

How to Change for the Better (Part 1)

Lasting Change – Why We Want it so Badly and Achieve it so Rarely

Proverbs 10:9

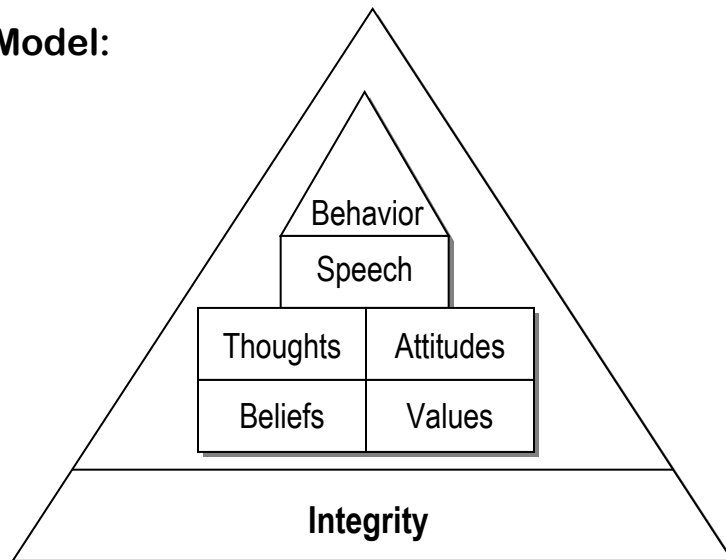
He who walks in integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out.

Proverbs 10:9 (NASB)

Question:

Why do our attempts to change so often fail?

Model:



Principle:

Integrity is the prerequisite for lasting change.

What is integrity?

- Complete moral innocence
- State or quality of being complete, undivided moral soundness, upright, honesty
- “Walking Honestly” – Your life and your words are telling the same story
- Comes from the same root word as “integrate” – to bring unity and wholeness to division
- Synonyms = “sincere, authentic, real, consistent”

Why is integrity essential for lasting change? - 3 Reasons

1. **RELATIONSHIPS** are impossible without integrity.

- With God John 4:23-24, Psalm 15
- With yourself Psalm 32:2-5
- With others Ephesians 4:15

2. **PEACE** is impossible without integrity.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.

Colossians 3:15 (NASB)

3. **IMPACT** is impossible without integrity.

Like a trampled spring and a polluted well is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked.

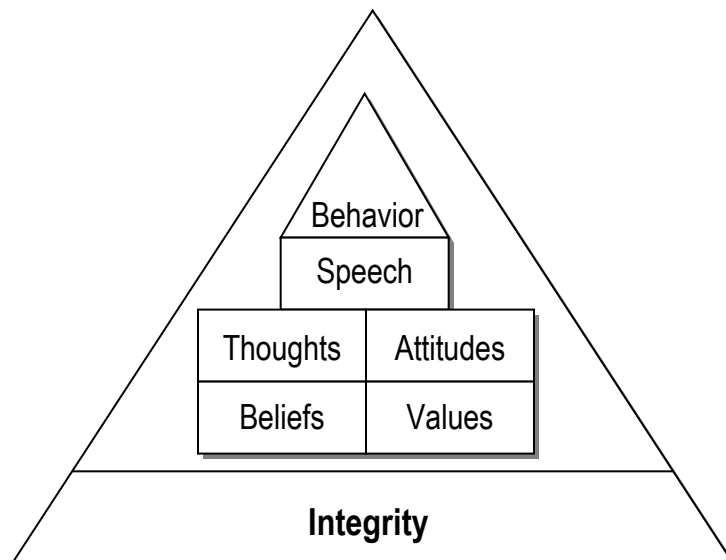
Proverbs 25:26 (NASB)

Application / Discussion Questions:

1. What did you learn about “lasting change” that was helpful to you? Explain.
2. Why do most of our attempts to change fall short? What’s missing in the process?
3. Give the three reasons why integrity is essential for lasting change? With which of these reasons do you most identify? Why?
4. What aspect of your life do you think needs to be more “integrated?” What steps will you take to follow David’s example in Psalm 139:23-24? Be specific.

Introduction: Why is it so difficult to “get started” and
almost impossible to “keep going?”

Model:



The dynamics of change for life integration:

The Context: James 3:1-18 (NIV)

¹ *Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.*

² *We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.* ³ *When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal.* ⁴ *Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.* ⁵ *Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.* ⁶ *The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.* ⁷ *All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind,* ⁸ *but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.*

⁹ *With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness.* ¹⁰ *Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.* ¹¹ *Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?* ¹² *My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.*

¹³ *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.* ¹⁴ *But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.* ¹⁵ *Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.* ¹⁶ *For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.* ¹⁷ *But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.*

¹⁸ **Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.**

How to Change for the Better (Part 2)

Motivation – How to Do What’s Best When You Feel Like it the Least

James 3:1-18

- **Promise of judgment** = Motivation through accountability James 3:1
- **The tongue** = Fruit of our inner life James 3:2-8
 - Positive potential James 3:2-5
 - Negative impact James 3:6-8
- **The problem** James 3:9-12
 - Identified = DUPLICITY James 3:9-10
 - Roots = HEART James 3:11
 - Fruit = BEHAVIOR James 3:12
- **Wisdom** = Roots of our inner life James 3:13-17
 - Negative roots = Negative impact James 3:13-16
 - Positive roots = Positive impact James 3:17
- **Promise of reward** = Motivation through hope James 3:18

Three motivational principles from James 3:1-18

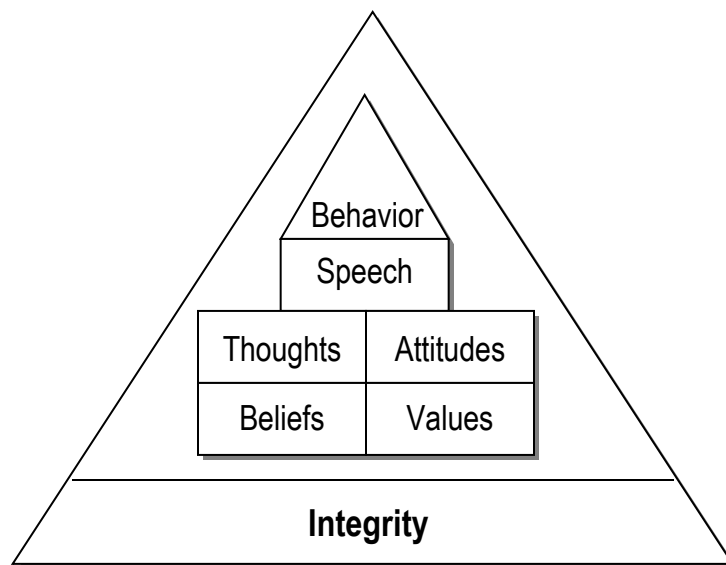
1. The principle of certain **JUDGMENT**. James 3:1
2. The principle of future **REWARD**. James 3:18
3. The principle of strategic **APPLICATION**. James 3:2-5

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is motivation such a problem for most of us?
2. Discuss what aspect of this message you think will be most helpful for you in developing lasting motivation. Explain why.
3. How will you specifically apply the three motivational principles to your life situation?

Introduction: Lasting change always occurs below the
“water line.”

Model:



Thesis = our tongue is the window of our soul

The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.

Luke 6:45 (NASB)

Understanding the power of our tongue:

1. The principle – If you can control your tongue, you can control your life.

² We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.

James 3:2 (NIV)

2. The proof – Our tongue is a small, but powerful instrument to institute major changes in our lives.

³ When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴ Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵ Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts.

James 3:3-5a (NIV)

3. The warning – Our tongue is not only powerful, but a dangerous and formidable foe.

^{5b} Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, ⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

James 3:5b-8 (NIV)

4. The reason – Our tongue reveals the true condition of our hearts.

⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. ¹¹ Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? ¹² My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

James 3:9-12 (NIV)

- See Matthew 12:33-37 and Jeremiah 17:9

Application: Where do we go from here?

1. Get a new heart 2 Corinthians 5:17
2. Start listening to your speech to look below the water line.
3. Determine to deal with “core” issues.
4. Commit to bring your speech under the lordship of Christ. Psalm 141:3

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is the tongue so vital to any lasting change of significance in our lives?

2. What does our tongue reveal about us? Read Matthew 12:33-37.

3. With which problems relating to the tongue do you struggle?
 - o Complaining
 - o Bragging
 - o Lying
 - o Gossiping
 - o Criticizing
 - o Talking crudely
 - o Talking flippantly
 - o Talking condescendingly
 - o Talking too much
 - o Talking abrasively

With which one do you struggle most? _____

4. List three practical steps you could take to allow God's spirit to bridle your tongue:
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____

Introduction:

The greatest danger in seeking to change for the better is believing it's simply a matter of "**YOUR WILL**".

⁵ Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. ⁶ He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

2 Corinthians 3:5-6 (NIV)

Back to the basics:

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:18 (NASB)

- Change is a work of the **Spirit**.
- Change is a **by-product** of a personal, accurate and deepening relationship with God.
- Change occurs from the **inside out**. The goal of change is **Christ-like character**.
- Change is a **progressive** on-going process.

A Biblical theology of change:

1. Salvation:

- It Begins at Spiritual Birth: *“Jesus answered, Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.”*

John 3:5 (NIV)

- The Gospel – The Good News: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

John 3:16 (NIV)

- Justification: A legal declaration of our standing before God. He takes away our sin legally. He imputes the righteousness of Christ. It is a point in time.

- It is by **GRACE** we are saved, through **FAITH**.

2. Sanctification:

- *“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation...”*

1 Peter 2:2 (NIV)

- *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”*

Galatians 2:20 (NIV)

- Progressive Sanctification: A continuous process of becoming more and more righteous or holy, in daily experience.

- What do we do when we blow it? *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*

1 John 1:9 (NIV)

How to Change for the Better (Part 4)

**Warning: When Changing What You
Don't Know Will Kill You**
2 Corinthians 3

- How do we become more holy?
 - The body of Christ
 - Personal time with God
 - Ordinances
 - Conviction and empowering
 - Practice of spiritual disciplines

3. Glorification:

- *“...we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”*

1 John 3:2 (NIV)

Four key concepts to “put it all together”:

1. Spirituality is the life of Christ.
(John 14:20, Phil. 1:21, Ephesians 3:17, Galatians 5:19-20)
2. Spirituality is the life of Christ **reproduced in the believer**.
(2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 2:20, 2 Corinthians 4:5-10)
3. Spirituality is the life of Christ reproduced in the believer **by the Holy Spirit**.
(Acts 1:8, Galatians 5:16 & 25)
4. Spirituality is the life of Christ reproduced in the believer by the Holy Spirit **in obedience (response) to the Word of God**. (Hebrews 5:11-14, James 1:19-27)

Conclusion: The Work of God
 The Word of God
 Personal commitment
 Other believers
 + Time and trials

 Maturity

The issue isn't **TRYING** harder, it's **TRAINING** in grace.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why does change require more than will power?
2. What aspect of this teaching helped you most?
3. What was most unclear or confusing? Discuss and help one another in your group.
4. Read Philippians 2:12-13 and discuss the balance of “God’s part” and “our part” in seeing change become a reality in our daily experience.

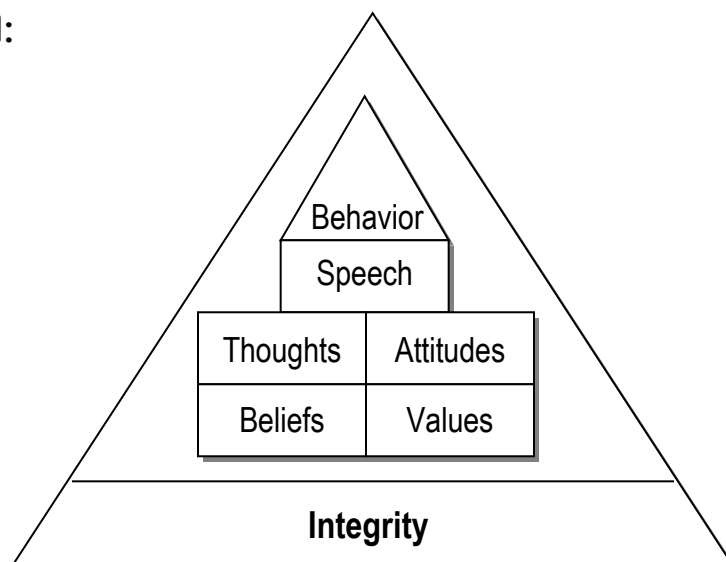
References: *True Spirituality* – Francis Schaeffer
The Pursuit of Holiness – Jerry Bridges
The Spirit of the Disciplines – Dallas Willard
30 Days to Understand the Christian Life – Max E. Anders

Introduction: How can we know if we’re really changing for the better?

The test: *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility (gentleness), that comes (flows) from wisdom.*

James 3:13 (NIV)

Model:



Wisdom = Core values + beliefs we hold about what makes one “successful” in life

Summary: Lasting change demands we examine the source (core values and beliefs) of our attitudes and actions.

Man’s wisdom: “Me Centered” attempts to achieve and appear righteous to satisfy ego needs and fulfill private agendas.

¹⁴ But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵ Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

James 3:14-16 (NIV)

- **Characteristics** of man’s wisdom James 3:14
- **Source** of man’s wisdom James 3:15
- **Results** of man’s wisdom James 3:16

God’s wisdom: “Christ Centered” dependency that seeks to obey God and serve others to fulfill God’s agenda.

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

James 3:17 (NASB)

- **Characteristics of God’s Wisdom**

- *Pure* – If I’m wise, I won’t compromise my **INTEGRITY**.
- *Peaceable* – If I’m wise, I won’t antagonize your **ANGER**.
- *Gentle* – If I’m wise, I won’t minimize other’s **FEELINGS**.
- *Reasonable* – If I’m wise, I won’t criticize other’s **SUGGESTIONS**.

Summary: God’s wisdom will be revealed in lives characterized by personal holiness and relational oneness.

- **Results of God’s Wisdom**

- *Full of mercy and good fruit* – If I’m wise, I won’t emphasize others’ **MISTAKES**.
- *Unwavering* – If I’m wise, I won’t show **PARTIALITY**.
- *Without hypocrisy* – If I’m wise, I won’t disguise my **FAULTS**.

Summary: God’s wisdom will result in compassionate, authentic, and vulnerable relationships.

Application: How do you get God’s wisdom?

- Action step

²In this way they will know God’s secret, which is Christ himself. ³He is the key that opens all the hidden treasures of God’s wisdom and knowledge.

Colossians 2:2-3 (GNT)

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|-------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Receive the Son | 1 John 5:11-12 |
| 2. Pray – Ask God for wisdom | James 1:5 |
| 3. Dig for God’s wisdom daily | Proverbs 2:1-5 |
| 4. Get around wise people | Proverbs 13:20 |

Discussion Questions:

1. What insights about “changing” have you gained from this series?
2. What progress have you seen occur in your life?
3. In what ways do you see man’s wisdom operating in your life? God’s wisdom?
4. What would “trusting God” look like in your life if lasting, Christ-like change were your goal?

Resources:

1st Steps **The Fight** by John White
Victory **Tired of Trying to Measure Up** by Jeff Vanvonderen
Motives **Inside Out** by Larry Crabb; **Finding God** by Larry Crabb
Wisdom **Knowing God** by J.I. Packer