

HOW CHRIST CHANGES
US BY HIS GRACE

how people **change**

(STUDY GUIDE)



Timothy S. Lane | Paul David Tripp

HOW PEOPLE CHANGE

How Christ Changes Us by His Grace

STUDY GUIDE

Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp

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How People Change: How Christ Changes Us by His Grace
Study Guide

New Growth Press, Greensboro, NC 27404

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First edition 2000. Second edition 2008. Third edition 2010.

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Cover Design: faceoutbooks, Nate Saliccioli and Jeff Miller,

www.faceoutbooks.com

Typesetting: Lisa Parnell, lparnell.com

ISBN-13: 978-1-935273-84-4









ISBN-10: 1-935273-84-1

Printed in the United States of America

20 19 18 17 16 15 14

12 13 14 15

Course Outline

	A Word of Welcome.....	v
	Acknowledgments	ix
	<i>Lesson 1</i>	
	Here's Where God Is Taking You.....	1
	<i>Lesson 2</i>	
	So, You're Married to Christ.....	17
	<i>Lesson 3</i>	
	Change Is a Community Project.....	33
	<i>Lesson 4</i>	
	Life as God Sees It, Change as God Does It	45
	<i>Lesson 5</i>	
	HEAT 1: The Real God in the Real World	65
	<i>Lesson 6</i>	
	HEAT 2: The Real You in the Real World.....	79
	<i>Lesson 7</i>	
	THORNS 1: What Entangles You?	89
	<i>Lesson 8</i>	
	THORNS 2: Why Do You Get Entangled?	103
	<i>Lesson 9</i>	
	CROSS 1: New Identity and New Potential.....	119
	<i>Lesson 10</i>	
	CROSS 2: The Cross and Daily Living	131
	<i>Lesson 11</i>	
	FRUIT 1: Real Heart Change.....	145
	<i>Lesson 12</i>	
	FRUIT 2: New and Surprising Fruit.....	161
	At a Glance: How People Change.....	182

A Word of Welcome

Welcome to *How People Change*. We are gratified that you have chosen to use this course to help God's people understand what it means to be progressively transformed into the likeness of Christ. Our prayer is that *How People Change* will produce a harvest of lasting change in you and the people in your ministry or church.

How People Change has an ambitious goal. Our prayer is that God will use this course to change people's lives as he transforms their hearts by his grace. Our goal is that through this study, people will live more functionally Christlike lives, even in the middle of life's hardest challenges. We sincerely believe that when God cleans the inside of the dish, the outside will also become clean (Matthew 23:25). We have written this course to help people understand and participate in the grace-driven, Christ-centered work of personal transformation that God pursues in every situation and relationship of their lives.

Let us offer a few words of introduction to the course you are about to teach.

1. Our goal is to train you and to provide you with a resource that enables you to teach people how God works growth and change in their hearts and lives, transforming them into the image of Christ. *How People Change* is intentionally Christ-centered and heart-focused. We want this material to impact you as the leader first of all; we want you to feel that it is "yours." Accordingly, we encourage you not to view it as a script you must read or memorize word for word. At the same time, we ask you not to substantially add to or alter its content. What is here has been carefully and prayerfully included and tested.
2. Many people in our culture would call *How People Change* a self-help course because it leads people through steps of

self-examination and change. However, the Bible would use two words for this material. The first word would be *gospel*. This course is a study of what God has done in Christ to transform us from idolatry-enslaved sinners to people who are like him, zealous to do what he says is good in a world that is terribly broken. This course celebrates the truth that Jesus came to save us because we are unable to save ourselves. His work addresses the deepest and most personal issues of human experience. This course calls people to know their world, to know themselves, and to know the Lord and his grace. And it calls them to a personal commitment to a lifelong process of transformation into the image of Christ. The second word the Bible would use for this course is *discipleship*. Discipleship is walking with someone as he or she learns to walk more faithfully with the Lord. Rather than helping themselves through this course, people are being discipled by the Lord as they are discipled by you.

3. This material should not be treated as a compilation of abstract information. This is not a theology course, but a God-ordained opportunity for you to know, confess, repent, obey, and grow. As you humbly examine yourself, looking into the mirror of God's Word and seeing your heart, your self-disclosing example will bring authenticity and enthusiasm to this material that cannot be written onto the page. Pray that God will use this course to change you and those you teach.
4. *How People Change* systematizes God's work of heart and life transformation, but it is vital to remember that living a Christ-like life and discipling others to do so is always more than a system of change or a set of techniques. That is why this course rests not on a model or formula for change, but on the presence and power of a living, active Redeemer. Our ultimate goal is to encourage people to:
 - Look at themselves in the mirror of God's Word.
 - Know and rely on Christ's grace.
 - Step out into life with renewed faith and courage.

As they do these things, they will experience the fact that they have been given "everything they need for life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3)—

all that they need not just for eternal life, but for a God-pleasing life in the here and now.

Let us say again that we are excited that you are beginning this journey. Remember that we are prepared to assist you in every way we can. Our hope is that this course will be part of a long ministry partnership between CCEF and your church and ministry.

In Christ,
Timothy S. Lane
Paul David Tripp

Acknowledgments

It would be impossible to properly acknowledge the many people who have contributed to the content and development of this curriculum over the years. However, there are a few who must be mentioned. Thanks first to David Powlison, who developed the material that is the basis for *How People Change*. Sue Lutz edited this piece, making a much better training tool. Michael Breece did a great job of editing this 2010 reformatted curriculum. The faculty of CCEF has stood behind and supported us throughout its writing and have, in many ways, contributed to its content. Thanks to each one of you.

We want to offer a special word of appreciation to all the churches around the country that were willing to test this course. Your contribution is invaluable. You have challenged and encouraged us and helped sharpen the curriculum.

Our gratitude also goes to the churches and individuals who gave sacrificially to support this curriculum project. We could never have attempted a project as costly, as labor intensive, and as time consuming as this one without your help. You have been a constant source of encouragement to us. For all who will use this curriculum, for the churches whose ministries will benefit, and for the people who will grow and change as a result, we say thank you.

There are times in ministry when you are privileged to see God's "total involvement paradigm" ("as each part does its part") in operation. The writing of this curriculum has been one of those times.

About CCEF

Since 1968, the Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation (CCEF) has been at the forefront of the biblical counseling movement with the mission to restore Christ to counseling and counseling to the

local church. CCEF's goal is to teach people how to explore the wisdom and depth of the Bible and apply its grace-centered message to the problems of daily living. This mission is accomplished through a combination of counseling, training, publications, and conferences. These strands are tied together by a passion to equip God's people to experience Christ amid the challenges of everyday life. For more information about CCEF, go to www.ccef.org.

Here's Where God Is Taking You

INTRODUCTION

Let's become familiar with the study guide's format by briefly looking at each section. The first thing to notice is the figure titled "At a Glance: How People Change," which is on the last page of the guide. It is a summary of the *How People Change* course. We'll be referring to it often, which is why it is in a place that is easily located. This page gives you a quick preview of the model of personal change we will be learning: HEAT-THORNS-CROSS-FRUIT. The numbers in the diagram indicate the lesson that covers the topic. Next, turn to the Word of Welcome page at the beginning of your study guide. Take some time later to read this on your own. But right now turn to page iii, entitled "Course Outline." This lists each lesson that we'll cover in this course. Just like the At a Glance page, it provides a summary of the entire course. Once again, you can see that the model of personal heart and life transformation we will explore contains four elements: HEAT-THORNS-CROSS-FRUIT.

CENTRAL POINT AND APPLICATION

Each session begins with a section entitled Central Point and Application—CPR for short. This section functions like a map for each lesson. It will give you a sense of where we're going. Notice that this section is divided into three parts. Central Point lists the core truth you need to know and remember from each lesson. Personal Application helps you to see the implications of that truth for your personal life. And Relational

Application points to how each truth sets the agenda for your relationship with others for ministry.

The initials of these three points, CPR, give us a way of remembering that we are focusing on heart change. The promise of the gospel is that Christ will completely change our lives by transforming our hearts by his grace. Although we would often settle for circumstantial or behavioral change, God loves us too much to settle for that. He is intent on changing us, and because all of our actions, reactions, and responses are guided by our hearts, that is where his work of change is focused. Heart change is what bears visible fruit in our daily lives, affecting our families, church body, and communities. By changing hearts, God is changing lives—yours and those around you.

THE BIG QUESTION

Each lesson will present you with the Big Question, which will help you take the core teaching of the lesson and use it to examine yourself, your situation, and your Lord. We hope that God will use these questions to further the work of heart transformation he has begun in you.

LESSON CONTENT

We will spend a portion of our time viewing the DVD, which presents the main content of each lesson. Every lesson will include a time for a small group activity related to the lesson's content. Some lessons will also have an opening discussion.

CPR

An extended version of CPR recaps the lesson and goes into more detail about its main ideas and applications.

HOMEWORK

1. *Lesson Content:* Each week at home you should read the lesson that was previously viewed on DVD.

2. *Make It Real:* Be sure to answer the questions in the Make It Real section. This may be the most important section of your study guide because it is the place where you make the course material your own. You are strongly encouraged to do the assignments so that:

- You will know yourself and your heart better.
- You will deepen your understanding of how God transforms you, right where you live every day, from what you are to the likeness of his Son.
- You will learn how he is calling you to participate in the work of change he is daily doing in you.

One thing this section will not provide is “10 easy steps to a quick fix.” Life is not like that, and we won’t insult you by implying that it is! When done thoughtfully, however, these questions will help you apply the truths of the lesson to the specifics of your own life. Take time to answer them in a way that reflects where you are in your relationship to the Lord and where you believe he wants to take you. Be honest—write what you think and feel, not what you think you *should* write. Make It Real will be useful in the change process only if you are honest before the Lord. You will not be graded or judged, so treat this material like a trusted friend who can help you face a challenge. Some of your answers may be too personal to share with the group, but we hope you will share them with at least one person. Write your answers down, complete or incomplete, and trust God to help you to find him if you seek him with your questions (1 Chronicles 28:9).

At the beginning of each session, we will discuss some of your answers to the Make It Real assignment. This discussion time is important. Through it you will learn from each other, encourage one another, and allow God to use your gifts in the lives of others.

3. Personal Growth Project: Another way this course will encourage change in your life is the Personal Growth Project introduced in lesson 6. You will be asked to choose an area in your life where you believe God wants to change you. After prayerful thought, you might realize that God is putting his finger on your road rage, the way you play golf or talk to your children, your relationship to money, your view of your looks, your relationship with a parent or spouse, your cynicism, grumbling, gossip—or something else entirely. Next, you’ll be asked to consider what it would look like for this specific area of your life—which is controlled by your heart—to undergo transformation. What is your goal, and how will you get there? As you apply the truths you learn each week, our hope is that you would begin to see substantial changes by the end of the course.

A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Though this is a study guide with a predictable format, our prayer is that your experience with this material will be anything but predictable. We hope these lessons will instill hope and faith about what lies ahead as Christ completes his sanctifying work in you.

One of the many amazing things Christ is doing right now is changing you by the power of his Holy Spirit into someone worthy of honor in his kingdom. Someday you will receive a crown of righteousness, a crown of life, and a crown of glory from his powerful and gracious hands. “And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory” (1 Peter 5:4). “And when Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory” (Colossians 3:4).

Whether you have been a Christian for a day or a decade, we pray that the Lord will use this material to show you how your heart, mind, spirit, and will are either moving you toward God or away from him at any given moment, as well as toward or away from other people, and even yourself. There are new problems to recognize, long-standing issues to face yet again, Sabbaths to take, wars to win, lusts to lose, relationships to reconcile, and more. The calling is constant and the task enormous, but you do not undertake it without supernatural resources. As long as you live, you have hope for change. Do you believe that? “Lord, I do believe. Help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24). May the Lord bless your journey.

AT A GLANCE

Now let’s begin our first lesson by taking a look again at the last page, the At a Glance diagram. You will see three trees under the heat of the sun. This picture represents how God changes us in the middle of the toughest challenges of life. We all have trials, pressures, temptation, and difficulty in our lives (HEAT). As sinners we all tend, in our hearts, to respond in a variety of sinful ways to what is going on in our lives (THORNS). God meets us in our sin and struggle with his heart-transforming grace (CROSS). Finally, as our hearts are transformed by that grace, we begin to respond to the same old difficulty in brand new ways (FRUIT). This is the journey we will be taking together.

Let’s pray and then we will look at our Central Point and Application and the Big Question, and view our first DVD. As you view the DVDs, you can take notes in the margins of your lesson and use the four additional note pages at the end of your study guide.

CENTRAL POINT AND APPLICATION

Central Point: Living with God's ultimate destination in view gives hope and perspective in our daily situations and relationships.

Personal Application: I need to know what kind of hope directs my life. Functionally, what am I really living for?

Relational Application: I need to look for ways to help others live with the final destination in view.

THE BIG QUESTION

What hopes and goals give direction to your life?

LESSON CONTENT

DVD

Small Group Activity

1. Introduce yourself to your group by stating your name, your occupation, a brief description of your family (spouse, children), and share one of your “future orientations” when you were younger and how that determined your perspective, priorities, and actions.
2. Share with your group how you hope God will use this curriculum in your life.
3. Take time to pray together as a group.

HOMEWORK

Human beings are “meaning makers.” We are constantly searching for answers and seeking meaning and purpose for the events and activities in our lives: the shocking tragedy of terrorist actions, a cancer diagnosis, a friend's divorce, parenting styles, the effects of sexual abuse, racial profiling, working seventy-five hours a week, and so on. As we suffer, struggle, achieve or relax, we ask ourselves, consciously or subconsciously, “*What is the point? What's the purpose? What does it all mean?*” The answers we give ourselves—the meanings we give to our thoughts and actions—are what keep us on a certain path or move us in a radically different direction.

In little, everyday ways and in hugely significant moments, as we try to make sense of our lives, we are all crying out for some kind of change. We all instinctively know that things are not the way they were meant to be. Whether it is the fifteenth fight over breakfast between siblings who rarely treat each other with love or haunting memories of terrible abuse in your childhood, we all sense and experience that the world we live in is broken. Our days are mixed. Sure, we smile and laugh, but before the day is over we may also frown, yell, or cry.

We spend much of our time dreaming about what could be. If only the boss were more patient. If only my husband were more caring. If only my father didn't drink so much. If only my son would quit arguing and listen. If only our neighborhood was more friendly. If only we had been able to get that house. If only I could defeat my despondency. If only our church understood the single parent's plight. If only I could enjoy good health, financial stability, or the respect of friends. There is probably never a day that we don't think about change, about things being different.

As we do, we all have pictures in our mind. We look at our lives and decide where change is needed and what it should look like. The problem is that even our best definitions of change fall short. Often our desires for change aren't fundamentally wrong; they just don't run deep enough. The Bible confronts us with a hard-to-accept reality: The change most needed in our lives isn't change in our situations and relationships but in *us*. The thing God is most intent on rescuing us from is *ourselves*. God knows that what messes up relationships and situations is people, and people are the object of his loving and lifelong work of change.

We are often at odds with our wise and loving Lord because the change he is working on is not the change we have dreamt about. We dream about change in *it*, while God is working in the midst of *it* to change *us*. What does he want to change us from and to? He wants to change us from people who "*live unto themselves*" to people who are literally *like him*. Peter says it in the most amazing way! "That . . . you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (2 Peter 1:4). This is real change! My selfish, sinful nature being replaced by his divine nature! God is shaping me into his own image. In the mud and muck of life, he is right beside me and his focus is me. In the middle of it all, he is radically transforming my

heart by his grace, so that I am able to think, desire, act, and speak in ways consistent with who he is and what he is doing on earth. Positive personal change begins to take place when my dreams of change begin to line up with God's purposes for change. Leaving behind goals of personal comfort and self-fulfillment, I begin to reach out for Christ, desiring to be more and more like him each day. As I do this, I become more and more prepared for my ultimate destination—eternity with him.

Here's the rub: it doesn't come naturally to us to connect the ways we think, feel, and act in the midst of struggle with our ultimate destination of life in heaven with Christ. It is a work of the Spirit in our lives. But when we learn how to respond to that work, the impact on our lives is enormous. This is what this curriculum is about. It is meant to help you connect God's transforming grace and your future in eternity with the struggles you face every day. It is designed to help you understand how God meets you and changes your heart in the middle of the greatest joys and deepest sorrows of life.

Turn to Philippians 1:3–11. Can you pick up Paul's excitement in this passage? It is filled with reality *and* hope! Paul is clearly talking to people who need to grow, who are living in the real world with all its pressures, problems, and imperfections; yet as he thinks about them, he is brimming with confidence!



1. *What is the source of this confidence?*

Paul prays with joy when he prays for the members of this church.

2. *What is he joyful about?*

3. *As you look at the passage, what does Paul want them to understand about the impact of Christ's presence on their lives?*

4. *In verses 9–11, what kind of growth does Paul pray for in the Philippians?*

Paul knows something that God wants us to know too. No matter what you face today, you can be encouraged that God's good work is continuing in your life. Every step you take, God is moving you forward as you submit your heart to him. This kind of confidence and growth will change the way we respond to life. It's what moves us toward our ultimate

goal—the thing for which we were made—the praise and glory of God (v. 11). Remember, Paul himself is in prison as he writes this letter of encouragement!

How does this passage encourage you? It's meant to encourage you to be full of hope in the midst of things you don't understand. You don't have to figure everything out. You just need to know and trust the One who does understand, and who has the power to help you. Do you look at your life as Paul looked at the Philippians' lives and his own? Or do you see things differently?

Imagine a house for sale that is a “handyman's special.” One buyer sees the house as it is: the crumbling chimney, the overgrown shrubs, the broken windows, the 1930s kitchen, the missing shingles, the outdated wiring, and the roof that should have been replaced ten years ago. His shoulders sag and he walks away—too much work; not enough hope.

Another buyer sees the same house but looks ahead to what it will be when it is restored—with his kids playing soccer in the yard, guests laughing together on the wraparound porch, a wonderful meal cooking in the kitchen to be enjoyed by everyone around the table. Same house for each buyer? Yes. Same possibilities? Yes. But only one buyer who can see what he needs to do to make a new reality.

As you stand in the front yard of your life and look at the house you are living in, what do you see? What's got your eye? Do you only see the problems, give up, and walk away? Do you only see the problems and become so defensive that you angrily pretend they aren't there? Or do you see the problems the way God sees them, with hope in his power to change you?

? 5. Based on *Philippians 1:3–11*, what do you think God wants you to see?

? 6. As you consider your own life in light of *Philippians 1*, how is this moment a step toward the destination God has in mind for you?

A Picture of Our Final Destination

For a fuller glimpse of our future, turn to *Revelation 7:9–17*.

This passage allows us to eavesdrop on eternity. Do you see yourself in the crowd? We are given the privilege of hearing the praises of people who suffered under the scorching heat of the sun in a fallen world. They now stand changed, purified, and free before the throne of the Lamb who is their Shepherd. This is our ultimate destination! How different our lives here can be as we learn to live with this picture in view!

Now, ask yourself this: As this multitude looks back on all that they experienced on earth, what is it that they celebrate? What in their lives has changed for the better? They don't celebrate a good job, a nice house, friendly neighbors, or financial ease. Here they are in the palace of the Lord, standing before the throne, crowned and reigning with him. There is no more hunger, no more thirst, and no more scorching heat. There is no more reason to weep. There is no more guilt to face, no more confession or restitution to be made, no more relationships to restore, no more

thoughts to correct, no more justice to be sought, and no more desires gone astray. Because now their restoration is complete. The transformation of their hearts and lives has been completed, so that they are like Jesus, in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24).

This is where God is taking you. The final destination is his throne room where together, in white robes of righteousness and crowns on our heads, we will celebrate the one thing worth living for, the Lamb and his salvation.

Can you see yourself there? Does it encourage you as you look at your life?

Present Promises for That Final Destination

Think again: What are you living for? What is your goal in life? Every time you raise your voice at your child or give your spouse the silent treatment, you hope to accomplish something. What is that hope? What is that goal? If you work sixty-five hours a week, you have a purpose in mind. Certain hopes and promises are directing your life. What are they?

The question is whether those hopes, plans, goals, and promises are worthy of your true calling as a child of God. Do they reflect God's purposes to renew and refine your heart and mind to make you more like Jesus? Are they in line with your final destination? And do they draw you closer to the One who will bring you there? Christianity's change process does not revolve around a *system* of redemption but around the *Person* who redeems. We focus on Christ our Redeemer—the Word of God made flesh—who gives the pattern and power for change.

Preparing for That Final Destination

Focusing on Christ and our final destination has a major impact on our responses to problems in the present.

I can remember a conversation my wife and I had about one of our children. We were getting more filled with parental panic the longer we talked. Our fears were what we were focusing on; the things that could go wrong had captured our hearts. Things didn't turn around in the conversation—or in our hearts—until we began to help one another see the Lord, his truth, his love, his grace, and his sovereignty all clearly working in our child's life. We had to see that our hope was not in the fact that we had everything under control. Our confidence could not be that we as parents had everything tied up in a neat little bow. Rather, our confidence

had to be that Christ was carrying us—and our child—through the process. We began to see that this hard moment was, in fact, a God-given step toward a wonderful destination. This prepared us to deal in a very different way with the issues that had previously produced the panic.

7. *Is there someone in your life whom you look at through a lens of pessimistic fear? What might God be saying to you and your fears at this moment? How does God's perspective change the way you relate to or instruct this person?*

It is crucial not only to know your end point, but to hold it constantly before you. Life is sloppy, hard, messy, shameful, at times boring, with three steps forward and two steps back. Most often change is slow. We are tempted to believe that we are powerless to change and that all the effort is meaningless.

But the hope and good news of the gospel is that Christ has conquered sin and death, and with them every meaningless and destructive end. The Bible says that Christ gives us his “fullness” (Colossians 2:9–10). That fullness is the Holy Spirit. God himself comes to live inside us, and in him we have everything we need to be progressively transformed from what we are into Christ's own image. Because we are God's children, this “fullness” is already inside each one of us. Think about this! You have not only been forgiven, but God has come to live within you so that you will always have all you need to conquer your biggest struggles, inside and out. Spiritually, you are never really empty because you have been given the “fullness” of the Holy Spirit! That means that you can live today as if you are full. “For in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority” (Colossians 2:9–10).

Pray that the Lord would give you eyes to see the fullness of what you have already been given. Only then can you truly change.

CPR

Central Point

1. Living with Christ and his body is the Christian's final, most fulfilling destination.
2. This destination adds hope to the way we see ourselves and others right now.
3. God promises to complete the transformation of our hearts into his likeness through Christ's indwelling presence and power.

Personal Application

1. I need to acknowledge the drives and hopes that direct the course of my life.
2. I need to connect my final destination with my feelings, choices, and actions.
3. I need to acknowledge where Christ is calling me to heart change, so that being like him is my final goal.

Relational Application

1. I need to see others in terms of the hope of their final destination.
2. I need to see the power of Christ's promise to transform their lives here and now.
3. I need to look for opportunities to help them live with their final destination in view.

MAKE IT REAL

1. What dreams and expectations get you through the day and give you hope for your future?
 - Being accepted by a certain group of people?
 - A good commission, nice bonus, increased portfolio?
 - Moral and obedient children, good marriage, nice friends?
 - The possibility of owning the house of your dreams?
 - The hope of a life of comfort and ease?
 - Survival—determination to make it through this phase of your life?
 - The hope of the respect and appreciation of others?

Do you ever feel hopeless? What produces that sense of despair?
What were you hoping for and not getting?

2. How do the things you hope and work for shape your responses to people and circumstances? When people threaten your hopes and goals, how do you react?

3. Pick one place of opportunity or pressure, difficulty or blessing, where you need to view yourself as changed and carried by Christ. How will that perspective change your response to that situation?

4. Using one of the Bible passages from this lesson, write out a prayer asking the Spirit to help you apply what you have learned to your life and relationships.

