

CREATING TRUE HEART CHANGE

5.1 CHANGING AT THE HEART LEVEL
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5.3 LOOKING OUT FOR ONE ANOTHER

We live in a day when people find it easy to talk about being a Christian, yet act differently than what they claim to believe. Almost 50 percent of college students would call themselves “religious,” with 22 percent claiming to be “born again.” Why don’t we see this reflected more on campus?

Small groups can sometimes be part of the problem of unapplied knowledge rather than the solution. Groups can talk about the Bible, engage in theological discussions, but still ignore the critical step of applying God’s truth to their lives. As a small group leader your job is to create an environment which promotes application and encourages life-change. Unless the content makes the twelve-inch jump from their heads to their hearts and into their lives, your group hasn’t yet learned the truth of God’s Word. They’ll walk away unchanged.

Our generation is not the first to struggle with matching behavior with beliefs. James questions those who claim to believe, yet act differently (James 2:14-26). The apostle John writes, “Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did” (1 John 2:6). Jesus said, “He who has my commandments and obeys them, he is the one who loves me” (John 14:21). True belief results in application.

MARK'S QUESTION

A few times I have gotten into some good conversations about the gospel with the guys on my floor. Almost all of them say they believe in God. Once I asked one of the guys, "Since you say you believe in God, how have you submitted your life to Him?" He didn't know what to say. He had never connected "belief in God" with his daily life.

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CHANGING AT THE HEART LEVEL

Last chapter we discussed the difference between surface needs and heart-level needs. As a Bible study leader, it's critical that you understand the surface needs of your group members. But if you stop there you will have missed the mark of helping your group experience genuine life-change.

1 *The sin beneath the behavior: our Fallen Condition.*

You were introduced in the last chapter to a girl who was sleeping with her boyfriend, a guy using pornography, and a new believer struggling with alcohol. You were also introduced to Bible Bob and Sally Sanctification. Let's throw into the mix, Honor Roll Harry.

Everyone likes Harry. He's adored by his professors, doesn't skip class, turns in his assignments on time, even makes time for activities like going to your Bible study: what's not to like? But Honor Roll Harry may be a performance junkie, getting a high with every 'A' on his report card. At the heart level, Honor Roll Harry may be motivated by the same things as the guy struggling with alcohol—love, acceptance and ultimately happiness.

Our goal in life is to find acceptance and love. Whatever our peer group

defines as ‘lovable,’ well that’s the standard we’ll perform to. But why?

Blaise Pascal, said, “All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The [human] will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves” (Section VII of *Penses*). In other words, the alcoholic drinks with the same motivation that the performance junkie performs—to be happy.

For some, their heart-level motivation unconsciously says, “If I perform to this standard I will be somebody (i.e. valuable, acceptable, lovable), and then I’ll be happy.” For others it might say, “I’m so miserable (i.e. lonely, isolated, unloved) I just want to avoid the pain.” And so, they escape by using drugs, pornography, and yes, even religion.

There’s a term for this drive and desire; it’s called our Fallen Condition. Our Fallen Condition is any motivation that seeks to find life, love, and acceptance apart from Christ, as a substitute for Christ. And so, as you look around your group, while manifested in different behaviors, realize that every single person—as well as yourself—shares the same heart condition: a sinful inclination to find life outside of a relationship with Christ.

GARY’S HONESTY

My group leader was seriously dating someone, and we routinely gave him a hard time about it. We were thrilled when he told us he was engaged. However, a few months later he told us that she had broken the engagement. He could have left it at that, but over the next few months he was quite open with his hurt feelings and his effort to trust God in the situation. His honesty really brought our group closer to him and each other. We found out he didn’t always know why God did things either. It was a great experience for our group.

Let’s look at an example of how to expose the heart condition from a Bible passage. Imagine you are reading the book of James and you come across the following verse: “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will



Ways to Discourage Life-Change

- Forget to pray for them. Let Halo and Wheel of Fortune distract you from asking God to change their lives.
- Assume they'll automatically apply whatever you talk about in group, so you don't need to specifically discuss application. Yeah, right.
- Have a rip-roaring great discussion every week, but never quite get around to application.
- If you see them on campus, ignore them.
- Ask them to do the kinds of things that you're unwilling or uninterested in doing.
- White out the application portion of the your Bible study material.

go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit'—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.' As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil" (James 4:13-16).

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In this passage James appears to criticize all attempts to plan for the future. If we start by asking, "What should I do?" then we may try to identify situations in which planning for the future is wrong. But in doing this we may entirely miss James's point. In fact, we would. If, however, we ask the question "What does this reveal about my brokenness that requires Christ's work in my life?" then we are in a better position to discern James's true purpose.

Notice the reference to "boast" and "boasting" in the passage. James is speaking to a prideful spirit of independence that says, "I'm the master of my fate, the controller of my destiny." James invites us to come to the Lord acknowledging our propensity to control our future and live independently from him. What I hear Christ saying is "Entrust your future to me," not merely "Stop making boastful claims about your future, you braggart." This kind of trust requires a renovation of my soul.

2 How The Passage Points To Christ.

We are now on our way to understanding how people change. Once you move from outward behavior to heart level motivations and inclinations, you are taking the first steps to leading your group to life-change. But there is a second question we need to ask. The Scripture doesn't leave us to simply wallow in our sin, so neither should you leave your group there. After we've

asked, “What does this reveal about my brokenness that requires the work of Christ?” we next must ask, “How does this passage point me to Christ?” In doing so we are looking to our relationship with Christ for a solution.

The passage may lead us to experience Christ in the following ways: 1. Experiencing the purifying forgiveness of Christ; 2. Experiencing the purifying power of Christ; and 3. Experiencing the purifying promises of Christ.

Experiencing the purifying forgiveness of Christ means that on the one hand I increasingly realize the depth of my sinfulness before God; while on the other hand, because of what Christ has done for me, I increasingly comprehend what it means to be totally and unconditionally loved by God. Tim Keller, pastor of Redeemer Church in New York City puts it this way, “[the gospel] tells us that we are more wicked than we ever dared believe, but more loved and accepted than you ever dared hope—at the same time.”

This experience of grace and forgiveness is dramatically illustrated in Luke 7:36-50. A sinful woman erupts with joy as Jesus wipes her sins away, to the visible displeasure of a Pharisee named Simon. Simon doesn’t get grace. Simon doesn’t get Jesus. And so Jesus explains it to him: “Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven — for she loved much. But he who

CHRIS' BURNING SINS

One night my small group was studying forgiveness and I wanted to illustrate 1 John 1:9. We wrote out our sins on pieces of paper and went out behind the dorm to set them on fire. Well, the security guards came and broke up our confessional. Did I commit a sin while trying to illustrate forgiveness?

CHRISTINE'S PRAYER CARDS

I had five girls in my group, and I made a prayer card for each of them. Some of the things I wrote on it were things they asked me to pray for and some were things I wanted to see God do in their lives. Often I prayed through Bible passages like Ephesians 1 or Colossians 1. Every Monday I carried my “Lisa” card that had Lisa’s prayer requests on it and throughout the day I would pray for her. Tuesday was Kari’s day, etc. It was good for me to begin to pray consistently, and they were blessed as God answered my prayers. Something worked because it’s been more than ten years since that time and all five women are still walking with God.

has been forgiven little loves little” (Luke 7:47). The difference between Simon the Pharisee and the sinful woman was not the amount of their sin. It was that the woman accurately perceived the depth of her sin and as a result

experienced the full measure of the grace given to her.

As you begin to uncover the Fallen Condition within the hearts of your group members, they will need to experience afresh the healing grace and

SANDRA'S HUG

Beth was in my small group her freshman year, and I was really looking forward to seeing her after her first summer at home. When I saw her across the union during orientation week, I ran up to her to give her a big hug. She was pretty cool toward me, as she had already made up her mind to not come back to our group this year. I knew my best shot was to at least get her to drop by our first group. She did, and when she realized how much the other women cared about her, she changed her mind. The next year she was ready to lead her own group.

forgiveness of Christ. The more we understand (know and feel) our wickedness, the more we can understand (know and feel) grace.

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Experiencing the purifying power of Christ means that, not only does He cleanse us from the guilt of sin, He provides freedom from the power of sin. The gospel is not simply good news because we've been forgiven for our sin but it's good news because God has provided power through his indwelling Spirit: power, as the apostle Paul states in Ephesians 3:14-19, to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ; and power, as Romans 8 declares, to walk in righteousness. So, as you lead your group point their eyes to the life-changing power that can only be found in Christ.

Finally, *experiencing the purifying promises of Christ* means that your group members experience hope. Hope, in the biblical sense of the word, actually means assurance: it is assurance that produces hope within us. There are many promises found in Scripture of which we can be assured and take comfort in, all of which are grounded in Christ. Take for example Hebrews 13:5, which says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." That's a promise! Our assurance in this promise yields hope and security. In Christ, the promises go on and on and on: promises of empowerment, healing, answered prayer, et cetera. As you lead your group, seek to point them to the promises that best address their true and felt need.

3 Responding to Christ.

The application aspect of the Bible study, then, is more of a response than a list of 5 things the group needs to do. It is initially a response to God's Word as it searches our hearts and convicts us of our brokenness, of the ways in which we seek to find life apart from Christ. And then it is a response to Christ: choosing to run to Him for cleansing, forgiveness, love, security, and whatever else our heart is ultimately looking for in sin.

Leading a group toward life-change isn't something you add on to your group; it's the focus of your group. Pray for life-change. Work toward it. Expect it. Model it. Build it into your group. Don't become so enthralled with orchestrating an excellent discussion that you lose sight of the goal of responding to God, which is what leads to life-change.

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PRAYING FOR YOUR GROUP

One of the most important things you can do as a group leader is pray fervently for the individuals in your group. There are no tricks to this. It's simply a matter of asking God to work powerfully in their lives. Ultimately, God is the one who changes a person, as Paul wrote, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow" (1 Corinthians 3:6).

If God doesn't change the people in your group, they'll never change. So, if God is the key ingredient for life-change to occur, it makes sense that prayer plays a critical role in helping others change.

RAY'S REQUEST

My small group leader told us he wasn't enjoying God's Word and was having trouble spending time in it every day. So he asked us to ask him about it the next week, and he told us he would ask us as well. That next week he had great times in the Word, and so did we.

MARY'S HARD CONFRONTATION

One of the hardest things I ever had to do as a group leader was confront one of the members about habitual lying. She would lie about even the littlest things that didn't even matter. I dreaded the day I finally talked to her. Maybe no one had ever loved her enough to confront her before.

Often Paul and Jesus were found praying for those they led. Study these prayers to learn more about praying for those in your group. Pray through the prayers for those in your group. In Colossians 1:9-12, Paul prays for the believers in Colossae, asking God to fill them with the knowledge of His will so that

KAREN'S DECISION

One of the women in my group had been involved in Campus Crusade for four years. She was a leader in the ministry, and many students looked to her to set the pace. She started dating a non-Christian guy, and we all knew it wasn't a good situation.

At first she told me it was no big deal because they were just friends. Then as they fell in love, she began to rationalize his lack of spiritual maturity. I finally got to the point where I felt she shouldn't be a part of our discipleship group anymore because she was deliberately going against God's design for a relationship.

I think she hated me for awhile, but a couple of weeks later, although she still really loved him, she broke up with him. Not too long after, she met a great Christian guy, they went bonkers over each other, and got married. Confronting her was tough but worth it!

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they may live lives worthy of God and bear fruit. Jesus prays for His disciples in John 17:6-19 and asks the Father to protect and sanctify them.

Prayer is often a forgotten aspect of leading a group. Carve out regular time to ask God to change every person, including you, in the group. You can plan, teach, and pray for life-change, but there's one more element that will greatly influence your group: it's the encouragement and modeling of those in your group who walk with the Lord and who help others do likewise.

5.3

LOOKING OUT FOR ONE ANOTHER

When people care for others, they begin to look out for one another. As a result, each person in the group grows stronger from the influence of others. Solomon wrote, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17).

A small group can provide positive encouragement—a healthy sense of peer pressure. When individuals in your group are around others in the group who are taking steps to honor God, it will have a refining effect. Christian stu-

dents need each other for accountability, encouragement and help in facing the many temptations of the world around them.

As you gain experience leading a group, you'll likely observe firsthand how a group can provide powerful encouragement for those in it to take the next step in their relationship with the Lord. Struggling believers often pull through because their group encourages them and models that it can be done.

On the other hand, when individuals make a deliberate choice to rebel against God, they'll almost always come less often to the group. It's too difficult for them to live one life and be intimately involved in a group where others are living a different lifestyle.

There are several things you can do as a leader to help the group begin to care and look out for each other. Developing a sense of responsibility for each other in the group will take time, and it occurs naturally as the group gets to know each other.

Here are a few suggestions to help you as a leader:

First, set the example by acknowledging you need the support and encouragement of the group. Ask them to pray for an area in which you are struggling (be appropriate with what you share). Be part of the group, admit your need for encouragement, and give it to those in your group. As group members see your example, they'll follow.

Second, have the courage to talk to individuals in your group if they are obviously living contrary to God's Word. Do this humbly and graciously, not as one who is perfect, but rather as one striving to please the Lord. Avoid a judgmental or harsh attitude. As a group leader you'll inevitably encounter situations like this. You can choose to ignore these situations, which is an easy but unloving

RANDY'S RESPONSIBILITY

Brad came to my group sporadically for a couple of years, usually when he had no other conflicts. Eventually he quit coming to group. One day we ran into each other and he asked me to call him every week to remind him of the Campus Crusade meeting. After four years he still was looking to me to get him to the Campus Crusade meeting. I told him I'd gladly remind him when I saw him, but he needed to begin to take responsibility for his own relationship with God.

alternative, or you can lovingly go to the person to see if you can help. Solomon wrote, “Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses” (Proverbs 27:6).

It’s important for the leader and those in the group to realize they have a responsibility toward each other. This is healthy, as God has clearly taught us that we should love each other, admonish one another, bear one another’s burdens, etc. These are responsibilities we have toward each other. But this is different than being responsible for those in the group.

For example, if someone in the group is actively involved in some kind of immoral behavior, believers around that person have a responsibility to talk to that person and offer help. But they aren’t responsible to change that person’s behavior. That’s the individual’s decision. Some very unhealthy relationships can develop when people feel the need to take responsibility for another person’s life.

Third, have the group commit itself to encouraging one another to live lives which honor the Lord. You might say something like, “It’s difficult to live the Christian life without the help of others. In this group one of the things we’ll want to do is help each other live God-honoring lives. So every week we’ll talk about how to practically apply the Scriptures to our lives, as well as talk about ways we can encourage one another to do the same.”

Fourth, encourage those in your group to take responsibility for their lives. You can point them to the Lord, but they need to make their own decisions and learn to honor the Lord in their lives.

Too often today people blame others for their poor choices. You do your group members a great favor by telling them you and the group can be a resource, but it’s their life. You can encourage this by saying things such as, “Well, it’s your life Scott. What do you think God wants



Planning a Bible study lesson is one thing: you study the passage, apply it in your own life, think of some personal illustrations, and write questions that create great discussion. But application for your group members is another matter. You can't control it. You can pray for it, model it, teach toward it, and encourage it, but you can't make it happen. A wise leader takes responsibility for his part and understands where his responsibilities end. Whether your group members apply God's Word is not your responsibility. When things go well, tell God. When you are discouraged, tell God. Either way, remember that God causes the growth..

you to do about this passage?” or, “That’s a tough choice. What are the pro’s and con’s? What do you think the Lord wants you to do?” Help them make decisions for themselves.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we’ve talked about promoting life-change and looking out for one another. These two issues are obviously related. As the group learns to look out for each other, it will help individuals make changes in their lives. Likewise, as you establish the importance of applying God’s Word, they’ll feel an increased need to help each other act on what they’ve learned. Both of these areas are crucial to a small group.

One of the greatest challenges you’ll probably face is helping promote application. It’s far easier to just have a good discussion. However, as you’ve had pounded into your head in this chapter, a group that doesn’t bring about life-change falls short of all God wants it to be.

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FOR THOUGHT / DISCUSSION

- 1 Have you ever been around someone who would talk one way but live another? What was your view of that person? How did it affect you?
- 2 Have you ever been in a group that had a refining effect on your behavior? What was it like?
- 3 Agree or disagree: “Most small groups strongly emphasize content, but tend to come up short in the application portion.” If you agree, why do you think this so? In your opinion, what are the keys to directing a small group toward life-change?
- 4 Has there ever been a time when another believer lovingly confronted you about an issue? If so, how did you feel? How did you respond? If not, how do you think your life might be different if someone had done so?