



THE COMPASS

A TOOL FOR DISCIPLERS

Sanctification

Conversation On the Journey

A little theological background on this issue might be helpful before we dig in. First, let's clarify the term sanctification. To sanctify means to set apart to God or be made Holy; sanctification is the process of being made holy. When we come to Christ, the process begins and will not be complete until we are face-to-face with Him in heaven.

Historically, some Christian traditions have overemphasized the role God plays in the sanctification process, i.e., God does everything. This can be expressed in many ways, one of which is seeking a spiritual experience that will bring holiness in certain areas overnight - God, just change me! Other Christian traditions have overemphasized our role in the process - if you are simply disciplined and obedient enough, you will stop sinning.

The view of sanctification that we feel is most consistent with Scripture is called "cooperative sanctification," which, as the name suggests, views the sanctification process as a partnership.

To set the stage for your discussion, you may want to ask your disciple if they have ever heard the word "sanctification," and what they think it means. Then you might ask your disciple to explain, as best they can, what is God's role in their spiritual growth, and what is their role? This should heighten a need, because truth be told, most Christians can not answer that question.

Turn to Philippians 2:12,13:

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed - not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence - continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Now you want to ask, "According to this passage, what is God's job in your spiritual growth?" Obviously, according to the verse, it is God's job "to work in us to will and to act according to His good purposes." But get them to try to explain what they think this really means. I'd also ask, "In what ways have you seen God do this?" or "How have you seen God change your attitudes and desires?"

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This Week's Excursion

Sanctification is the process by which God makes us holy. The confusing thing is knowing what is God's part in the process, and what is ours. That is your role and objective in this lesson: to clearly explain to your disciple what is his or her role in their spiritual growth, and what is God's role. It is a partnership, where roles need clarifying.

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Here, now, is a critical question: is there anything we can do in this “partnership” to better “experience” God’s direction and leading in our attitudes and desires?

Yes. While this is God’s part, we play a crucial role. The influence God has on our thoughts, motivations, and attitudes, can be like a rushing river, or a dripping faucet, depending on our cultivation of His presence.

So now the question you may want to ask is, “What things can we do (hypothetical), or what things are you doing to cultivate God’s presence and influence in your life?”

(As a discipler, it’s always good to think which questions you want to ask hypothetically, e.g., “What things can we do to please God?”; experientially, e.g., “What things have you done that you felt were pleasing to God?”; and imperatively, e.g., “What things do you need to do to please God?” A good mix is always helpful.)

Here’s a helpful analogy. Ever been to a wicked, depraved, evil, college party? The atmosphere, music, clothing, dancing, drinking, time (night), lighting (you can say things by a mood lamp that you can’t say under florescent lighting), can all create an atmosphere conducive to sin - the atmosphere increases sin’s influence.

Communicate that the atmosphere we set in our heart and mind determines the degree of influence God has over our “willing and acting according to His good purpose.” The atmosphere of our hearts and minds aids, or mitigates, the Holy Spirit’s influence.

What are some of those things we can do to create the right atmosphere in our heart? Thanksgiving (when you are constantly giving thanks to God throughout the day, you are wonderfully open to God’s presence and influence); time in prayer and Scripture; relying on God; listening or singing Christian music; Christian fellowship; and engaging in ministry.

What your disciple needs to see is that the main point of these activities is to experience God’s presence and increase His influence in our lives. These are not things we go out and do for God to make Him happy with us.

Back to Philippians 2:12,13. What is our part in the passage? Right, “working out our salvation.” Ask what you think Paul means by this? Answer: like the old Beatle song “Twist and Shout,” (“c’mon, c’mon, baby now, work it on out”) - the rhythm is in you; work it out - dance. Paul the apostle (not the Beatle) is saying to make good choices and take what God is doing in you and cement it into godly habits and character. The other part of the partnership is for us to make GOOD CHOICES to turn these godly desires and attitudes into settled godly habits and character. It is often a “string” or campaign of good choices that habitualize godly desires.

Some questions to ask here are: What kind of choices have you made? In what ways have you begun to see these choices become habits? Where do you feel you need to make consistent good choices? It would also be helpful to share some of your victories.

Here are some other areas in which to discuss making godly choices: choices to confess our sins to someone else; choices to avoid sin; choices to get good sleep and exercise so as to be less vulnerable to attacks; choices to be involved in

Next Steps

Have them think about that party metaphor and consider the different ways they can make a conducive environment in their heart for God to speak, lead, and empower. Also, where is an area they need to establish a pattern of making good choices, to turn a godly desires into a godly character trait?

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fellowship and ministry. In other words, there is a whole sphere of good choices that extends wider than simply saying “no” to sin, that you can discuss with your disciple.

Last, though this is our responsibility, how does God help us make good choices? God can protect us at times from temptation, distract us, empower us, provide helpful relationships, and in various other ways come along side us and help us to establish a campaign of good choices that result in settled character.

You might ask your disciple how they have experienced God’s help in these ways.

Summary

Our spiritual growth is a partnership. God works in us to will and to act, and we, for our part, cultivate His presence, which makes His influence more powerful, and clear. We also make right choices which confirm into our character what God is doing in us. God, on His part, empowers and encourages us in these choices.

Side Trails

Renovation of the Heart. Dallas Willard. Nav Press.

By far the most helpful and comprehensive book on the process of spiritual growth.

Grace Walk. Steve McVey. Harvest House Publishers. A little bit simpler reading.

A Hunger for God. John Piper. Good News Publishing.

Order at christianbook.com

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