

HELP!

I WANT TO CHANGE



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Jim Newheiser

Consulting Editor: Dr. Paul Tautges

ENDORSEMENTS

Dr. Jim Newheiser explains, clearly and concisely, what God's Word teaches about the dynamics that enable deep transformation of our desires and behavior. He shows how God's grace in Christ ignites our response of love for God, and how the Spirit of God uses the gospel itself to motivate and empower us to resist habits and appetites that breed shame and defeat. He also demonstrates from the Scriptures the complementary truth that we need in our struggle against sin: that the grand indicatives of what Jesus has done for us and the assurance of the Father's invincible love toward us are intended not to make us passive, but to sustain our hope and to fire our resolve to fight sin and pursue Christlike holiness and love.

*Dennis E. Johnson,
Professor, Practical Theology,
Westminster Seminary, California, USA*

It's easy to see areas that need changing in our lives and, as Christians, we long for change that will glorify God. But how is change accomplished? In this helpful

booklet, Jim Newheiser reminds us that change begins and is sustained by the power of Christ through the gospel, and that through that same gospel we are enabled to respond. I highly recommend it!

Elyse Fitzpatrick, author, speaker, and counselor

In this little gem, Dr. Newheiser hits the nail squarely on the head! Read it and use it with confidence in Christ.

*George C. Scipione, Director, Biblical Counseling
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A byproduct of years of careful thinking by a bright-minded and caring counselor, this little booklet is densely packed with biblical guidance for any who are interested in transformation for themselves and others. I rejoice in the attention that this booklet gives to God as the Author of change and to the role played by gospel indicatives and imperatives in nurturing and directing the process of change. Readers will find much hope and help here!

Milton Vincent, author,
A Gospel Primer for Christians

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We all have areas in our lives which we want to change. Some would like to have more discipline in their eating and exercise. Many know they need to establish budgets by which they can get their spending and credit card debts under control. Others wish they were more faithful in their daily Bible reading and prayer. But change is hard. Many have tried to change but have experienced a continuing cycle of failure.

Dan,¹ a young man in his early twenties, has been fighting the temptation of pornography and self-gratification ever since he became a Christian when he was in his mid-teens. He sometimes goes days or even weeks without giving in to lust. When he fails he confesses his sin to God, but the feelings of defeat and hopelessness linger for days.

Sally, a middle-aged stay-at-home wife, started drinking when her kids grew up and left home. She has gone through various programs, but has never

¹ All names have been changed to protect the identities of those concerned.

been able to go more than a month without going on a binge. She agreed to carry no cash or credit cards so that she wouldn't possess the means to buy alcohol, but one day recently she was so desperate that she pawned silver which has been in the family for generations to get the money to indulge her habit.

Jim has struggled with his weight all his life. As he has grown older and heavier his doctor has put him on cholesterol medication and is about to put him on blood pressure drugs. Jim knows exactly what he should do—eat less and exercise more. In the last six years he has started diet and fitness programs countless times, but he never sticks with them for more than a few days.

Bob and Mary have been married for over ten years. The Lord has blessed them with a son, aged eight, and a daughter, five. Bob and Mary don't fight, but there is no intimacy in their relationship. They also recognize that they aren't being wise and consistent in raising their children. They are both tired of the mediocrity of their family life, but they feel powerless to make things better.

Vic has an explosive temper which has cost him relationships with friends and family members, and in his career. He has been to anger management classes, once by court order after an incident in which the police were called out because he had physically

assaulted his younger brother. When Vic is calm he knows the right things to say and do, but when he is provoked everything he has learned goes out the window and he blows up.

Dan, Sally, Jim, Bob, Mary, and Vic all want to know “*Why can’t we change?*”

The Bible teaches principles by which we can experience significant changes in our lives. The change that we, as biblical Christians, seek is unique. Our goal is not merely to transform some aspect of our lives so that we will be happier or more comfortable. The goal of believers is that we would become more Christlike and that this change would be to the glory of God (Colossians 1:28; 1 Timothy 4:5; 1 Corinthians 10:31). God desires this kind of change in his people and is committed to seeing that it happens:

I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

(Philippians 1:6)

This is good news!

1

Unbiblical Methods Lead to Failure

Many professing Christians seek change in their lives using methods which are contrary to Scripture. As a result, they don't experience the change which God seeks to produce in his people. Consider just six examples.

Deliverance Ministries

Some claim that the source of every personal problem is demonic and that the solution is to identify and cast out the evil spirit(s). Certain preachers claim to have the special powers and methods to perform these deliverances. They often draw large crowds of people desperate for help. While the Bible does teach that we are engaged in spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:11-12), it does not teach that all our spiritual problems can be solved by casting out demons. If this were the issue, the Bible would contain detailed instructions

for how to identify and eliminate demons. Those who seek such unbiblical deliverances typically fall into their old patterns again and again. Instead, we are taught to engage in spiritual warfare by putting on the armor of God, which includes truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation, Scripture, and prayer (Ephesians 6:13–18).

Mysticism

Many believers expect that God will somehow instantly zap away their sin patterns and problems through dramatic answers to certain kinds of prayers. Some seek out spiritual leaders who claim to have special powers in prayer to produce dramatic results. The Bible, on the other hand, teaches that spiritual growth and true wisdom are typically obtained through a persistent disciplined pursuit of God (Proverbs 2:2–12), not through a one-time experience. Many repeatedly go through such emotional experiences, only to have the sin pattern resume after the excitement and feelings wear off. They are then tempted to be angry with God, blaming him for not taking away the sin. Others passively continue in their sin, excusing themselves by the claim that they cannot change until God mystically intervenes.

Medication

While we embrace the use of medicine for true medical problems, many believers are hoping to find quick and easy solutions to their spiritual problems through pills. Some drugs may dull some of the symptoms of our emotional pain, but they do not address the heart issues from which sin comes (Proverbs 4:23; Mark 7:20–23).²

Self-Improvement Formulas

Worldly methods of change typically involve finding the resources within yourself to successfully lose weight, stop smoking, control anger, and so on. This is contrary to Scripture, which teaches that we are totally dependent upon God for meaningful transformation. Jesus said,

Apart from Me you can do nothing.

(John 15:5)

2 For further information on this topic see Elyse Fitzpatrick and Laura Hendrickson, *Will Medicine Stop the Pain? Finding God's Healing for Depression, Anxiety, and Other Troubling Emotions* (Chicago: Moody, 2006).

Moralism

Many try to change by seeking to discipline themselves to do the “right thing” by keeping a list of rules. God’s Word teaches that we can’t keep God’s law in our own power (Romans 3:20) and that we cannot be truly changed merely by keeping rules.

For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son ...

(Romans 8:3)

Those pursuing moralistic solutions will either have to lower their standards far below those of Scripture, resulting in pride, or they will endure an endless cycle of failure, resulting in despair.

Recovery Programs

Twelve-step programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, are very widely used by those who seek to make significant changes in their lives. Such programs typically combine elements of mysticism (relying on an undefined higher power), self-improvement formulas, and moralism, while

neglecting the biblical instructions as to how we can change.

In contrast to all these methods, Scripture teaches us that God transforms us as we understand and experience the power of the gospel and then step forward in Spirit-enabled obedience.