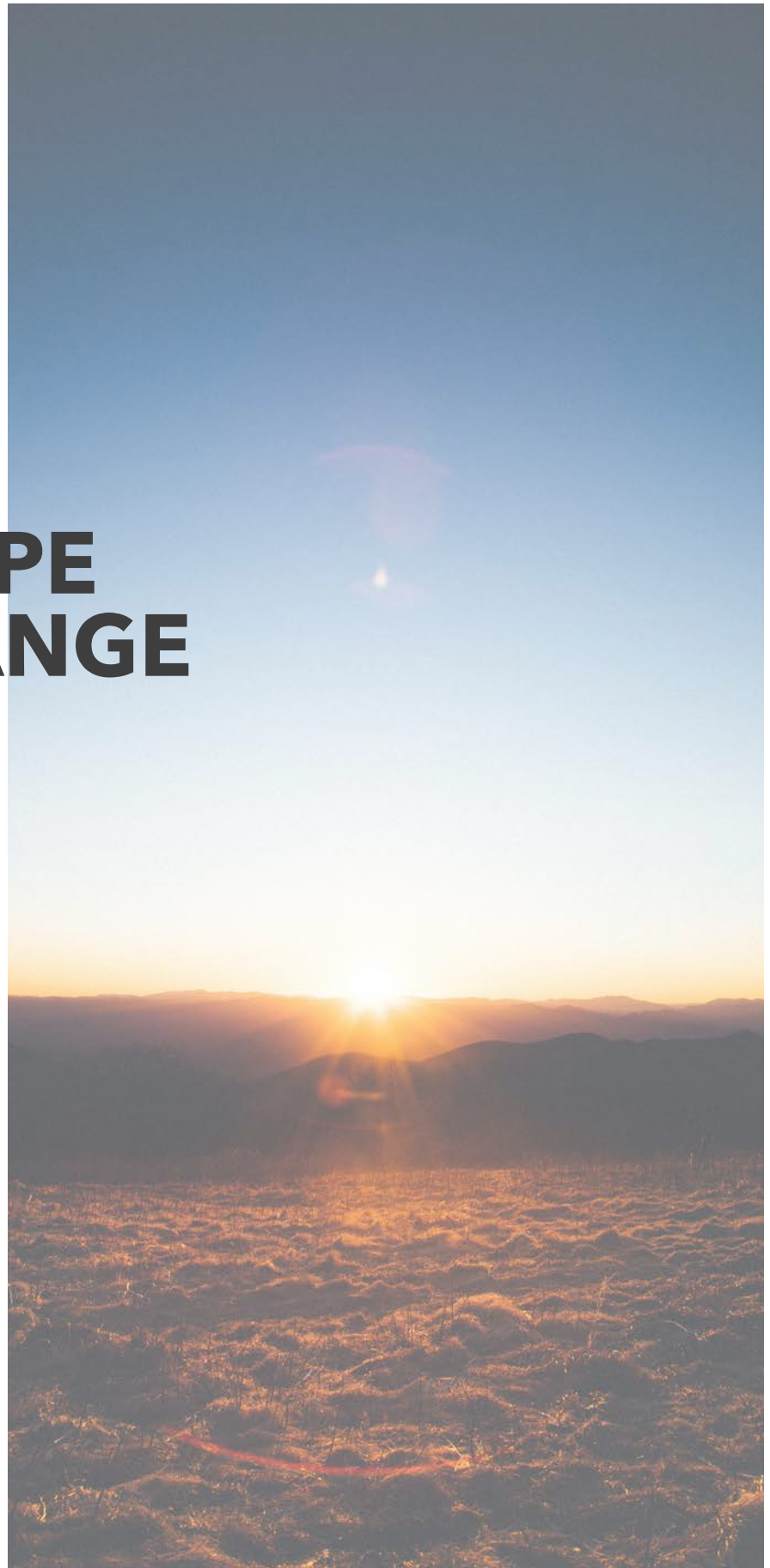





REAL HOPE FOR CHANGE

WEEK 3





"...let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect."

-Romans 12:2

DAY 1 - MONDAY

ROMANS 12:1-2, 2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-18, 10:3-6,
PHILIPPIANS 4:6-9, EPHESIANS 4:17-24

Reflection:

How often do you spend time evaluating your thoughts?

What influences your thoughts?

Spend some time today with your thoughts, actively processing how to take them captive and teach them to be obedient to Christ.

Renew Your Mind

Our behavior begins in our minds. Our human minds are incredibly powerful, and the Bible has much to say about how we handle our thoughts. Our thoughts control not only how we think but also how we feel and act. If we want to have hope for real change, that change starts with renewing our minds. But what is a renewed mind exactly? And how do we go about renewing our minds?

2 Corinthians 10 reminds us that it will be a fight to take our thoughts captive and teach them to obey Christ. Why is it a fight? Because the enemy of our souls enjoys using our thoughts as his playground. First, we must acknowledge that this will take some work and likely be something we will have to do over and over daily—sitting with our thoughts long enough to teach and train them to be in line with scripture and be obedient to Christ. Paul said in Romans 12:2 that we are transformed by the renewing of the mind. Where our thoughts go, our lives will follow. We are training our minds to no longer be enslaved to thoughts from the enemy and instead operate as a child of the living God. We don't have to live like a slave when we are heirs to the throne, sons and daughters of the King. As His children, we have access to Him and the power of the Holy Spirit. This gives us a real chance to fight against the schemes of darkness. The problem is we often forget that we have access to the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit in us, so we continue to live like slaves instead of soldiers equipped for battle.

We can't blame outside circumstances for our negative thoughts. We need to take hold of the power we have been given through Christ to renew our minds by meditating on His Word. We need to stop believing that we can't control our thoughts. The Bible tells us in Philippians 4 that we can fix our thoughts on "what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable." We have been given the power to control our thoughts. It's impossible to fix our thoughts on these things in Philippians 4 if we continue to fill our minds daily with the things of the world more than the truth of God's Word. The only way to change our default thinking is to fill our minds with God's truth so that truth will flow out of our mouths and into our actions. We see this when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by the enemy. The enemy attempted to fill Jesus' mind with lies, but Jesus fought those lies by speaking scripture.

We cannot always stop negative thoughts from coming in and taking up residence in our minds, but we can stop them from moving in permanently. They can be temporary residents on their way out! Ask for the Father's help; if you are struggling with your thoughts, ask God for clarity and wisdom to know if you need additional help from a trusted counselor or pastor. Lean into the power of the Spirit that reminds us that we have been given a sound mind. Start with a simple prayer: *Jesus, by your Holy Spirit, keep my mind firmly set where you want it to be focused today. Help me to take my thoughts captive and teach them to be obedient to you.*

DAY 2 - TUESDAY

EXODUS 14:10-14, ROMANS 5:3-8, ROMANS 6:7-18,
1 CORINTHIANS 10:12-15

Reflection:

Do you find yourself caught in the same cycles of temptations?

What is your typical reaction to temptations and trials? Do you lean towards cynicism and apathy or optimism and hope?

A Way of Escape

We encounter temptations and trials daily. They can lead us down a path of despair if we let them. Temptations and trials often come from the enemy, whose motivations are to lead us into sinful patterns that seem inescapable. God can also use these times of temptations and trials to grow us in endurance, perseverance, character, strength, and intimacy with Him. The difference between the two is their motivation. Satan's goal is for us to fail and fall deeper into despair. God's goal is for us to grow stronger and more resilient, and unlike the enemy, God is right there to lift us up and give us grace when we fail; He provides a way out!

In Exodus 14, we see the Israelites have just been freed from slavery in Egypt, and they seem to come up against temptations and trials at every turn in the wilderness. The Red Sea seemed impossible to cross; they were surrounded by trouble on every side and even wanted to return to slavery. Moses says this to the people in Exodus 14, *"Don't be afraid. Just stand still and watch the Lord rescue you today. The Egyptians you see today will never be seen again. The Lord himself will fight for you. Just stay calm."*

God was about to provide a way to escape, a path right through the Red Sea. They couldn't see a way out of their struggles. Even though God had shown Himself to be all-powerful, this difficulty caused them to doubt God's ability and character. Moses was asking them to stop complaining and trust the Lord, to take their focus off themselves and place it back on their deliverer. Their Deliverer did more than just show up; He provided an unexplainable supernatural way of escape for them. Even after seeing this way of escape, they still struggled to trust Him in their time in the wilderness, so God was faithful to be patient with them and continue to remind them of His power.

We have a powerful God who makes a way of escape for us when we are tempted. We have a powerful God who tests us to build our strength, so we can better face temptations when they come. Sometimes all we can do is trust Him and lean into His power as our way of escape. The more we do this, the more natural it becomes and the more change we see in our lives. We don't have to return to slavery when trials and temptations come our way...*"Now you are free from your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous living."* There is real hope that He provides a way out for us when we trust Him, cry out to Him, and follow Him. His way is always better than our way.

DAY 3 - WEDNESDAY

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-21, LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24,
COLOSSIANS 3:5-10

Reflection:

When would you say you gave your life to Christ? What do you think is holding you back if you haven't yet?

How does God's grace changing and transforming us daily bring a more splendid view of His salvation to your mind?

End this time reflecting on how you can regularly open your life to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Ask God to help you open your life up daily to the prompting of the Spirit to be made new.

A New Creation

"...it is specifically God the Holy Spirit who works within us to change us and sanctify us, giving us greater holiness of life. Peter speaks of the "sanctification of the Spirit" and Paul speaks of "sanctification by the Spirit" It is the Holy Spirit who produces in us the "fruit of the Spirit" those character traits that are part of greater and greater sanctification. If we grow in sanctification we "walk by the Spirit" and are "led by the Spirit" that is, we are more and more responsive to the desires and promptings of the Holy Spirit in our life and character. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of holiness, and he produces holiness within us." -Wayne Grudem Systematic Theology

Growing up, I believed that salvation, God's grace, was something I received on one special shining breakthrough day, and then I just followed God every day naturally after that. As I have grown older, I have learned that is not how my holiness or sanctification (the process of living and looking more and more like Jesus) works. The truth is more beautiful than that. Salvation is a gift. I can receive it with my whole heart at a given point in my life. The time of salvation may be at church on a Sunday, at camp as a child or teenager, or in your bedroom on your knees. No matter when salvation comes into the life of someone, the process of continually receiving that salvific gift of grace, the process of being transformed by His salvation is daily, hourly, minute-by-minute, second after second work.

In his second letter, Paul wrote to the Corinthians about being a new creation, which he makes clear is not a one-and-done experience but something that happens to us daily. We are a new creation, made new, and saved; each day, each moment, we choose to pursue Jesus, live more like Him, and embrace holy living. The book of Lamentations was written hundreds of years before Jesus' sacrifice, and it, too, points to this being in the very character of God's love, mercy, and being. God makes us new each day when we turn our eyes, hearts, and lives to Him. The encouragement is knowing that we have real hope for change in the grace-filled gift of Jesus' salvation for our lives. We can be made new every time we make our way His way by opening our lives to the work of His Holy Spirit that lives in us and moves through us.

DAY 4 - THURSDAY

GALATIANS 2:20-21, EPHESIANS 1:15-23, EPHESIANS 3:14-21

Reflection:

Do you feel like you have the power to face your weaknesses and enact true change in your life? Why or why not?

Sit before the Lord today with that question in mind. Ask Him to reveal to you ways that you can lean into His power within you and make real progress toward change.

Crucified with Christ

If we have any hope of real change, we must wrestle with the reality of Galatians 2:20, *"I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."*

What does that mean? It means that our lives are no longer our own; Christ lives in and works through us. This means that if we have submitted our lives to His authority, then we are no longer in charge. We must bring all our desires under His rule and ask Him to birth in us new desires that honor and bring glory to Him.

J. A Medders says it this way,

"You were crucified, too, right along with Him. You are a crucified man. As Jesus struggled to breathe, your sins and your past life were struggling to breathe too. And when Christ walked out of that borrowed burial site, you walked out, too—into new life. Right now, your life is animated by the Lord Jesus. Christ lives in you, and you live by faith. Faith in Christ is now the driving force in your life, if only you'll let Him lead."

This means we now have Jesus' power within us through the Holy Spirit. His resurrection ushered in our resurrection to a new way of living. One where we have the power of the Spirit living in us to daily put to death our sinful desires and walk in a new abundant life with Him. This abundance looks different than the abundance the world offers. It might not look like wealth, possessions, and happiness, but it will be a life filled with unconditional love, unexplainable peace, deep joy, and eternal hope. This is the life fueled by the power of Jesus, one that can only come if we surrender fully to His ways above our own. This life is fueled by the reminder that He loves us and gave Himself up for us on the cross. This becomes our motivation and heart's desire as we surrender to the Lord daily. As N.T. Wright says, "Jesus was faithful to God in being crucified, and my faithfulness answers the faithfulness of Jesus."

DAY 5 - FRIDAY

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10, EPHESIANS 2:8-10, ROMANS 8:26-28

Reflection:

List all the areas where you feel like you're weak. Now take time to journal or process where God can work through your weakness to show Himself in your life and the lives of others.

His Power Made Perfect in Weakness

"This sufficiency is declared without any limiting words, and therefore I understand the passage to mean that the grace of our Lord Jesus is sufficient to uphold thee, sufficient to strengthen thee, sufficient to comfort thee, sufficient to make thy trouble useful to thee, sufficient to enable thee to triumph over it, sufficient to bring thee out of it, sufficient to bring thee out of ten thousand like it, sufficient to bring thee home to heaven... O child of God, I wish it were possible to put into words this all-sufficiency, but it is not. Let me retract my speech: I am glad that it cannot be put into words, for if so it would be finite, but since we never can express it, glory be to God it is inexhaustible, and our demands upon it can never be too great. Here let me press upon you the pleasing duty of taking home the promise personally at this moment, for no believer here need be under any fear, since for him also, at this very instant, the grace of the Lord Jesus is sufficient." -Charles Spurgeon

DAY 6 - SATURDAY (REFLECTION DAY)

ROMANS 12:1-2

Reflection Notes and Questions:

We are invited to come to God as we are but thank God we don't have to stay that way. The final gospel belief we looked at in this study is that we have real hope for change. The hope for a change in our lives comes not through our common pursuits like self-help or a seminar. Real hope for change comes by drawing near to God and allowing His Holy Spirit to change us. The process of being changed by God is what we studied this week; now, take time to reflect on what you learned this week and seek to apply it.

As we wrap up week 3 of this study, reflect on what it means that we have a real hope for change in a relationship with Jesus, and follow these reflection practices below:

- › Write down what you learned about who God is this week.
- › Why do you think there is real hope for change when we pursue a lifetime relationship with Jesus?
- › What do you feel Jesus may be changing in you right now?

DAY 7 - SUNDAY

REST DAY

Use today to rest, pray, and catch up on any of this week's reading you missed. Use today as a rest and preparation for your heart towards next week's time with God in this study.

