

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

David Powlison, Contributor



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

New Growth Press, Greensboro, NC 27429

Copyright © 2003 by Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation.

Copyright © renewed 2005 by New Growth Press. All rights reserved.

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

All rights reserved. Published 2010.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Cover Design: faceoutbooks, Nate Saliccioli and Jeff Miller, www.faceoutbooks.com

Typesetting: Lisa Parnell, Thompson's Station, TN

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









ISBN-10: 1-935273-84-1

Printed in Canada

17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10

1 2 3 4 5

Course Outline

	A Word of Welcome.....	iv
	Acknowledgments	vi
	<i>Lesson 1</i>	
	Here's Where God Is Taking You.....	1
	<i>Lesson 2</i>	
	So, You're Married to Christ.....	15
	<i>Lesson 3</i>	
	Change Is a Community Project.....	29
	<i>Lesson 4</i>	
	Life as God Sees It, Change as God Does It	39
	<i>Lesson 5</i>	
	HEAT 1: The Real God in the Real World	57
	<i>Lesson 6</i>	
	HEAT 2: The Real You in the Real World.....	69
	<i>Lesson 7</i>	
	THORNS 1: What Entangles You?	79
	<i>Lesson 8</i>	
	THORNS 2: Why Do You Get Entangled?	93
	<i>Lesson 9</i>	
	CROSS 1: New Identity and New Potential.....	109
	<i>Lesson 10</i>	
	CROSS 2: The Cross and Daily Living	119
	<i>Lesson 11</i>	
	FRUIT 1: Real Heart Change.....	133
	<i>Lesson 12</i>	
	FRUIT 2: New and Surprising Fruit.....	147
	At a Glance: How People Change.....	170

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 disciplined by the Lord as they are disciplined 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 Christlike 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.

Lesson 1

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.

Lesson 2

So, You're Married to Christ

DISCUSS HOMEWORK

As a whole group go over answers to questions 1–6 (Philippians 1:3–11). Then form the small groups to discuss answers to question 7 and Make It Real (especially question 2). Also while in small groups, reread CPR from lesson 1 and share which seems most relevant to you at this time.

To prepare for lesson 2, read together the Review, CPR, and the Big Question.

REVIEW

In lesson 1, we examined what a difference it makes when we approach life with our ultimate destination in view. God is with us. He is transforming us by his grace and preparing us for an eternity with him. These three facts are meant to shape everything we do and say as we live our lives now. But do they? The answer for some of us is, “Not all the time,” and for others, the answer is “Seldom.”

This is where lesson 2 comes in. God doesn't just give us a call and a plan. He doesn't just call us to a right system of living. He calls us to himself, to live in a loving and lasting relationship with him that is central to the process of change. The great gift Christ gives us is himself. Only in relationship with him will we find all the good things we need.

Change, according to the Bible, is intensely personal and relational. Scripture uses the term “covenant” to describe God's willingness to bind himself in relationship with us and chooses marriage as the best way to depict this. Only when you understand what it means to be married to Christ will you understand what he has been doing for you and in you.

CENTRAL POINT AND APPLICATION

Central Point: The hope of personal growth and change rests on my relationship with a person, Jesus Christ, who powerfully acts to change my heart and make it more and more like his.

Personal Application: Change takes place when I embrace the person and work of Christ in the context of my struggles.

Relational Application: To have an effective ministry to others, I need zeal to help them understand and experience the present benefits of knowing Christ.

THE BIG QUESTION

What daily benefits are yours because
of your marriage to Christ?

LESSON CONTENT

DVD

Small Group Activity

1. Our relationship to God is the heart of the Christian life. Describe what you think this relationship should be like.
2. What prevents Christians from having the close, intimate relationship God has made possible?
3. How do you typically think of your relationship to Jesus? As a marriage? As an employee and boss (do what you are told and get paid for hard work or demoted for poor performance)? As friends (enjoy hanging out with Jesus)? As neighbors (stay out of each other's business and try to get along)? As a student and teacher (master what you are taught)?

Consider the following questions on your own:

1. How is your relationship with Jesus? Is your relationship close and intimate as a bride and groom?
2. What is hindering the close relationship as God intends it to be?

HOMEWORK

Staying Focused on Christ

As you think about the Christian life as a lifelong process of change, what things come to mind? What would you include as the key ingredients for change and growth in the Christian life? Perhaps you would mention things like personal devotions, Bible study, church attendance, reading Christian books, small group attendance, fellowship at the Lord's table, active involvement in the church, and personal evangelism. All of these things are beneficial, and all are things to which God calls us. But if these things could change us, in and of themselves, Jesus would not have needed to come. While the Christian life is not less than these things, it is much, much more. These activities are ways by which I recognize my need for Christ and learn to rely upon him. This is why these various elements have been called "means" of grace. They are God-ordained ways to commune with Christ. The Bible warns us of the danger of making these "means" "ends" in themselves, rather than pathways to a deeper relationship with Christ, and a conforming of our hearts to his will.

Passages that Define Your Relationship to Christ

In this lesson, we will focus on three passages that help us think clearly about the living reality and practical importance of our relationship with Christ. In 2 Corinthians 11:1–3, Paul uses the metaphor of marriage to talk about being united to Christ. In Colossians 1:15–23 we catch a glimpse of Christ, the bridegroom to whom we are betrothed. In Colossians 2:1–15 we discover the life-changing benefits Christ brings us as we are united to him by faith. Let's look at these passages and see what it means to be in a life-changing relationship with Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:1–3, Married to Christ

Do you tend to think of Christ as a nice consolation prize? You know, if everything else in life fails you, you still have Christ to fall back on! Do you find yourself investing your time, energy, and hope in the approval of others, career success, physical health, comfortable lifestyle, and so forth, while viewing Christ as a safety net? In stark contrast, Paul presents a vision of life that makes Christ the most important and cherished thing in life. Everything *else* is a consolation prize. While Paul views these other things as blessings to be

appropriately enjoyed, his concern for the Corinthians (as well as for us) is that we do not forget our relationship to Christ.

Paul is speaking with the affection of a father. He is jealous for the Corinthians' purity of heart in relation to Christ. In verse 2, Paul introduces the metaphor of marriage to describe the Christian's relationship to Christ. He speaks of Christ as a "husband" (v. 2) and them as pure virgin brides (v. 2). In verse 3, he is concerned that they will fall prey to the seduction of temptation and give their hearts to false lovers instead of Christ. Paul describes their calling as "pure and sincere devotion." In this way, Paul describes the Christian's relationship to Christ in the most intimate terms—so intimate that it is almost embarrassing! But this is what is so amazing about the gospel. God reconciles sinners to himself through Christ and welcomes us into a relationship that is intensely personal. He does not simply tolerate us; he brings us close to himself by giving *himself* to us. Christ is our husband, and we are his bride.

We are married to Christ. Consider what this means. He has made us the recipients of his affection and in turn, we are to make him the ultimate object of our affection, sharing it with nothing and no one else! This is why Paul speaks to the Corinthians as a jealous father who wants nothing to supplant or compromise this relationship. He urges them to shun the enticements of false saviors and false gospels and place their hopes and affections solely on Christ. List possible false saviors, lovers, and gospels that tempt us away from Christ.

What we see in this passage is that the most important relationship and circumstance of my life at any moment is my marriage to Christ. This foundational relationship alters the way I approach everything else. Paul's concern for the Corinthians' "sincere and pure devotion to Christ" models how my relationship with Christ should affect my agenda for my own life.

There are many models of the Christian life. Some approach it as a business, a well-planned program, or an educational pursuit. But here, Paul reminds us that the Christian life is much more intimate,

personal, and comprehensive than all of these. Notice at least three profound implications of my union with Christ:

1. *If I am spiritually married to Christ, then the core of my present life is not present personal happiness but spiritual purity.* Like any other marriage, the big issue is my commitment to fidelity. Will I remain faithful to Jesus alone and not seek fulfillment elsewhere?
2. *My betrothal to Christ gives this passage a “now and then” structure.* My “now” life is preparation for my “then” marriage to Christ, when the marriage supper of the Lamb sets the stage for all eternity. Now—my life on earth—is a time of preparation for that day. The complete fulfillment of this relationship will take place in heaven, though I do experience it in part now. Because Christ is THE prize, everything else that could draw me away from him is no longer essential.
3. *For Paul, the Christian life is more than having devotions, giving money, and participating in ministry.* It is possible to do all of these things without Christ at the center of my life. For Paul, the heart of Christianity is remaining faithful to Christ in a world where many “lovers” seek my allegiance and affection. Paul’s Christianity is intensely relational.

If it is true that Christ is the only prize worth living for, then he must be wonderful and amazing! Let’s look at Colossians 1:15–23 to see our bridegroom.

Colossians 1:15–23, Christ the Bridegroom

Certainly, the most important question for any prospective bride is, “Who is this person whom I am to marry?” In Colossians 1, Paul gives us a rich description of Christ our bridegroom. We encounter a stunning list of names, character qualities, and roles. Reflect on the ways each of the descriptions below should affect the way you approach life. For example, if I am married to a rich person, money will not be an object of daily concern. If I’m married to a mechanic, my cars will run well; if I’m married to a chef, I can expect to eat well. Because I am married to Christ, and this is what he is like, how should that shape the way I think about my life? Complete each of the following descriptions below in the same way:

- Since he is God (v. 15),
then _____

- Since he is the firstborn over all creation (v. 15),
then _____
- Since he is the Creator of all things (v. 16),
then _____
- Since all things were created for him (v. 16),
then _____
- Since he is eternal (“before all things”) (v. 17),
then _____
- Since he is the Sustainer of all things (v. 17),
then _____
- Since he is the Head of the body (v. 18),
then _____
- Since he is the beginning and firstborn among the dead (v. 18),
then _____
- Since he is supreme (v. 18),
then _____
- Since he is the fullness of God (v. 19),
then _____
- Since he is the reconciler of all things (vv. 20, 22),
then _____
- Since he is the peacemaker (v. 20),
then _____

What an amazing person! Who wouldn’t want to be married to this groom? Here is the point: Everything I could possibly need physically or spiritually has been provided for me by Christ. In him is fullness and joy! He is my Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer . . . my true husband. It might sound strange for Christians of either gender to speak of Christ in this way. But what we must understand is that human marriage is a reflection and a type of our union with Christ, not the other way around.

If marriage is the metaphor that the Bible uses to emphasize the intimate, personal relationship I have with Christ, and Christ is the bridegroom *par excellence*, what does Christ bring to this union? Let’s now look at Colossians 1:21–23 and 2:1–15 to find out.

Colossians 1:21-23; 2:1-15,

The Blessings of Our Union with Christ

When a couple gets married, they often start to wonder how their spouse will respond when he or she “really” gets to know them. What makes a marriage truly enjoyable is when your spouse really knows

you and loves you anyway. So it is with our marriage to Christ. We cannot fully appreciate the blessings until we see ourselves as we truly are. In Colossians 1 and 2, Paul's description of Christ is set against a realistic description of who *we* are. At least these three things are true of us apart from Christ:

1. *We are guilty of sin and alienated from God (1:21–23)*. This passage says that we are sinners who are guilty and full of shame. Paul uses two powerful words to describe our position before God: We are *alienated* and *enemies* of God (1:21–23). Sin stains us and separates us from him.
2. *We are foolish and blind (2:1–5)*. One of the terrible things sin does is reduce us to fools. We are easily deceived, attracted to hollow philosophy, and enticed by fine-sounding arguments that lead us away from Christ.
3. *We are powerless and enslaved (2:9–15)*. Paul uses the best possible word to describe how trapped and helpless we are. He says that we are *dead* (v. 13). When you are dead, you are unable to do anything. You are in a condition you cannot correct or improve. Sin makes us incapable of being and doing what God intended.

Consider these facts and imagine yourself sitting alone the night before your wedding. You are filled with guilt and shame over your own foolishness, and very aware of your inability to be the spouse you need to be. What are your options? You can either run away, overwhelmed by the prospect of failure, or you can comfort yourself as you consider the character of the person you are marrying.

That is what this passage is trying to do for you. It helps you to see yourself accurately so that you will conclude that only in relationship with Christ will you find what you need, to be what you need to be. That's why, in the middle of this passage, there is a call to live in daily fellowship and friendship with Christ, to celebrate the fact that you have been granted a relationship with him by pursuing him every day (2:6–8). What Christ brings to our relationship perfectly meets the deficits we bring to the relationship as sinners.

1. *Jesus is our justifier (We are guilty and alienated)*. His life, death, and resurrection free us from the guilt, penalty, shame, and alienation of sin. In 1:22, Paul says that we are holy in his sight, without blemish, and free from accusation. This is truly amazing!

2. *Jesus is our wisdom (We are foolish and blind).* In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He frees us from captivity to our own foolishness.
3. *Jesus is our power (We are powerless and enslaved).* In him we are made alive and given a new ability to live as we were intended to live.

Why is it so important to review these descriptions? Because the Christian life is built on the foundation of accepting who you really are and believing who Christ truly is. Everything you do will be shaped by the degree to which you believe and act upon the blessings that are yours in Christ.

Let's look at how this works. If you are carrying around guilt, you will tend to hide, excuse, blame, rationalize, and cover up your shame, rather than enjoy the freedom of confession and the joy of forgiveness. If you are forgetting your foolishness, you will be susceptible to pat answers, quick solutions, human formulas, and surface techniques that never truly solve problems, instead of enjoying the lasting fruit that comes from following the wisdom of Christ. If you forget your weakness, you will reduce the Christian life to a simplistic list of rules and behaviors, while being blind to the serious gaps in your own relationship to Christ.

Illustration

Imagine a boy born into a very poor family. He spends most of his life malnourished. He is the object of scorn among his friends. He is seldom clean or properly dressed. He has little education and very few prospects for the future. He leaves home and gets odd jobs, one of them as a caddy at a prestigious country club. While working one day, he meets a young woman from an extremely wealthy family. Much to his surprise, one day she asks him to be her caddy. This begins a long relationship that, amazingly, culminates in their marriage. In an instant, his life is changed. He is the recipient of new status, wealth, power, and prestige—none of it because of what he has done or deserved. It is the result of the new relationship. His marriage changes who he is, what he has, how he experiences life, and how he will live the rest of his life. What changed him was his marriage; so it is when the Christian is wed to Christ!

As you and I come to Christ, the change that takes place is much more than change in our circumstances, relationships, or status. We become different at the deepest spiritual level. Our inner spiritual natures are transformed by the power of Christ's grace. We were once

dead, and now we are alive. Our hearts were once totally enslaved to sin and now they have been freed. Our hearts were once hard as stone, but now they are soft and pliable. The changes that are the result of our union with Christ are so fundamental that the Bible says that in him we become “new creatures” (2 Corinthians 5:17)!

At the most foundational level, this change is not simply the product of good theology and disciplined obedience. Every bit of change that takes place in us is the result of our relationship to Christ. Because I am united to him, I am a new creature who is being renewed daily by his Spirit. Because I am united to him, the power of sin has been broken, and its presence in my heart is being progressively eradicated. This is what the Christian life is about. With joy I affirm that I am a new creature in Christ, and with humility I confess that there is still sin in my heart, so that I need God’s grace today as much as I did when I first believed. I commit myself daily to participate in the ongoing work of heart change that is God’s loving focus. Thankfully, I am *in* him; however, I am not yet completely *like* him. The Savior who made me new calls me to be committed to his daily work of renewal, which takes place in the midst of my circumstances and relationships.

Assets and Liabilities

How do you react to the glorious imbalance of this marriage? How does it affect your assessment of what you bring to your relationship with Christ? Normally in a relationship, we assume that each person brings some strengths and gifts, but it’s not true in this case. Human “assets” deceive us into thinking that we are okay when really we are people in desperate need of help.

Turn to figure 2-1 and consider Paul’s example in Philippians 3:4–7. Notice some of the things he listed as the assets and strengths he thought he had. But when he met Christ, how did his evaluation of these things change? (*Read 3:7–9*). Why did they change? Was Paul happy or sad about it? Why?

Use Paul's example as a guide to do the same kind of asset assessment for yourself on the second section of figure 2-1. What strengths, gifts, and assets do you bring to your relationship with Christ? In what ways are they liabilities in your salvation and in the process of change that makes you more like Christ? How do you respond to that? Why do you think God wants you to understand this?

Finally, complete the chart by listing what Christ brings to your relationship with him. As you can see, there are no liabilities! Why do you think God wants you to understand this? How does this encourage you as a new creature in the process of becoming more like Christ?


Everything that Christ provides changes our perspective on the things life brings our way. We no longer try to cope with life on our own, with our own resources. Knowing Christ and being found in him changes the way we experience everything! For example, how will the truth of being married to Christ change the way you respond to:

- Loss of a job
- Working at a dead-end job
- Your burden as a single parent
- The death of a ministry dream
- The injury, disease, or death of a loved one
- Chronic illness
- A difficult marriage
- A friend's betrayal
- Financial difficulty
- Chronic loneliness
- Career advancement
- Financial blessing
- A wonderful marriage
- Obedient and well-mannered children
- Perfect health


All of these things take on new significance when we realize that we experience them within our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Figure 2-1. Married to Christ: Assets and Liabilities

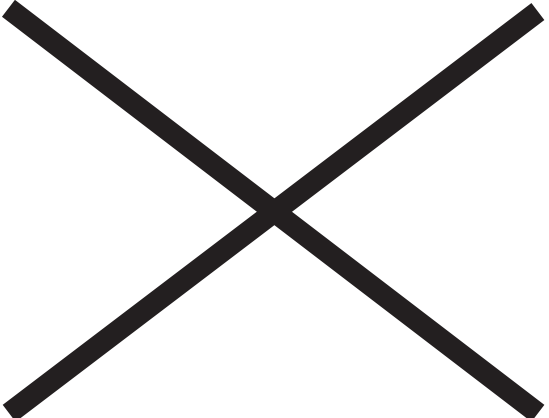
PAUL (PHILIPPIANS 3:4-7)

Assets	Liabilities
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Circumcised on 8th day 2. Of Israel 3. Tribe of Benjamin 4. Hebrew of Hebrews 5. A Pharisee 6. Zeal 7. As for legalistic righteousness, faultless 	

WHAT I BRING TO THE MARRIAGE

Assets	Liabilities
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 	

WHAT CHRIST BRINGS

Assets	Liabilities
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 	

CPR

Central Point

1. The hope of personal growth and change rests on my relationship with a person, Christ, who acts on my behalf.
2. The Christian life rests on accepting who I really am (past and present) and who Christ truly is.
3. The Bible calls us to approach life aware of who Christ is and what he has given us.

Personal Application

1. I must not let my relationships and circumstances overshadow the reality of my marriage to Christ.
2. I must remember who I really am (past and present) and actively embrace who Christ truly is.
3. I must continually ask myself, “Where do I fail to appreciate what I have been given in Christ?”

Relational Application

1. I want people to understand that change results when they are lovingly faithful to their heavenly bridegroom, Christ.
2. Ministry to others is more than getting them to do things; it is encouraging them to actively appreciate their union with Christ.
3. I want to help people grasp what it means daily and practically to believe who Christ is and what he has given them.

MAKE IT REAL

1. The core issue of 2 Corinthians 11:1–3 is spiritual purity. Where are you most tempted to commit spiritual adultery? What things function as false lovers? What things make you feel beautiful? Where do you see Christ replacements in your life right now? (Examples: career, recognition, success, approval, comfort/ease, health, youth, trophy kids, pleasure, certain level of economic status, theological knowledge, and ministry success)

2. What attracts you to these “lovers”? Be specific in identifying these false lovers and in confessing your unfaithfulness to Christ.

3. Write a prayer, thanking God for his love for you in Christ. Rejoice in who he is, in his blessings, and in your relationship with him.

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.

Lesson 3

Change Is a Community Project

REVIEW/DISCUSS HOMEWORK

As a whole group, discuss answers to the Colossians 1:15–23 activity, the Assets and Liabilities activity, and how being married to Christ should change the way we respond to life.

In small groups, discuss Make It Real (especially question 1); reread CPR, and share which item God is impressing upon their hearts currently.

Next, read together CPR and the Big Question for lesson 3.

CENTRAL POINT AND APPLICATION

Central Point: God's work of personal transformation is intended to take place within the community of God's people.

Personal Application: I need to be committed to a lifestyle of mutually helpful relationships.

Relational Application: I want to help others pursue relationships that promote biblical growth and change.

THE BIG QUESTION

What daily resources are yours because you are part of the community of Christ? Are you taking advantage of these resources? What resources and gifts do you bring to the body of Christ?

LESSON CONTENT

Opening Discussion

DVD

Small Group Activity

1. Share your thoughts, feelings, concerns, or encouragements when you consider “Christians cannot grow to the fullness of God by living independently of others.”
2. Who is someone you trust to reveal the truth to you?

Write a question to ask this person that will allow him/her to speak honestly into your life to help you to grow and change:

3. Is there someone you think God wants you to confront and help in his/her Christian walk? Pray and think carefully about how to lovingly and gently approach this person.
4. Pray together as a group.

HOMEWORK

Have you ever heard someone say, “You’ve made your bed; now lie in it”? As Christians, we know that nothing could be further from the gospel. Can you hear the two main lies in this statement?

1. “The problems you’ve created are irreversible, so you are stuck in your own mess.”
2. Not only are you stuck forever, you are totally on your own.”

In other words, don’t expect help from anybody. If things are going to change, you’d better find a way to fix them yourself—and don’t try to join the rest of us (who have no problems) until you do.

When Christ brings us into the family of God, no matter how much we have messed up, we are never alone again. Yet many

believers latch onto the hope of personal change while clinging to the individualism of our society. They have a “Jesus and me” mentality as they battle sin and seek to become more like Christ. At first we might think, *Why not? After all, getting involved with people is complicated and time consuming. Who needs it? It’s not very efficient when we have a lot of personal changing to do.*

But God has a bigger—and, frankly, messier—plan. Change is something God intends his people to experience *together*. It’s a corporate goal. What God does in each of us as individuals is part of a larger story of redemption that involves all God’s people through the ages. You are part of the story and part of the family already, and that is the context in which personal change takes place in your life. That is also what we hope you will experience in this course. Change within community is counterintuitive to the way we often think, but Scripture clearly presents it as God’s way of making us more like Christ.

God Himself Lives in Community

Have you ever wondered why? The most important reason is often overlooked: *God himself is a community!* The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit live together in perfect fellowship, harmony, and unity. What each person of the Trinity is and does is always in union with the others. That even includes our salvation! At great personal cost, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all played a part in bringing us into the family of God. Their perfect fellowship as the Trinity was disrupted so that we could be brought into fellowship with God.

Look at the way Scripture talks about this in Ephesians 4:4–6. Did you notice that Paul uses the word *one* seven times? The unity of God is meant to lead to unity in his family.

❓ 1. *What unity do we share as believers?*

The message is clear: God is a community and this is stamped onto all he creates.

Belonging to God's Family

When the apostle Paul was discipling new believers, he repeatedly reminded them there was help in Christ *and* in Christ's people, the church, in good times and bad. Let's look at two specific passages where Paul encourages the Christians at Ephesus to think of themselves as part of something new—something bigger. Read Ephesians 2:14–22.

? 2. *In this passage, what is God seeking to produce in us, his people?*

? 3. *What has God done to make this possible?*

It is impossible to read this passage and come away with the idea that Christianity is a “just-me-and-God” religion. Have you ever heard someone say, “Yes, I am a Christian, but I don't go to church. Why do I need that when I have the Lord?” This passage makes it clear that our salvation is something that connects us to God *and* his people. It's not just in heaven that we will be united around the throne of God. Our personal relationship with God links us to other believers *now*.

Notice how Paul brings this out. He says that God has “destroyed the barrier” “to create in himself one new man.” We are “fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household.” We are “being built together to become a dwelling place in which God lives.” We can't become the Christians we are meant to be by being alone with God. That is not God's purpose. What we become, we become together.

- ? 4. *How does this vision impact you? Does it surprise you? Intimidate you? Annoy you? Encourage you? How much does your life currently allow you to develop relationships that are deep enough to help you grow and change? What are some of the obstacles to such relationships?*

American culture may idolize the Lone Ranger, Clint Eastwood, and Superman as heroes who right wrongs and ride out of town alone, but that solitary approach to change is foreign to Scripture. When we are accepted by God through faith in Christ, we are adopted into his family and made members of his body (Ephesians 5:29–30). This is not necessarily the simpler way; being involved with people is inefficient, complicated, and time consuming. There are so many more ways for things to go wrong! But these are some of the very reasons why community is such a big part of God’s plan to transform us into the image of Christ. The more we understand our own hearts, the more we see that it takes a work of God’s grace to transform self-absorbed individuals into a community of love. Being in community shows us our need for change *and* helps bring it about!

Being Loved as a Family

Read Ephesians 3:14–21.

- ? 5. *What is Paul praying for in this passage?*

- ? 6. What language does Paul use that shows he believed these things would come from God through community?

When we look ahead to Ephesians 4, we see that Paul follows his prayer with all sorts of practical instructions on how to pursue and preserve the unity of this community. These are some of the ways our personal transformation is worked out within the family of God.

If, as we see in 4:4–6, God himself lives in community, could we really expect him to want anything different for us? If his redemptive purposes caused him to enter our world and get close to us, should we be surprised that he calls his children to do the same with each other? The things we need to do to enjoy deep love and fellowship with God and each other are the very things that make us less self-centered and more like Christ. It *is* the change he is after!

Purified as a Family

We have seen that understanding God’s love as God’s people brings us to maturity or “fills us to all the fullness of God.” Another component of Christian growth involves saying no to what is harmful and yes to the things that produce life and godliness.

Read Titus 2:11–14. This is another passage that first appears to present God’s grace to individuals, who then are commanded to use God’s grace as a way to privately clean up their act. However, as the passage describes the final goal of God’s grace, it says that Jesus gave himself to us “to purify for himself a *people* . . . eager to do what is good” (v. 14). The ultimate goal of God’s grace is to produce an active, healthy, unified body of believers. It’s a full-fledged family freed from sin and its enslaving ways. It is this people, purified and zealous for good works, who are God’s precious inheritance.

Just as in Ephesians, this chapter is followed by instructions for corporate Christian living. We need each other’s help as we learn to say yes and no to the right things! Paul calls believers to live in a way that helps people to be built up as well as built together, and he adamantly warns against divisiveness.

Divisiveness conjures up images of one person or group intentionally leading others away from the whole, leaving the rest of the

body to suffer. It *is* damaging when people quarrel and leave, but the body of Christ is also deformed and disabled when people never fully join it in the first place.

Paul describes this vividly in 1 Corinthians 12, where he talks about the family of believers as a physical body. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12. Each believer receives gifts from the Holy Spirit to be used “for the common good” (v. 7). We are to live as unique and vital parts of Christ’s body, connected to serve and be served by the rest of the body (vv. 12, 14). No one part should think of itself as useless, especially when compared to more prominent or “glamorous” parts (vv. 15–27). Think about the gifts God has given you.

? 7. *How are your gifts meant to serve other members of the body as they seek to reflect and honor Christ?*

? 8. *What gifts do you need from others to help you do the same thing?*

Think of what happens in a church when there is a death in a family. The pastor and others seek to comfort the family with the promises of Scripture. Other people bring meals, watch the children, make phone calls, run errands, clean the house, drive the grieving survivors to the funeral home, and help them make arrangements. Still others help them with banking, budget, and insurance matters. Others just come to weep with those who mourn. How many of you have experienced the love of Christ in this multiplicity of ways? Wouldn’t you agree that all the different elements combined together more fully reveal the love and power of God? Doesn’t it provide more hope for the future, more encouragement to trust the Lord, more strength to do and be what God calls us to be? Everything is more powerful when it is combined with the ministries of the rest of the body.

What is the point of all this? God's work of change has relationships both as a necessary means and a wonderful goal. Humble community is not the icing on the cake of Christianity. In a real way, it *is* the cake. These relationships of love are a means of personal growth, a mark of God's people being purified, and a clear argument to the world for the truth of the gospel.

CPR

Central Point

1. A Christian is not only a child of God, but a member of the family of God.
2. Christians cannot grow to the fullness of God by living independently of others.
3. Personal transformation takes place in the context of redemptive community.

Personal Application

1. I continually need to learn more about God's love for me in Christ, and I cannot do this alone.
2. I need to understand my gifts and my role in the larger body of Christ.
3. God calls me to be committed to a lifestyle of mutually edifying relationships.

Relational Application

1. I want to pray for others to gain a greater understanding of God's love for them in Christ.
2. I want to help others understand and own their vital place in the body of Christ.
3. I want to help others grasp the privilege and responsibility of participating in intimate Christian relationships that promote biblical growth and change.

MAKE IT REAL

1. How does your life reflect your commitment to meaningful relationships that help you grow and change? What things get in the way or serve as replacements for you? Here are some possibilities:

- The busyness of life (keeping relationships distant and casual)
- Being totally immersed in friendships that are activity- and happiness-based
- Conscious avoidance of close relationships (too scary or messy)
- Formal commitment to church meetings and activities but no real connections to people
- One-way, ministry-driven relationships (always ministering to others but never allowing yourself to be ministered to)
- Self-centered, self-absorbed, “meet-my-felt-needs” relationships that keep you always receiving but seldom giving
- A private, “just-me-and-God” approach to the Christian life
- Theology as a replacement for community—knowing God as a life of study, rather than the pursuit of God and his people

2. What opportunities for redemptive relationships are already in your life? (marriage, friendship, parents, small group, extended family, ministry partner, etc.) Are you committed to and experiencing the personal transformation that God has planned for these relationships? If not, what things are in the way?

3. If you do not have this kind of relationship in your life, what is God calling you to do so that you can participate in a redemptive community? Are there new relationships that need to be made? Present relationships that need to be strengthened or restructured? Relationships that need to be restored?

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.

Lesson 4

Life as God Sees It, Change as God Does It

REVIEW/DISCUSS HOMEWORK

As a whole group, discuss questions 1–6 in the Lesson Content section for lesson 3. In small groups, discuss questions 7 and 8 from Lesson Content and questions 1–3 from Make It Real.

Read Review, CPR, and the Big Question below.

REVIEW

Let's review where we have been so far. In lesson 1, we learned that there is a valid reason to *hope for change*. Real change is not only possible but actually happening because Christ, in all of his power, changes us fundamentally at the moment we first trust in him. I am a new creation in Christ, and I will enjoy nothing less than total transformation in the future! This wonderful vantage point begins in the past with my conversion and culminates in the future with my glorification. It gives me a deep hope and confidence as I struggle and grow in the present. In lesson 2, we considered the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, the *person who changes us*. He provides not only the resources for change but himself as well. This relationship supernaturally transforms our hearts. In lesson 3, we learned that God has provided a wonderful *context for change*. God knows that we cannot do this alone; we need one another. God has placed us in the middle of a ministering community where daily help is available. With this foundation, we can begin to examine the *process of change* in lessons 4–12. This lesson will introduce the various elements that are a part of the change process.

CENTRAL POINT AND APPLICATION

Central Point: Practical hope, comfort, and direction result from looking at our lives and our world from God's big picture perspective.

Personal Application: I always need to evaluate myself in light of what God says about himself, me, my world, and change.

Relational Application: I need to help people see the hope found in looking at their lives from God's big picture perspective.

THE BIG QUESTION

How does "The Big Picture" help you to understand and respond to the God of grace as he works through the details of your life?

LESSON CONTENT

DVD

Small Group Activity

Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 10:1–14. Move between the Scripture passage, the explanation of the passage as related to the model, and the model itself in figure 4-2.

If you have time, begin filling in the diagram on page 47 based on 2 Corinthians 1:1–12. What you do not finish together, complete on your own for homework.

HOMEWORK

The Big Picture

Do you ever feel lost in the middle of your own world? Sure, you know a lot about yourself, God, and others, but you are not sure how to put it all together. You don't know why your marriage is struggling. You don't know why you battle with depression. For the life of you, you cannot understand why your teenage son has become so adversarial. It is these experiences that this lesson and this curriculum address.

Think of it this way. If you are lost in the middle of a big city, what do you need? The tempting answer would be specific and detailed directions. But, in fact, you need more! If all you received were particular instructions to one destination, you would be lost once again after you followed them. What you really need is the helicopter overview of

the whole city implanted in your brain—*the big picture*. Then you will always know where you are and where you need to go.

When you read your Bible, it doesn't always seem like it gives you a helicopter view of all of life. Scripture can seem like a haphazard collection of stories, poems, teachings, and commands. Yet when carefully examined, the Bible provides the essential elements that give an overall picture of life as God sees it and change as God does it. Only when you have an overall sense of what God is doing can you make sense of all the details of your everyday life. This lesson will introduce you to four elements that the Bible repeatedly includes in the change process God institutes in the lives of his children. Understanding how God typically uses daily life to change our hearts is an essential part of this growth and change process.

How the Bible Gives Us the Big Picture

Although this lesson will refer to God's "big picture," we will be the first to say that the Bible does not explain the model we are introducing in one specific passage. Rather, different elements of this model are woven through many passages of Scripture. The same elements are often presented but with different language, order, and emphasis. However, once you begin to identify these elements as they occur in Scripture, they start to simplify and enrich your understanding of what the Bible teaches, resulting in practical wisdom for you. The wonderful thing about this big picture model is that it is the story of every believer's life. God has already made us a part of it and invites us to live with him inside the plot. Let's begin by looking at the elements of this Big Picture in figure 4-1.

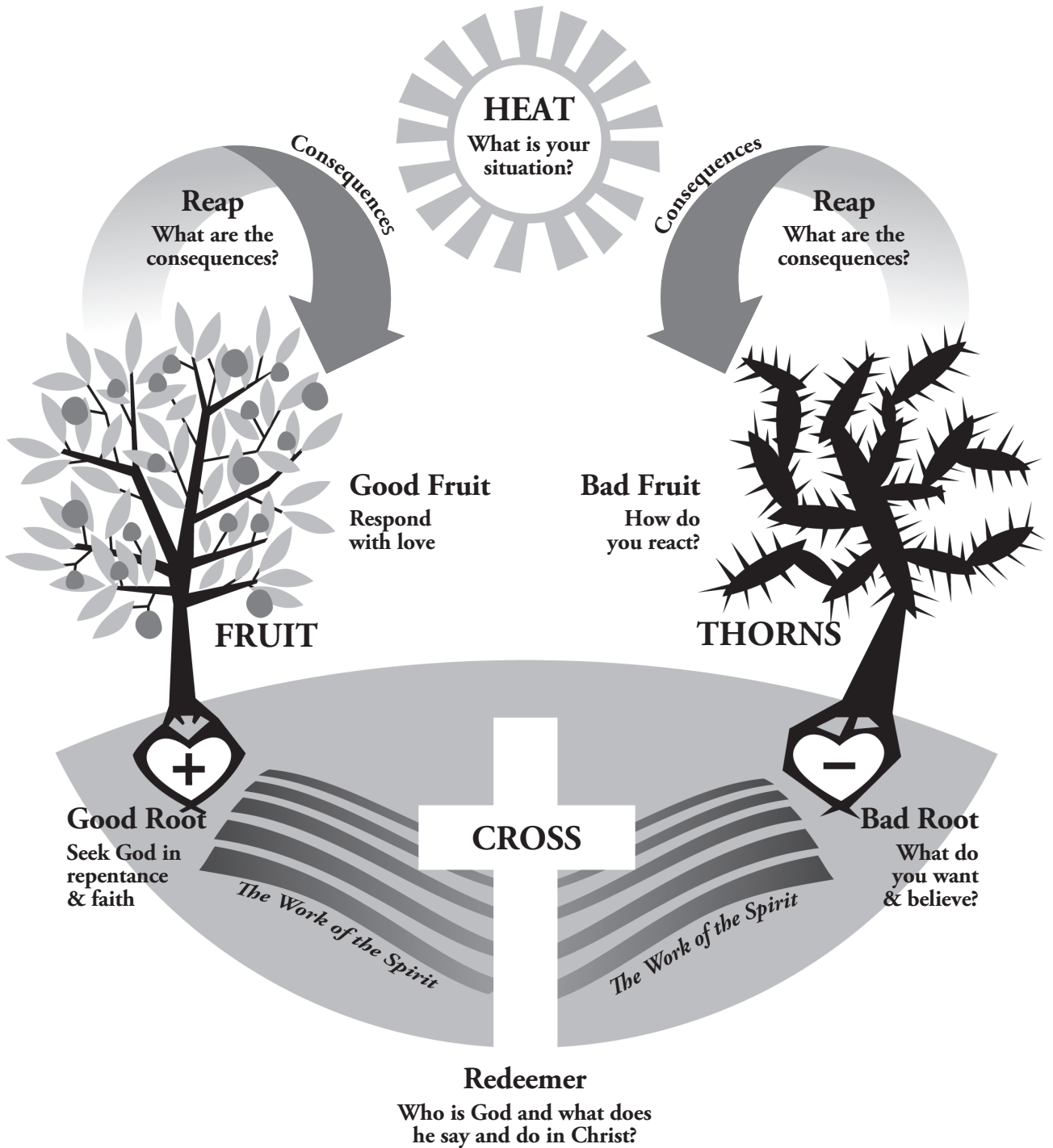
HEAT (What is your situation?)

You and I are always reacting to things that are happening around us. Whether it is the scorching heat of difficulty or the unexpected rain of blessing, you are always responding to whatever is coming down on you. The Bible presents a shockingly real picture of a fallen world. It is honest about the things that happen here.

THORNS (How do you react? What do you want and believe?)

You and I are never really passive. We are always acting, reacting, and responding to the "heat" (or "rain") in our lives. Maybe it's a tough boss or a crazy extended family. Perhaps it is a rebellious child or a chronic sickness. Maybe it's a new career opportunity or a

*Figure 4-1. How Do People Change?
Jeremiah 17:5–15*



newly acquired inheritance. Whatever it is, the Bible helps us to see how we react to the “heat,” in our hearts and our outward behavior. It reminds us that sinners tend to respond to the fallen world sinfully and each reaction yields a harvest of consequences. Scripture also makes it clear that these responses are not forced on us by the pressures of the situation. Rather, they flow out of the thoughts and motives of our hearts.

CROSS (Who is God, and what does he say and do in Christ?)

The God of the Bible presents himself as “an ever-present help in trouble.” The ultimate example is Christ, who came to a fallen world to live, die, and rise again. He gave us everything we need to respond in a godly way to what we face daily. The promise of the cross is not just renewed strength or enhanced wisdom; it is a new heart that begins to evidence new strength and wisdom in the face of daily trials and blessings. Christ, the Redeemer, gives us himself and in so doing remakes us from the inside out. Each of us is in the process of being remade to reflect the character of Jesus himself. This is truly amazing! His patience, love, mercy, courage, boldness, justice, and grace can be expressed more and more in and through us as we grow into his likeness.

FRUIT (Seek God in repentance and faith. Respond with love.)

Because of what Christ has done, we can respond to the same old pressures in a brand new way. Out of hearts renewed by him, we behave differently in response to the circumstances of life. These new responses produce a harvest of fruitful consequences in our lives and the lives of others.

Let’s look at three passages where the elements of the Big Picture can be found.

Jeremiah 17:5–10

The Bible typically uses concrete images to illustrate spiritual truths. Jeremiah 17:5–10 is a good example. Look at the main images in this passage. In verse 8, the image of Heat is used to describe life in a fallen world. In verse 6 the image of a Thorn Bush in the wasteland represents the ungodly person who turns away from the Lord. In verses 5 and 7, there is a clear reference to the Lord. He is the Redeemer who comforts, cleanses, and empowers those who humbly

trust in him. We represent this part of the passage by the Cross to capture the redemptive activity of God on our behalf. In verses 7 and 8, the image of a Fruitful Tree emerges, representing the godly person who trusts in the Lord. In the midst of these images, verses 9 and 10 show us a God who does not simply focus on our behavior. Though he does not ignore behavior, his focus is on our hearts. He is the searcher of hearts because they are central in the change process he undertakes as our Redeemer.

This gives us a simple but helpful view of life that involves four basic elements described metaphorically. We have the HEAT. This is the person's situation—the real world with all of its difficulties, blessings, temptations and enticements. We have THORNS (the bush)—the person's ungodly response to the situation. This includes behavior, the heart that drives the behavior, and the consequences that follow. We have the CROSS—that is, the presence of God in all his redemptive glory and love. He brings comfort, cleansing, and power to change. Finally, we have FRUIT—the person's new, godly response to the situation as a result of God's redemptive power at work in the heart. This includes behavior, the heart renewed by grace, and the consequences that follow. Thus we have a simple biblical picture that captures the major elements of change in the midst of life: HEAT-THORNS-CROSS-FRUIT.

Now, let's look together at two passages and organize them in light of these four elements. As we do this, we will begin to see how this big picture is basic to a biblical view and understanding of all of life. All of the elements are in each passage but presented in different ways. In 1 Corinthians 10:1–14 we see the elements presented in the general context of dealing with life's hardship (the model). In 2 Corinthians 1:2–11, the same elements are presented within the context of Paul's personal experience (a case study).

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1–14

Let's use figure 4-2 to consider this passage from the vantage point of the picture we saw in Jeremiah 17. First, we see HEAT. In verses 11–14, Paul is using the real-life experience of Israel in the wilderness to help the Corinthians understand their own situation. We should be encouraged by the Bible's honesty about what we experience in this fallen world. God understands what is going on around us and in us. We will be looking at Numbers 11–14 to understand what Paul is saying. What was Israel's situation? What pressures, temptations, blessings, challenges, and enticements did they face? How did it compare to

the Corinthians' situation? How does it compare to ours? An overview of Numbers 11—14 is provided at the end of this chapter.

Second, we see THORNS. In 1 Corinthians 10:5–10, Paul details the ungodly ways Israel responded to the heat (idolatry, pagan revelry, sexual immorality, testing the Lord, and grumbling). In verses 7b–9a and 10a he emphasizes their specific *behavior*. In 5, 9b, and 10b he mentions the *consequences*. In verses 6–7a he focuses on the *heart* out of which the behavior grows.

Third, we see the CROSS. In verses 1–4 Paul speaks of God's presence and power with Israel during their time in the wilderness ("All ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ."). How amazing that the same Christ that is now with the Corinthians (and with us) was with Israel! Living in reliance on him, in the midst of life's difficulties, is at the very heart of what God is seeking to produce in each of us.

Finally, we see FRUIT. In verses 11–14, Paul calls his readers to embrace Christ. Verse 11 is a reference to Jesus' first coming. Paul wants his readers to see how privileged they are to live in full view of the coming of the Messiah and to have full access to the blessings that are ours because of him. In verses 11–12, Paul speaks of a new *heart* that embraces Christ and engages in humble self-examination. In verses 13–14, Paul describes new *behavior* that includes new resolve to stand up under temptation (13) and a new watchfulness that sees the tendency to slide toward idolatry. Paul is envisioning initial as well as long-term change!

2 Corinthians 1:2–12

Let's look now at 2 Corinthians 1:2–12 to watch someone actually using HEAT-THORNS-CROSS-FRUIT to reflect on his own life. To do this we have provided an illustration of the "biblical big picture" we have been examining (see fig. 4-3). In 2 Corinthians 1, Paul is looking at his own life in terms of these four elements. Use figure 4-3 to organize 2 Corinthians 1:2–12 according to the elements of HEAT-THORNS-CROSS-FRUIT.

Do you see that although these passages refer to situations taking place in different eras and circumstances, the same four elements help us to understand what is going on from God's perspective? In each case, God sees us, meets us, and changes us right in the middle of life's challenges.

Understanding the overall picture of life and change in a fallen world not only helps you understand the Bible better, it also helps

Figure 4-2. A Biblical Model for Change (1 Corinthians 10:1–14)

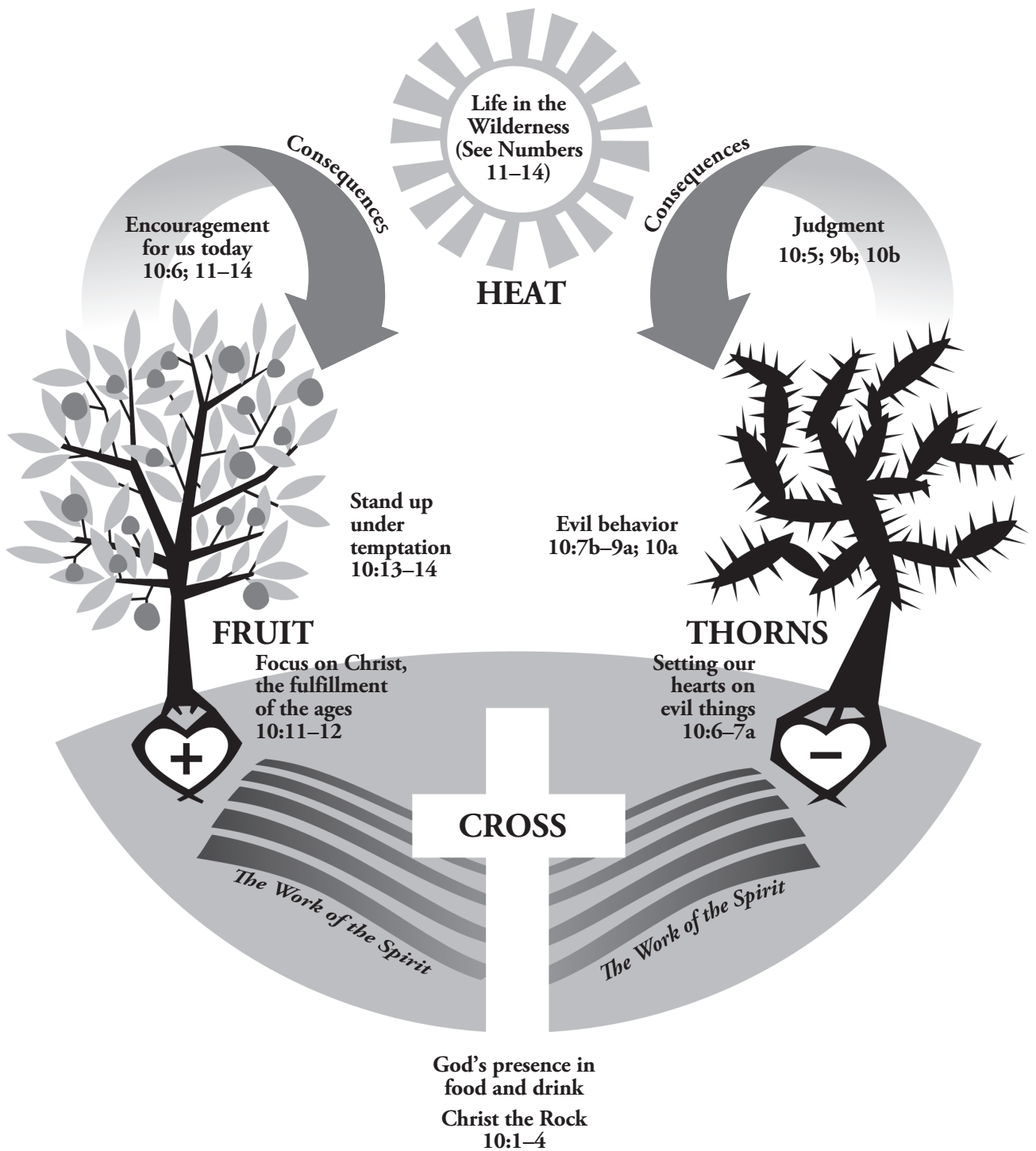
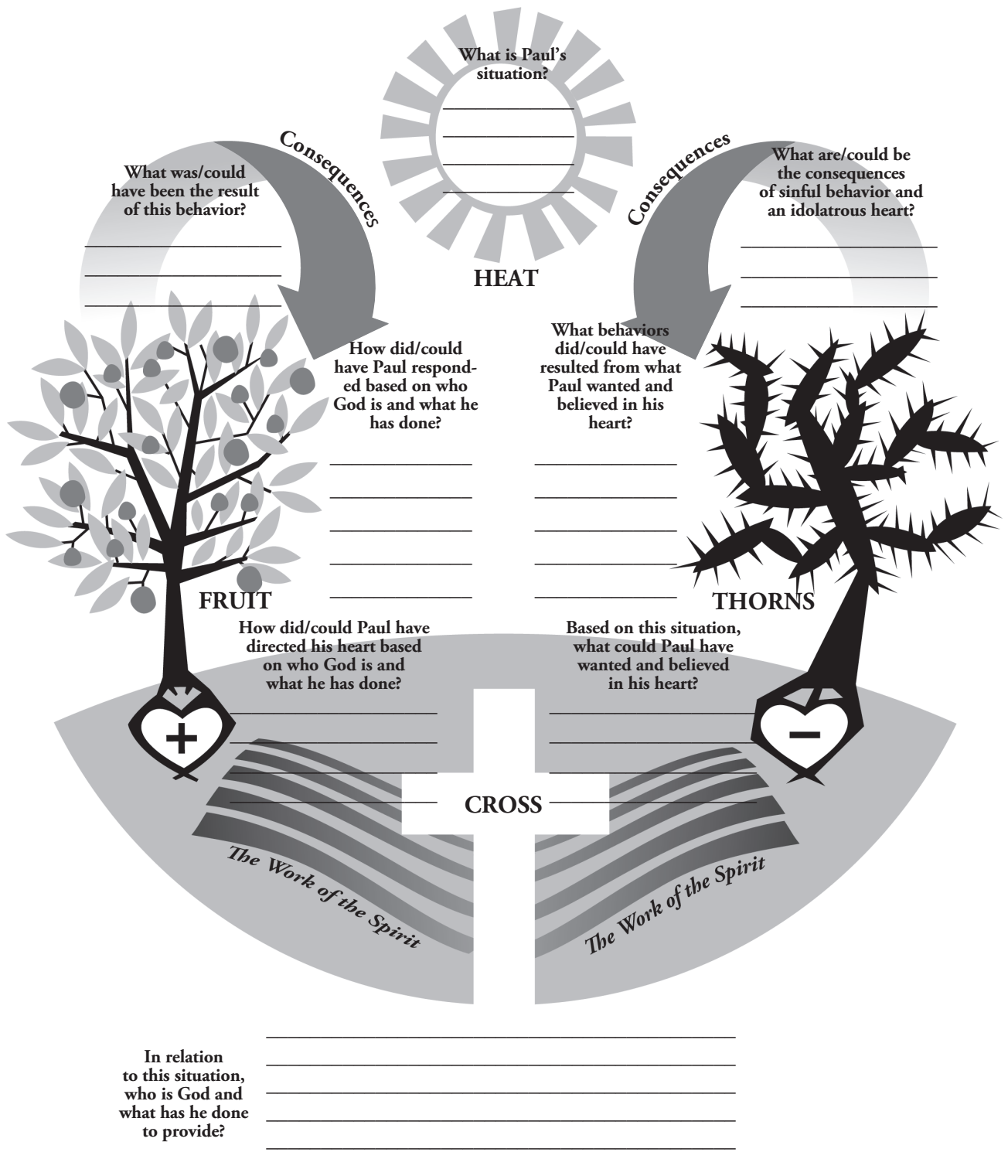


Figure 4-3. A Biblical Model for Change (2 Corinthians 1:1–12)



you see how practically helpful the Bible can be in the process of change. In lessons 5–12, we will take a more detailed look at these four elements and their part in God’s process of changing us to be more like him. This offers you a wonderful opportunity to grow in areas where you need to grow. It will also provide a foundation for you to help others.

In the lessons to come, we will look carefully at this four-part picture of how God changes us. We will also give you an opportunity to apply what you learn to your own life as you live under the “heat” every day.

Let’s look at some additional passages using “The Big Picture.” Select one of the passages given to complete figure 4-4. It should help you to see that this model is a biblical way to think about life and a helpful way to understand the various situations we face.

CPR

Central Point

1. Practical hope, comfort, and direction result from looking at our lives and our world from God’s overall perspective on change.
2. The Bible is honest about the trouble we face in a fallen world.
3. Scripture’s description of the change process that God oversees in our lives can be described using the categories of HEAT, THORNS, CROSS, and FRUIT.

Personal Application

1. I always need to evaluate myself in light of what God says about me, my world, and change.
2. The Bible’s honesty about life in this world invites me to be honest about my difficulties and my responses to them.
3. I need to learn how to examine myself using the simple categories God provides in his Word (HEAT, THORNS, CROSS, and FRUIT).

Relational Application

1. I need to help people see the hope found in looking at life from God’s perspective.
2. I need to encourage people with the way the Bible accurately and honestly describes what we face every day.
3. A significant aspect of a wise and helpful ministry is to help others see themselves from the perspective of these simple biblical categories (HEAT, THORNS, CROSS, and FRUIT).

Figure 4-4. A Biblical Model for Change

Select one of the following passages to practice applying this model:
 Psalm 1; Matthew 18:15–35; Galatians 5–6; or James 3:13–4:12.
 (Possible answers can be found in figs. 4-6 through 4-9.)

