

The Path to Real Change Small Group Guide

Warm-up Question: (Choose one, make up your own, or skip this part all together, depending upon the nature of your group.)

1. Have you ever tried a self-improvement fad? Explain.
2. What is one way you have changed over the past few years?

Read the following passages: Mark 12:28-34; Philippians 2:1-11.

Jesus's discussion with an expert in the law gives us a helpful way to think about transformation. For starters, we should not approach transformation as if we are the gods of our own lives. There is only one God, and he is in control. Real transformation begins when we surrender to his rule. As Proverbs puts it: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). Only God has the right to define who we become.

Jesus's teaching also shows us that real transformation is fundamentally about our motives. Love is not just about what we do, but why we do it. Although people pursue change for a variety of reasons—more freedom, more peace, more success, more happiness—we should pursue the deeper transformation of a change in our motives.

When love is our motive, we will begin to reject self-centeredness and embrace relationships characterized by giving and receiving. In fact, we will start look at our problems and their solutions from a very different perspective. Instead of seeing all of our problems as individual problems, we will look at our problems through the lens of loving God and loving people. When we do this, big areas like mental health, identity, purpose, growth, success, and failure will no longer be about the self in isolation, but the self in relationship.

Questions for Discussion (Choose several that are relevant for your group):

1. In what sense is personal autonomy idolized in the modern western world? What's wrong with seeing ourselves as completely and solely responsible for all transformation that takes place in our lives? What would a more biblical perspective on transformation look like?
2. Are there any thoughts or narratives about yourself or your responsibilities that are regularly causing you anxiety? Explain. (These might even include thoughts that we typically consider to be positive or noble, like, "I can't disappoint my family," or "I have to move forward in my career," or "I have to get married.") Is there a better way to reframe any of these thoughts or narratives? Do any need to be thrown out?
3. How should the confession "Jesus is Lord" impact how we think about transformation?

4. In Psalm 73, Asaph describes how he almost lost his mind as he kept putting his attention on the prosperity of the wicked. What in your life should get less attention, and what should get more attention?
5. Consider the following passage. How might our pursuit of happiness lead us astray? Does this mean we should reject our desire to be happy? Explain.

“By far, the most common motivation for change is happiness. This motive is so pervasive in my society that morality has shifted from good versus evil to pleasure versus pain. ... As innocent as happiness appears to be, from gossip to violence, the pursuit of happiness justifies all kinds of evil, and, ironically, leads to unhappiness. It causes us to be increasingly self-focused, which causes us to behave selfishly, which ultimately creates a very lonely and destructive existence.”

Greg Mitchell, Relational Formation

6. Consider the categories below. What might it look like to view these categories from the perspective of relationship instead of from the perspective of the self in isolation?
 - Mental health
 - Growth
 - Success
 - Identity
 - Purpose
7. What are some things that Jesus’s example can teach us about living a non-self-centered life? In particular, how do we keep from being ruled by the whims of the people around us?
8. In what sense does living a life of love require us to trust in God?

Pray