

GROW

AN SMBS SERIES

Lesson 13 – Putting It All Together

Teacher Edition



Review: So far we have seen that in order to change, you have to want to change and you have to be given a new nature so that you can change. Next we saw that in order to change, you need God’s help, although God still requires you to put forth effort as well. Then we got a broad overview of God’s masterplan for change: put off, be renewed, put on, and examined what it means to put off sin and what it means to be renewed. We saw that in order to renewed, we must have God’s grace, and that requires humility. That grace then comes through three channels that Scripture clearly gives us: Bible meditation, prayer, and fellowship. Finally, it is important to put into action what God has given us by putting on.

Overview: Our final lesson will tie together all these pieces to show how you can live a holy life by utilizing God’s plan for growth.

Introduction: We’ve concluded our survey of the Bible’s teaching on change. For our final lesson we will seek to put all the pieces together into one coherent whole, showing how all of these teachings relate.

To do this, we will consider the hypothetical case of Sam. Sam is a close friend of yours who confides in you one day that he is really struggling with anger and bitterness. You ask further questions and find out that Sam’s parents got a divorce several years ago, and Sam is angry about it. This anger has been building on the inside for a while, and it’s starting to spill out in scary ways. He is constantly arguing with either mom or dad, and fears that the relationship with both is deteriorating. He is starting to lose his cool elsewhere as well, including with friends and at work.

Scared about this change in his life, Sam comes to you for help and asks you what you think he should do about this problem.

Here are a series of questions that you could ask Sam, and yourself, to walk him through the process of biblical change. There are probably too many questions to work through in a single sitting. But if you are going to help someone grow these are the kinds of questions you should be thinking through. More importantly, as you seek to grow these are the questions you need to be asking yourself.

I. Do You Really Want to Change?

Perhaps this seems like an odd question to ask. After all, Sam came to you, so isn't it obvious that he does? Not necessarily. Many people find that they don't like the consequences of their sin, but aren't ready to do what really needs to be done.

How would you determine how real the desire for change was?

Probably the best way to determine this is not to begin by asking it upfront, but rather to discover as you continue with the process whether or not Sam will follow what God has told him to do in Scripture. If you provide a biblical solution, and Sam turns it down, you know that he's not really ready to change, not yet. A person is truly ready to change when they are ready to do **whatever** they need to in order to address this sin God's way.

What do you do if you decide that Sam isn't willing to change bad enough to fix this problem God's way?

The best option is to simply leave him with the choice to obey God or disobey God, make it clear that at least currently Sam is choosing to disobey, and pray that God would get ahold of his heart. It may be appropriate to remind him the negative consequences of his actions or of the blessings he will forfeit. But at the end of the day, you can do nothing to change him. You will have to simply pray for him and trust God to do a work in his heart that you can't do.

II. Have You Been Saved?

Whenever you give someone spiritual help, this is the first question you ought to ask. As we have seen earlier, dead people can't change, and salvation makes dead people alive (Ephesians 2:1-10). At salvation we are given a new nature, new desires, and new power through God's personal help.

Now, hopefully in working with someone you know well, you will know that they have a salvation testimony, but don't ignore the importance of this step. People who aren't saved can't change, not in any way that will truly please God. This means that you personally must be saved if you are going to grow, and whomever you are helping must be saved before they are truly ready to grow.

“People who aren't saved can't change, not in any way that will please God.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?

III. Are You Cooperating with God?

Remember that biblical change is a cooperative venture.

Justification is all the work of God, man plays no part; he simply accepts by faith what God offers. Sanctification, on the other hand, involve God and man working together.

A. Are you trusting the Father's sovereignty (John 15:1-2; Romans 8:28-30; Hebrews 12:5-12)?

Some of these questions will be more appropriate in certain situations than in others. This question is particularly helpful for Sam right now as he deals with his problem of anger.

Why is trusting God's sovereignty crucial for someone who is battling anger?

Sam is angry because of what he views as bad things happening in his life. Sam must come to believe that God is good and that God is in control and is all wise. An all wise, sovereign God with our best intentions in mind won't make mistakes, even if he

makes decisions we don't agree with or understand. Whether he wants to admit it or not, Sam's anger is a direct attack on God's character. Anger says I am not okay with the current state of affairs and I demand a change, now!

B. Are you living in union with Christ (John 15:4-10)?

Remember, in biblical change, we grow as a result of a relationship, not to earn a relationship. Everything we have we have because we are "in Christ," yet although our position in Christ is firm we should to live out our position in Christ by abiding in Christ.

According to John 15:9-10, how do believers "abide in Christ"?

Prayer (ask what you will), Scripture meditation (my words abide in you), and obedience (bear fruit) are all essential components of abiding in Christ.

Ask Sam, how has your prayer life been? How has your time in the Word been? How would you describe your relationship with God?

C. Are you walking in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-25)?

Walking in the Spirit is one of the tougher concepts to simply state. In short, it means that all of one's life is following the directing of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. This means one must know the Word of God, and one must seek to follow the Word of God in their life. Ask Sam if there are other areas in his life where he is failing to follow God, but simply does not care.

IV. Have You Put Off?

Before you can change, you have to address the sin you've already committed, both with God and man. This is an unpleasant step, but a necessary one if you want to truly change.

A. Have you made your sin right with God?

This can be an easy step to skip if you're not paying attention. Don't forget about it! Too often Christians sin and think "Okay, I'll do better next time," but they don't get it right with God first!

B. Have you made your sin right with others?

Who would Sam need to make things right with?

This might be one of the hardest points in the whole process for Sam. If Sam has been angry and has reacted in anger against his parents, coworkers, or others, he now has a responsibility to make that right. Although this is generally true of sin, in the case of anger God has made it extra clear that this is so! (Matthew 5:21-26) Going up to people who wronged you and asking for their forgiveness is one of the most humbling, humiliating things a person can do. But Scripture is clear that if we aren't right with others, then we aren't right with God.

Making things right with others and dealing with the consequences of our sin is often where the rubber really meets the road. It is here that you find out if someone is actually ready to change, or simply wants relief from bad things happening in their lives.

C. Have you cut off the sin from your life?

This sing might be harder to "cut out" since it's more of a habit or way of reacting to life, but there are still possible ways for Sam to be feeding his anger. Perhaps he has been watching movies or TV shows that get him agitated or feed wrong thinking about anger, bitterness, and forgiveness. He might be playing video games or listening to music that fuels his anger. Proverbs warns that the wrong friends can make you angry (Proverbs 22:24-25). Ask Sam specifically if there are things in his life that he engages in that he knows stir up his anger and make it harder to love God and others. If he can of things then

he should cut them out of his life whenever possible. Even if it's not wrong, if something is making it easier to sin, cut it out of your life!

V. Are You Being Renewed?

Recognizing our need of God's help and cutting off sin are important first steps, but they are just that, first steps. Sin is always the result of wrong thinking, a wrong way of looking at the world. That thinking needs to be renewed through Scripture, prayer, and other believers.

A. Are you reading God's Word?

God's Word gives us grace and changes the way we think about ourselves, about our sin, and about God. If you are sinning, it is because of wrong thinking (Ephesians 4:17-19). If you want to change your thinking, you need to reprogram your mindset by renewing your thinking with the knowledge of God (Colossians 3:10). Look at specific passages deal with the sin, or with factors that contribute to the sin.

What would be some good passages to suggest to Sam? Other than passages directly relating to the topic of anger, what are some passages that would address the root problems we've been looking at throughout this lesson? (lack of trust in God's sovereignty and goodness)

B. Are you praying?

Prayer for spiritual growth is crucial. Prayer is the direct hotline to heaven, to give us power in our times of need and to turn our hearts to God. Christ warned Peter that the "spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." His solution was to pray, a practice Christ himself went on to demonstrate.

C. Are you spending time with other believers?

Remember, one of the ways that God builds us up is through the words of other believers (Ephesians 4:29). Part of this

process is no doubt the teaching and preaching ministry of the local church (Ephesians 4:11-13). But this also includes the encouragement and confrontation of other believers. We need other Christians in our lives if we want to grow! Ask Sam if he is regularly attending church, and more than that, if he is building relationships with Christians there.

VI. Time to Put On!

At the end of the day, Sam needs to remember three key truths from Romans 6-8 when he is tempted to be angry. These truths consist of things that are already the case, and that require us to seek to flesh them out in our daily lives.

A. You are dead to sin, so kill sin.

Sin no longer has power over you. Your relationship with sin has ended, the old man is dead and gone. However, the flesh remains, so you must seek to be putting to death the deeds of the flesh (Romans 8:13; Colossians 3:2-5).

B. You are free from sin and a slave of God's, so serve God.

Sin is no longer your master and you are no longer its slave. Since you have become the slave of God, make the choice to serve Him and not sin. With the power that Christ has given you at salvation, you truly do have the choice to sin or not to sin, so choose to not sin!

C. You are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, so mind the things of the Spirit.

This has already been briefly considered under the heading of the Spirit's role in sanctification, but remember that God is ultimately the one who gives you the power to do right and not wrong. It is the law of the Spirit that sets you free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2).

For the believer who is surrendered to God, studying his Word, praying, confessing sin, and fellowshiping with believers, there is no excuse for sinning! The final step is to live in faith by putting into

practice what one knows is possible. We don't start off by just telling people to go out there and live right, but that is certainly how we end!

Conclusion: That's quite a plan! There's a lot to take in here, but all of this is crucial for spiritual growth! God's Word has a lot to say about how to grow, and we could have spent more time on this topic and looked at more passages, but hopefully this gives you a general understanding of what to do.

Here is a shortcut list that combines overlapping elements and should help you as you help others and as you grow yourself. When you or a friend are struggling with a particular sin, ask:

1. Are you ready to do whatever God asks of you?
2. Have you been conscious of your need of God, asking him for his help and seeking to surrender all of your life to him?
3. Have you addressed previous sin biblically, getting things right with God and others?
4. How has your personal devotional time been? What has your time reading God's Word and praying looked like over the last two weeks?
5. What are some passages you could memorize and meditate on?
6. Are you regularly and faithfully attending church, more than that are you participating in church?

If the answer to any of those questions is no, then ask God to help you change and grow in that area. If the answer to all of them is "yes" then commit to putting into practice what you know to be right, believing that God is able to change you to look more like Jesus Christ!