That's a passive kind of faith, and it keeps people in touch with cultural Christianity. But it doesn't change lives.

When the pursuit of bigger, better, and more dominates our thoughts and activities, it inhibits and undermines the changes God wants to work into our lives.

An hour or two of worship and teaching on Sundays is good, but it is rarely enough to combat the steady stream of un-Christian perspectives that fill our workplaces, communities, media, and interactions with society and culture at large. And that steady stream can be seductive. Many Christians have bought into the lie that we can be satisfied and fulfilled with a little more money, a better job, a successful family

with kids who excel, a coveted neighborhood, nicer clothes, a remodeled house, a better car, and better vacations. All those things can be wonderful blessings given by God, but they can also become idols that compel our hearts to keep reaching for more and never having enough. When the pursuit of bigger, better, and more dominates our thoughts and activities, it inhibits and undermines the changes God wants to work into our lives. We eventually find that bigger, better, and more never really satisfies, and the change that would have satisfied us remains elusive.

Millions of Christians have settled for the emptiness of worldly pursuits by prioritizing them over the adventure of walking with God and experiencing the transformation He gives. Jesus promised that when we seek God's kingdom and righteousness above all else,

all else tends to fall into place (Matt. 6:33). Unfortunately, passive faith tends to reverse that order. Those who seek the kingdom of God first get that and more; those who seek worldly pursuits above the kingdom of God usually miss out on the satisfaction of both. As C. S. Lewis wrote, “You can’t get second things by putting them first; you can get second things only by putting first things first.”¹ Many Christians have found that to be painfully true.

If any of the above describes your experience, don’t despair. Passive faith is an easy pattern to fall into, and Jesus warned that it’s powerfully seductive, but it doesn’t mean you’ve failed. It just means you’ve gradually been affected by cultural and social trends that thwart God’s transforming work in your life. There’s no condemnation for those who are in Christ. If you recognize this pattern in your life, the good news is that recognizing it is the first step to changing it. Your heavenly Father is ready and waiting for you to turn to Him and enter into a deeper and more fulfilling relationship with Him.

In my many years of pastoring and leading ministries, I have become convinced that many people are not intentionally distancing themselves from God. They just don’t understand or know how to apply biblical truth to their lives. Far too many people fit Paul’s description of “having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:5). The average professing believer can affirm that Jesus died on the cross, rose from the grave, and saved us from our sins. Most can point to a time when they accepted Christ by faith as their Savior and asked Him into their hearts. But many who have experienced an initial change of perspective and lifestyle ceased to grow significantly in ways that impact their core values and character. Jesus has not made a significant difference in the way many Christians live—how they spend their time, handle their sexuality, live with integrity, determine their priorities, fulfill their roles in marriage and parenting, love their neighbors as themselves, and seek to

reach the world for Christ. The church as a whole desperately needs to experience the fullness of God and His power to transform us.

Receiving the free gift of salvation is a huge, foundational decision, but it is a starting point for the rest of our lives, not the culmination of our faith. The cross and resurrection save us from the penalty of sin when we believe, but they are also meant to save us from sin's influence in our lives from that day forward. It's great to know what we were saved *from*, but we also need to discover what we were saved *for*. God has redeemed us so He can restore us into His image. We were saved in order to experience a holy transformation that not only changes our own lives but also the lives of people around us.

Unfortunately, evangelical Christianity has developed a culture in which no one is very surprised when someone prays to receive Christ and continues in a lifestyle of minimal change. For many, this may reflect a casual approach to faith, but I think most genuine believers feel stuck in a dilemma. On one hand, they know that Christ is living within them. On the other, they continue to struggle with sin and get swept into the influences of their culture.

My heart goes out to people caught in that dilemma because I know from experience what it feels like. They go back and forth between wondering whether something is wrong with them or with the gospel itself. Many haven't connected with other believers who could help them, developed new habits that allow transformation to occur, or learned the principles of spiritual growth. Over time, that ongoing dilemma leads to a life of resignation—Christian in name, but agnostic toward how it all works. They hope they go to heaven but wish they could experience its power on earth. Little by little, the new life fades back into the old, and even though they hunger for change from time to time, they have little hope of experiencing it. They resign themselves to passive faith.

Why Is Change So Elusive?

Why are so many Christians missing out on authentic, supernatural, spiritual transformation? Why is there such a gap between the picture we are given in Scripture and the picture of so many Christians' lives? Why does transformation seem so difficult and beyond reach?

Jesus met a man who had been paralyzed for thirty-eight years (John 5:1–15). The man had been lying near the pool of Bethesda, where the waters were thought to have healing power whenever they were stirred by an angel. Many blind, paralyzed, and sick people positioned themselves at the pool's edge so they could be the first one in when the water moved. But this man had a problem. He said he couldn't get to the water first because he had no one to help him. He had managed to put himself in proximity of a major transformation but not close enough to actually experience it. So he remained paralyzed, unable to do anything about his condition, with change just out of reach.

Does that sound familiar? That's not a bad description of the dilemma many people face, longing for the idea of change but perhaps reluctant or even paralyzed to take the steps that would actually create it. Jesus, who had looked into the hearts of so many other people and pointed out their true thoughts and motivations, clearly understood this man's predicament. He knew the problem, and He knew how to fix it. But He asked the lame man a penetrating question: "Do you want to get well?" (John 5:6). And the man never really gave Him a straight answer. He responded only with an excuse for why change wasn't possible.

Jesus' question seems obvious on the surface. Anybody seeing a paralyzed man at the edge of a pool known for healing would assume he wanted to get well. But the human desire for change is rarely that simple. Change means leaving some familiar things behind, and many people are afraid to do that. That's one reason

so many people feel stuck in dysfunctional relationships and avoid dealing with the dysfunction, or why employees discontent in their work don't go to the trouble to seek a new position and instead remain where they are. It's what they know. The benefit of change is that it allows for a new way of life. The problem with change is that it demands a new way of life. It isn't an easy fix.

We also have to battle our own physiology. Our brains are wired for habits. That is very helpful most of the time; it means we don't have to relearn everything we know and do every single day. But it also means that developing new ways of thinking and doing things can be very difficult. Neurologists tell us that established neural pathways work to overcome new, developing pathways, and the only way the new ones can become established is through strong conviction and persistence in renewing our minds. That's why time and consistency are so important in our change processes. Far too many people give up before the new becomes a part of their lives.

Motivation and neurology aside, I think there are at least three primary reasons Christians fail to change as thoroughly as Scripture promises: spiritual ignorance, spiritual isolation, and spiritual myopia.

Spiritual Ignorance

Many Christians simply don't know who they are. They don't understand their identity in Christ, the new nature they have been given, the foundation of grace God has provided, and the Spirit who lives within them. As a result, they revert to old-nature strategies: try hard, do good, fail, and try again. Those strategies come early in life; most of us have been trained from an early age in a punishment-and-reward system. We experience negative consequences for bad behavior, but we are given incentives and rewards for good behavior. So it's only natural that we would apply the same psychology of behavior to our relationship with God.

But that's not the kind of relationship God has given us. Jesus already took the punishment for our sins, united us with Him in resurrected life, and made us His coheirs so we can receive the rewards He deserves. That's part of what it means to be "in Christ." He exchanged His life for ours, taking our sin upon Himself and giving us His own righteousness. He paid the price for us, and we enter into the life He has given. When we act as if our relationship with God is based on our behavior, we are stepping out of that grace and reverting to old ways. We have to know who we are in Him and live from the new righteousness He has provided.

The biblical word for being made right with God is *justification*. That's what happens the moment we receive Christ. We are justified. God takes all the sin and guilt in the debt column of our lives and marks it "paid in full." This isn't just a wave of a wand or an arbitrarily canceled debt. It is based on what Jesus did on the cross. He took the penalty of our sins upon Himself, and when we receive Him by faith, that sacrifice applies to our relationship with God. Everything is paid for. Not only that, the righteousness of Jesus was deposited into our account, so God sees us as holy and pure in Him. That's our legal standing before God (Acts 13:39; Rom. 3:24, 28). We can't add to that standing or take away from it. It's ours—a gift of grace.

The biblical word for living out that justification—demonstrating the righteousness that has already been given to us—is *sanctification*. It simply means being "set apart" to God. In one sense, we have already been sanctified—set apart and made holy. But in a practical sense, it's an ongoing and lifelong process by which God changes our heart and life from the inside out to conform our character to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29; 1 Thess. 5:23). Like being given a new wardrobe that doesn't fit us now, we are given sanctification and then spend our lives growing into it.

But that's where the problems arise. Many Christians don't

know how to grow into it. How do we make use of the grace God has given? Why do we keep sinning if God already forgave us and cleanses us? How do we live as new creations in our old, sin-saturated environment? If we don't know the answers to those questions, we will revert to the try hard, do good for a while, fail, then try again cycle. Eventually that turns into trying hard and faking it—or just giving up.

The pattern of “trying hard, doing good” for a time, and then failing can be terribly disheartening.

For the first two years of my Christian life, I lived in two worlds. On Thursday nights, I would sing praises to God in the living room of a brick-layer who led our campus ministry. On Friday nights, I would barhop with my basketball teammates all over town. I was miserable, plagued by a never-ending cycle of failure, guilt, depression, repentance, resolutions to never do that again, another try, and back to failure again. I had tasted the reality and freedom of my new life in Christ. Living out that reality was another matter. God brought some great people and some biblical teaching into my life that broke this vicious cycle. Unfortunately, many Christians are still stuck in it.

The pattern of “trying hard, doing good” for a time, and then failing can be terribly disheartening. I've heard the same laments again and again from numerous Christians:

“I try to read my Bible every day, but I miss sometimes and get off track.”

“I try to conquer my lusts, but they keep coming back.”

“I try to pray, but I'm not getting answers, and I lose heart.”

“I try to be patient, but I keep losing my temper.”

The variations are limitless, but the dynamics are always the same. This is willpower Christianity, and no matter how long it succeeds, one failure makes the whole effort feel as if it is “unsuccessful.”

A 90-percent success rate isn't enough if frequent or even occasional failures seem to put us back at square one.

About a year and a half into my Christian life, I was so frustrated with my failures that I actually tried to quit. I got stuck in that dilemma between “something's wrong with me” and “the gospel isn't working.” I didn't realize it was a lack of knowledge about God, His Word, and the sanctification process. I needed to learn how to tap into God's grace and power. I believe millions of believers across our country are living in that kind of defeat because they don't know what God teaches us about how holy transformation works in everyday life.

The process of sanctification requires us to walk by faith, and walking by faith necessarily involves responding to the alerts and prompts of Scripture. When God's Word shines light on a problem in us, it opens up a conversation with Him. We ask Him what it looks like to trust Him in a particular situation, relationship, or problem and read and listen for His answers. But it is important not to focus only on the issue itself. Focusing on our sin and struggles intensifies them. We need to turn our focus instead to whichever of God's promises apply to the temptation or struggle we're going through. Then we walk with Him by faith through that situation. As we apply these promises as our source of strength to address these issues, we are walking by faith. That's the core of Christian living, and we are changed in the process.

You can't live this life of faith by just reading the Bible a little bit here and there. As I've counseled hundreds of believers over the years—many with significant financial, relational, and moral problems—I generally ask them about their intake of God's Word. The answer is almost always the same: little or no personal devotion or study. Life-change demands that you make every effort to work the truth of God's Word into your heart. That should be one of your life

goals as a believer: to master the contents and truths of the Bible. I know it's a big book. But if you're like many people, you are well versed in the nightly news, sports stats, the latest in movies and music, or whatever your special interests happen to be. You probably already know how to be a zealous student of your culture and your times. So why not take some of that energy and attention and apply it to something that matters for eternity?

If Bible reading feels like an item on a to-do list that reminds us how far we're falling short, it becomes a chore that interrupts our downtime. No wonder it's so easy to neglect it. But as we learn to make it a conversation with the God of the universe that deepens and directs us, it can become the highlight of our day. And if we supplement that conversation with some study helps, commentaries, and devotionals, it becomes all the richer. Over time, we begin to notice some significant changes in our perspectives, attitudes, and choices.

Immersing yourself in Scripture and choosing to believe what God says about you will radically reorient your thinking. Sadly, too many Christians are trying to overcome their sin by targeting and focusing on their sin. But that's still a preoccupation with sin, isn't it? When you keep kicking yourself for your sins, you reinforce them by giving them so much attention. If you see yourself as a helpless sinner, you'll continue to live that vision out. But God says to consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God (Rom. 6). He says you are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). He replaces your shame with honor, your ashes with beauty, and your mourning with praise (Isa. 61:3). He says He removes your sins as far as the east is from the west (Ps. 103:12) and has canceled out your debts (Col. 2:14). He has given you the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). It can feel really irresponsible not to fixate on your sin—as if you're failing to police yourself—but doing so lines up with what God says and gives Him

and you an opportunity to fill your mind with something else. It's the only way to break the cycle.

That's what immersing ourselves in biblical truth can do for us. It doesn't happen overnight, and there are still some practical steps to take. But spiritual ignorance is not bliss. God wants better for you.

Spiritual Isolation

A second reason many Christians don't change is spiritual isolation—a failure to be deeply engaged in Christ-centered, honest relationships. By God's design, transformation normally happens in the context of community. There are very few exceptions. We experience change when we participate in regular, loving, accountable relationships centered on God's Word.

This requires faith, courage, and discernment. Not all Christian communities are mature enough to handle transparency and the flaws of their members without making judgments and creating false hierarchies of spirituality. Authenticity can be risky because grace is sometimes lacking in Christian relationships. But when you find brothers and sisters in Christ who are filled with grace, patience, and humility, and who understand the importance of mutual accountability, I encourage you to take a step of faith to open up and grow together. God uses the gifts, knowledge, and experience of other believers to help us learn to trust Him. We overcome the issues in our lives because God gives grace through His Word, His Spirit, and His people. When we realize we are totally accepted—by God and other believers—we live out our faith by grace, the same way we were saved.

Creating the right environment for safe, authentic relationships is central to helping others mature spiritually. Parents can set up their children for life transformation by regular conversations and warm interactions that flow from reading Scripture together

and modeling the importance of God's Word. These times can be brief, relational, and even lighthearted at times; you don't have to fill them with information or be able to answer all their questions. Bible storybooks, family devotionals, and private conversations can become treasured memories and have lifelong impact. Family is the most important small group God ever designed.

Most spiritual isolation is caused by a subtle form of pride—not the flagrant pride of an arrogant person but the kind of pride that elevates personal agendas and priorities above God's stated purposes for our lives. When *my* work, *my* time, *my* goals squeeze God's Word and authentic spiritual relationships out of my schedule, I end up with shallow relationships, isolated from the transforming grace we receive when we serve and give of ourselves sacrificially. I know I've lived that life and, as a pastor for more than three decades, counseled countless others who have done the same. The pursuit of happiness through possessions, lifestyle, status, or independence leaves us pretty unhappy. We miss out on God's means for transformation.

The world is filled with driven, talented people who have done that—who have reached the pinnacle of success and find themselves lonely, isolated, and depressed. They have missed out on meaningful relationships on their way to getting everything they thought they wanted, only to find out they really wanted meaningful relationships. Even if they accepted Christ and go to church, they usually haven't changed much. They haven't been able to enjoy the miracle of being a new creation.

It isn't just a good idea to have a few close friends with whom you can really share your heart. Biblical, Christ-centered relationships are essential components of the Christian life. This is where most of our transformation occurs. The people who are too busy for those kinds of relationships end up being the "average" American

Christian whose life doesn't look much different from a nonbeliever's. They may be saved, but they aren't really experiencing their salvation. And they aren't becoming more and more like Jesus because they aren't walking with people who can model Christlikeness for them, hold them accountable, and help them grow.

The people who have had the greatest impact on me are those who have loved me enough to speak truth to me, even when it hurt. I'll never forget an early morning meeting at McDonald's with my mentor. He opened his Bible and read Proverbs 27:5–6—"Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses." Then, with tears in his eyes, he pointed out a pattern of pride and arrogance that I was totally unaware of. It hurt deeply. I didn't like it. I mentally fought against it as it came out of his mouth, but the Holy Spirit spoke through him, and it was a major turning point in my life.

It isn't easy to hear a friend tell you that you're being arrogant or insensitive or too hard on your wife or kids. But that's love. That kind of accountability has spared me untold heartache. And it only happens in deep, honest, vulnerable relationships that take time and effort to develop.

Being in some kind of growth group—a small group that studies the Bible and prays together, a ministry team, or an accountability group—is perhaps the most important thing you can do for your spiritual transformation. And it's the example Jesus gave us. He came to transform the world, and He didn't set up a classroom, write a book, develop a seminar, create an online course, or advertise a program. He started a small group of men and lived with them for three years. Others followed, many learned, but the core group that spent all their time with Him were transformed the most during those years. He lived with them, modeled life for them, shared God's Word with them, and walked with them through their

doubts, questions, spiritual successes, and worst failures.

That's how I learned what the Christian life looks like. After college, I lived with the family of the man who discipled me. I learned about marriage by watching him interact with his wife. I saw how he parented his children. I noticed how he served people. I watched him stop and help someone change a tire on a rainy day when the leaders of a Christian conference we had just attended all drove on by. He didn't just teach me truth; he exemplified it. It's often said that truth and faith are "more caught than taught," and it's true. We change in the context of relationships with people who teach, model, and live truth together. As one mentor told me, "Show me your friends, and I'll show you your future."

Spiritual Myopia

Myopia is nearsightedness, the inability to see clearly at a distance. One of the reasons many Christians do not experience the life-change they envision is their overdeveloped focus on immediate, up-close motivations. Sometimes they want to be more Christlike because it would lead to greater joy and fulfillment, because they want God to use them for His purposes, or because they want to avoid feeling guilty for not growing. Those desires can motivate us for a time, but they rarely last. Why? Because they aren't big enough.

Spiritual myopia subtly and insidiously makes spiritual progress a personal matter that's no one else's business. It misses the big picture—a vision of the majesty of God, the testimony of the body of Christ in the world, His desire to manifest His wisdom, power, and love in every believer. The world watches and wonders. *Is Christianity legitimate? Is the Holy Spirit real? Is the church different from any other religious organization? Is there a God who loves me and watches over me? Can I hope for heaven?* We can develop all the theological arguments we want, learn the art and logic of apologetics, and make

our case for Christianity, but none of that creates a testimony as powerful as our lifestyle. The greatest evidence for Christianity is Christians. And if we are living ingrown, self-centered, typical lives that blend in with the rest of our culture, we are misrepresenting the nature of God, the salvation of Jesus, and the calling of the church. Or, as Jesus would put it (Matt. 5:13–16), the salt has lost its saltiness and the light is hidden from the world.

In many sectors of society and the church, Christianity has been reduced to a system of how-to lists or a moral and ethical code that isn't much different from society's best standards. It has become a collection of advice and hacks

for how to have a happy life, a wonderful marriage, good kids, financial security, and the approval of a somewhat distant God. There's nothing wrong with having good relationships and a comfortable lifestyle, but those are best seen as byproducts of the faith, not its substance. They are not the essence or purpose of God's call.

There's another aspect to our myopia that can also inhibit change. Much of Christian teaching in certain periods of history, including ours, has narrowed the gospel down to spiritual salvation and nothing else, as if God is only concerned about our souls but not the practical details of our lives. Many believers have therefore subconsciously divided their lives into the spiritual and everything else. But most people find, after being saved, that they really need help with the everything else, not just the spiritual. They have problems with relationships, health, finances, decision-making, and every other area of their lives. We forget that Jesus never talked about the gospel of salvation in isolation. He talked about the kingdom of God. That covers a lot. It is relevant to every aspect of our lives here

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and now as well as in eternity. It's comprehensive.

We are made for eternity but placed in this space-and-time world. We are called both to know and love God forever and to demonstrate His character, nature, and salvation in our here-and-now lives. Biblical Christianity gives us answers to life's deepest questions about why we are here, the meaning of life, and our ultimate destiny, and God calls us to live as the answers to those questions in the midst of our society. When we get a high view of God, grapple with and grow in understanding of His sovereign purposes in creation and redemption, and recapture the wonder and awe of His majesty, we grow. Change happens. We realize where we fit in His larger purposes and live them out in front of a watching world. And our myopia is healed.

The Testimony of a Transformed Life

The non-Christian world raises many intellectual and philosophical objections to Christianity, but much of the dialogue about our faith in our society centers on character issues. Many people perceive Christians as judgmental and condescending. Some point to the scandals and corruption that have plagued the church and assume these incidents are typical—that if you scratch the veneer of Christianity, you find the same flaws, lusts, greed, and self-centeredness at the core of every person's life, whether they claim the name of Jesus or not. Many accuse church leaders of ulterior motives in maintaining a profitable business, an exclusive club, or a system of power. A popular quote often attributed to Gandhi makes this point: "I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."² All of these objections come down to one common element: the lack of real change in Christians' lives. The world can find plenty of evidence that many of us are not Christlike, and that evidence is magnified in the hands of those who reject our faith.

Think of the testimony we could have if those scandals, behavioral flaws, and mixed motives became rare exceptions rather than common observations and headlines. What impact would it have on our loved ones? Our society? Our governments, schools, media, and community organizations? What if Christians became widely known as desirable friends, employees, and volunteers because of our humility, servant-heartedness, integrity, and love? What if we presented a clear picture of Jesus and demonstrated the power of a transformed life in ways that only our most strident critics could deny? What if we radically changed the way people see Jesus and His followers? We might actually turn the world upside down (again), and God might draw many to faith through us.

What if Christians became widely known as desirable friends, employees, and volunteers because of our humility, servant-heartedness, integrity, and love?

As it stands right now, believers can be as materialistic and greedy—and as deeply in debt—as nonbelievers. Disturbing numbers of Christians are trapped in pornography and other addictive behaviors. The divorce rate among committed Christians is substantially lower than that among non-Christians, but it is still alarmingly high. Those who claim the name of Christ know how to develop destructive habits, sabotage their relationships, and misdirect their priorities as well as anybody. But all of that can change. Transformed lives are contagious. We can become catalysts of change not only for Christian culture but for society as a whole.

Committed, discipled, transformed Christians are not perfect. If you are on that path of transformation, you know very well that we face many of the same kinds of struggles that everyone else faces, and sometimes we stumble, stagger, or fall. But we continue to grow because we recognize that Jesus owns our priorities, our time, our

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money, our relationships, our families, and our own selves. We make it our goal to thrive in marriage or singleness, raise kids, serve others, seek purity, maintain integrity, and live His way rather than ours. We may not be perfect at it, but we are growing in that direction.

Wherever you are on that spectrum from casual Christian to frustrated Christian to growing and changing Christian, you can learn the principles and tools of greater transformation. The

statistics, problems, and frustrations we've covered in this chapter do not have to be your story. We've introduced three hindrances to life-change—spiritual ignorance, spiritual isolation, and spiritual myopia—as common pitfalls for all of us. But it is important to know from the outset, without a doubt, that you are not stuck in any of them. Paul identified some profound, practical truths in the fourth chapter of Ephesians that can change your life. We will unpack them in ways that I think will be encouraging and empowering for you. Transformation really is possible, it is truly miraculous, and it is promised by the God who loves you and has designed you to reflect who He is.

Diagnostic Questions

- When you think about the possibility of genuine life transformation, what aspects of it excite you? Do any aspects of it frighten or intimidate you? If so, why?
- In which areas of your life have you been frustrated with lack of change? At this moment, how motivated are you to pursue change in those areas?
- What past teaching, experiences, and hopes are influencing your expectations for future transformation? How would you describe your expectations for change right now? Do you believe real, lasting change is possible? Why or why not?
- Which of the three inhibitors of change—spiritual ignorance, spiritual isolation, and spiritual myopia—seem relevant to you? Why?

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