

REAL Change: Inside Out

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning again. All right. Now we're going to get into the real heavy stuff. If you're new or visiting, please accept my welcome. We are delighted to have you this here.

We're on a summer preaching schedule, and it's a little bit different. We are accustomed to what is called expository preaching here, which is the philosophy of preaching where we start in a book of the Bible, verse one, and we do not end till we come to the conclusion of that book. But for the summer, we've kind of switched it up. We're in a topical series, and one of the reasons that I wanted to do is because it addressed so many of the issues that we face just as pastors here at the church and for people who are coming to new life in Christ. So I said, you know, you could call this a boot camp 101 or I guess that's spiritual boot camp, boot camp 101, or the basics of the Christian faith.

But let me put any thoughts aside. We're never too mature to hear and understand the basics of the Christian faith. Amen? Because truly they are the foundation, and really the difference between the milk and the meat of the Word is actually it's the same food. It just has a different part of nourishment.

So the first session, just to bring you up so you know where we're going as guests, the first sermon sermon that I did was, what is the new life? That when Jesus Christ saves us, we don't get a renovated life, we get a transformed life, right? We get a new life in Him. And because of that, Bonar, Horatius Bonar, a 19th century Presbyterian minister said, it's something deeper and truer. That our life, now that we are with God, we are God's child, our affinities are with the things above, we sympathize with the things that are divine, and we side with God in everything. We know that's supposed to happen, but it doesn't always work that way, does it? Second sermon, we talked about how Jesus saves us, and the Holy Spirit comes to indwell us. In John 14, 23, Jesus says, anyone who loves me will obey my teaching.

My Father will love them, and will come to them, and make our home with them. And he's speaking specifically about the Holy Spirit, who will come in His name, who will teach us, and bring remembrance all that Jesus had said. Third sermon was on the idea that if we're, our life is to be a root, we are to cultivate, we pursue holiness, and the things that are of God, to cultivate the soil, to make that soil as healthy as possible for us to grow in. And I gave you guys six action points on how to do that, and last week, we have to deal with the enemy, right? There's an enemy that's going to come against us, and we entitled that sermon, basically, how to fight the battle. And our points were all based on that word, fight. We face our sin, we invite accountability, we grasp God's grace, we hold fast to the word, and we trust in the cross.

[3 : 44] This morning, the topic is change. Because you know you are one place, and you need to know that you're going to have new affections. How does that happen? You've been a new believer for a little while, but sometimes we wonder if we really are changing. Are we really growing, or change is not happening as fast as we think it should.

You recognize that things need to change. The way you were living was not for God. You were living for self. That's how the Bible describes the life outside of Christ. You live for your glory. Now you live for God's glory. And some of those are habits, right? We have to change.

Now, the change that I'm talking about is not a few surface level tweaks here and there. But what I'm talking about is a deep and lasting transformation.

I'm talking about the kind of change that starts on the inside and overflows every aspect of your life.

Notice how it starts on the inside, right? Jesus comes. We are saved. We're given a new life. We're indwelt by the Holy Spirit. And what God does, he starts changing that inside, and then that inside starts to change the outside. Some of us, and many of you who've walked with the Lord for decades, know that sometimes we get confused with change, right? We think we have to change ourselves.

[5 : 36] So we try harder. We make promises to ourselves. We even set up rules and boundaries to force ourselves to change.

Paul writes in Romans 7.15, Does anybody else here ever ask themselves that question?

Am I the only one? Right? We know this, right? This is the true reality of the Christian life. So, if you're a new in Christ, let me assure you, you're not the only one dealing with this.

This is a lifelong, I hate saying this word, journey, expedition or adventure. But it's something that's always there. We will act in ways which we do not want to, and we struggle.

Then we start to ask, is change even possible? Now, you know you have to change, because if you don't, your marriage is going to be destroyed.

[6 : 55] If you don't change, you're going to lose the respect of your children. If you don't change, you're going to destroy your health. If you don't change, you're going to lose your job.

If you don't change, you're prohibiting yourself from having true and real meaningful relationships. And it's a struggle. And you all know the drill.

We pray, we cry, we hope. Well, too often we fall into these little traps. There's this writer, Tim Chester, he wrote that there's essentially three traps we fall into when we try to change.

The first trap is we try to change for God. Hey, God, I can do this. Let me prove to yourself that I'm a faithful Christian. I'll do this for you. Or, you know what?

I'm going to change for my wife. I'm going to change for my husband. I'm going to change for my kids. Right? We have an outside of ourselves.

[8 : 02] And we use that as a motivation to change. Well, that's a false way. And the other one is I'm going to prove to myself. Come on. Anybody who's ever set up a physical training regimen or how to work to get rid of some habit, that's always the struggle.

Right? You can set up. My son's really great at setting up this board. He sets up these boards. And these are what motivates him to do better in school. And, of course, they always end up in a Lamborghini or a Ferrari and, you know, something like that.

Right? Which, that was the same thing when I was in university. And I think I only know two friends that have Ferraris. So, there's a lot of dreams we're giving up along the way. Right? But we try to do these things.

Well, let me tell you from the outset. One, we can't impress God. And we don't need to impress God. God already has a great love for us. So, trying to prove ourselves to him, pure foolishness.

Number two, the views of others, what other peoples think, that's not God. God doesn't call us to compare ourselves for others. And three, when we actually try to prove things to ourselves, we end up being more self-centered than we are God-centered.

[9 : 20] And I think the place we want to be is God-centered. Amen? Amen? So, this morning, I'm going to give you a game plan for real change.

Right? It's a plan that you can remember easily because it spells out the word real. Right? I'm going to give you what each letter stands for.

One, the R, real. We're going to recognize the problem. That's the R. E. It's to embrace God's work. The A is to act in faith.

And the fourth one is to live in the Spirit. And what I'm doing is I don't want to give you four ideas. I want to give you four imperatives. Four commands. Four action points that you can put into play that will help you experience true transformation and apply these verses to our lives.

You with me on this? You guys okay? You want real change? Because this is the place where it happens. Right? Right here, real change. Before I go any further, let us pray. Dear Lord, Holy Heavenly Father, the reality is we are all familiar that at some point in our life we do need to change.

[10 : 32] Sometimes it's big, it's gray, but there's some stuff we just know are unhealthy for us. But we've struggled. We've struggled with outward ways of trying to achieve change rather than relying on the inside change that only you can bring.

So Father, I pray that you would give my voice wisdom in how it speaks, the words, and applying these verses that we're learning. Pray that you would open up our congregation's heart to truth.

If there is error, let them reject it. But I pray at some point that they're able to use these principles for real change, real learning to move forward, to move out of unhealthy situations into a healthy situation.

So all of God's people said, Amen. So the first R, recognize the problem. So this is where the first place we're going to is recognize the problem.

And this is a truth that you need to hear. The problem that you have that you need to change from is not your circumstances. The problem that you need to change from is not the people around you.

[11 : 51] The problem that you have is your heart. The problem that you have is your heart. You need to recognize where you are, where you don't like to be is actually a heart problem, not an external problem.

The heart is the root of the issue. Mark 7, 21. Jesus Christ says, Sometimes we don't think of foolishness being a sin, do we?

But foolishness, all these evil things come from within and they defile the person. The fact is, this is hard for us to swallow, but it's the truth.

Sin isn't just something that happens to us. It's not merely external pressure influences that lead us from astray. Sin comes from within.

Sin. The problem is not our outside, it's our inside. Fact of the matter is, we try all sorts of rituals, behaviors, rules, and laws, but none of those can change the heart.

[13 : 24] That's why real change doesn't start with modifying your behavior. It starts with recognizing the true condition of your heart. You need to stop blaming.

You need to stop complaining. You need to stop murmuring. You need to stop blaming your environment, your parents, the temptations that are around you. The issue at the core of your problem is your heart.

And until you recognize that, you will never experience lasting change. Jeremiah 17.9.

Very famous. If you go to counseling, Dave's going to take you. He's going to walk you through this. The first thing, he's going to want to know where your heart is. A lot of people, hey, I love my heart.

Jeremiah 17.9 says, The heart is deceitful among all things and desperately sick. Who can understand it? That's why we do those things we do not want to do.

[14 : 29] That's why God's plan is not about therapy. It's not about self-help books. It's not about behavior modification.

And they all fell short because they don't address the core issue. And here is the issue. Only God can change your heart. Only God can change your heart.

And the first step towards your heart changing is to know that God is the one who changes and the heart is the problem.

Think about this. How often have you tried to change yourself by focusing on your actions? Right? How many rules?

Some people write post-it notes. Some people hide food. Some people set alarms to remind them to do certain things all the time.

[15 : 28] They set boundaries. They make promises. They say, I'll do better next time. But it doesn't seem to last. Because the problem just isn't our actions.

It's our heart that drives those actions. And until your heart is transformed, real change won't happen. Because until we do, we will blame others.

We will blame our situation. We will blame our backgrounds. We will blame our neighbors. We will blame our kids. We will blame our spouses. We will blame our children. We will blame our children. They made me sin.

Thomas Watson, the Puritan author wrote, when we complain or murmur, he says, murmuring is no better than mutiny in the heart. It is a rising up against God.

When the sea is rough and unquiet, it casts forth nothing but foam. When the heart is discontented, it casts forth the foam of anger, impatience, sometimes little better than blasphemy.

[16 : 40] Murmuring is nothing else but the scum which boils off from a discontented heart. Can anyone relate to that?

The next time you find yourself complaining or murmuring, remember, it's the overflowing of a heart that is dissatisfied with God.

And it's rebelling against his reign. A heart that is satisfied with God trusts his provisions because he understands that he does all things without grumbling or disputing.

So the first step to real change is to admit it's a heart issue. So E, embrace God's work.

What does that mean? It means let God change you. So you've recognized the problem. And now you know that you need to embrace God's work.

[17 : 47] Hear me on this. You cannot change yourself. Stop trying to play God and give him your life. The Bible is clear. Real change is God's work, not yours.

1 Thessalonians 5, 23 says, Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. And may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He who calls you is faithful. He will surely do it. Did you catch that? He will surely do it. What a wonderful promise.

This is the God of heaven. Does God lie? Does God mislead us? No. So when he gives us these things, when he calls us to be faithful, he will surely do it.

That means God is the one who sanctifies you. God is the one who makes us holy. God is the one who brings real change into our life. The fact of the matter is, we can see the therapist.

[18 : 54] We can work really hard at our behavior. But in the end, it's only God who can bring that real, true change that we so desperately desire. It's God's job.

Embrace it. So what does it look like to embrace God's work? One, it starts with surrender. It starts with surrender.

Often, the reason why we fight and complain and become contentious is because we do not like the situation that we are in. And sometimes we need to accept where God has us and surrendering ourselves to it.

It's not about striving. It's about trusting. Submission. James 4, 7 says, Submit yourselves, therefore, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Submission is a bad word, right? It's like a four-letter word in our culture. Everyone hates that word submission. But submission is the key to embracing God's work in our life.

[20 : 06] That means that trial we are in, God has us there for a purpose. To embrace the trial. Now, surrender doesn't mean sitting back and doing nothing.

It means actively cooperating with God as he works in you. Remember, one of the key verses to this sermon series is Philippians 2, 12-13. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to his work, his good pleasure.

Note the balance. You work out what God is working in you. Amen? I think every single one of us, if we're patient or anywhere near observant, if we step back and are quiet for a moment, we can figure out what God's working on us, right?

It's that nerve. It's that center that's bothering us. It could be shame. It could be frustration. It could be anger. It could be thanklessness. Thanklessness. What God calls us to is to submit, surrender, to embrace his work, submit to God's process, and trust that God knows what he is doing.

God never said we're always going to understand the why. But we can trust that he is faithful and that he will complete the work he started in you.

[21 : 42] All right? So first is to acknowledge real change. Happens with the realization that it's us. Engage with God.

Now A is act in faith, which is trust God's power. Trust God's power. It's recognizing that the problem in embracing God's work is not, how do I say this?

It's crucial, but it's not enough. The fact of the matter is we need to trust God. What's another word for trust?

Have faith. Right? Now here's the thing that people misunderstand faith. Faith they think is passive. But actually faith is active.

God is calling us to engage in faith. Right? James 2.26 says, For as the body, apart from the spirit of dead, so also faith, apart from works is dead.

[22 : 43] Faith has to translate into actions. That means if you have real faith, it will produce real action. It's not about just sitting back and expecting change to happen when you do nothing.

All right, God, I surrender. No, no, no. Remember those actions that we did that cultivates that soil of holiness.

Right? Gave you those action words. Those things that we do. That cultivates and brings about in us. That's us working, trusting, having faith in God.

It's about obeying Him and trusting God to work in us. The fact of the matter is we become Christians by faith in Jesus. Amen? We stay Christians by faith in Jesus.

Amen? And we grow as Christians by faith in Jesus. So faith just isn't the starting point. Faith is our whole journey. It's our whole life.

[23 : 46] Our expedition. Our adventure. And if you're going to change, you need to walk by faith every single day of your life.

What does that look like? Means obeying God even when it's hard. Listen, if it was easy, everyone would be a Christian, right? We wouldn't have challenges.

We wouldn't struggle. There wouldn't be these psalms of lament. It does mean trusting His promises even when our circumstances don't make sense.

Hebrews 11.6 reminds us, And without faith, it is impossible to please God. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.

If you remember from my sermon a few weeks ago, probably one of the greatest actions that we can do is to seek the face of God. We don't read our Bible just to know information like we're going to be on some giant quiz show.

[25 : 03] But we read our Bible because we desperately want to seek the face of God. Amen? To know our Savior. To know this God who's given us this book so that we might know Him.

And here's the thing. God rewards faith. God honors those who step out on obedience. God rewards those who trust that He will provide the strength and power needed to follow through.

Remember this guy Peter? Sees Jesus walking on the water. Right? Here's Peter steps out the boat. He acted in faith and he walked. Even though he stumbled, Jesus was there to catch him.

Amen? He's there for us. There's no disappointment. Shame on you, Peter, for not trusting in me. Now drown. Like, what a horrible God that would be.

But that's not our God. Amen? Step out in faith knowing that God's power is at work in you and He will catch you when you fall.

[26 : 06] I'm preaching to the choir here. There will be times when we stumble where we will falter in this walk of faith.

But every single person who's ever walked this earth in Christ knows the good news that God's grace is sufficient. Amen? He's always there, always engaging, always picking up.

When you act in faith, even if you don't do it perfectly, God is there to strengthen and to lift you up. How many of us can speak that even in our foolishness, God redeemed our foolishness?

Amen? Sometimes we even pursued things of the world, things that were dangerous, and God led us to faith through that. Right? That's God's hand of grace and mercy.

Amen? It's not the God that condemns us to pain and suffering. It's a God that reaches down into the miry clay and picks us up and cleans us off.

[27 : 13] Holds us in the bosom. He loves us. Let's look at the L.

What does it mean to live in the Spirit? Finally, if you want to experience real change, you must live in the Spirit. The fact is, without the Holy Spirit, you cannot change.

It's impossible. That's why we read John 14. It's that verse, if you love the Father, He will indwell us. John 15.5 says simply, I am the vine, you are the branches.

Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. For apart from me, you can do nothing.

Come on. We know the story, right? We'll do it on the flesh. I can do it. I'm not going to bother God, right? But God's got another seven billion people He's bothered with. You know, my problems are so small.

- [28 : 20] He doesn't need to hear them. Right? And we keep going on our flesh and there's just a problem. And then we finally get to a point. We wisen up. And we surrender.
- And we know that without Him, I can't do it. You see, it's the Spirit who does the work in us.
- It's the Spirit who regenerates us. It's the Spirit who strengthens our faith. It is the Spirit who gives us new life. It is the Spirit who is the battery or the gas that propels us.
- The fact of the matter is, the Holy Spirit is the power source for our transformation. Amen? Without Him, we're dead in the water.
- But with Him, we have everything we need to live a good and godly life. Now, living in the Spirit means more than just acknowledging His presence. It means actively following in His lead.
- [29 : 22] Notice here, I've got Galatians 5.16. I think I put it. Did I put Galatians? Yes. Right? But I say, walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.
- Pretty simple, right? Right? That's a promise. When you walk in the Spirit, you will overcome those sinful desires. But you've got to make that choice every day to live in the Spirit.
- To let Him guide our thoughts, our actions, our decisions. So, how does this... How do you live in the Spirit? One, it starts with God's Word, right?
- It starts with knowing God's Word. I was in a discussion this week. Someone was asking me questions. He goes to another church. And he believes it's the Holy Spirit talking to him to tell him everything what to do.
- And what he's really doing is he's just... He's memorized copious amounts of Scripture. And I said, you know, you're just pouring out exactly what the Bible says. Like, you think you're having this really great event that every day God's talking to you.
- [30 : 26] And he kind of is. Right? The Holy Spirit has given you minds. But if you did not know God's Word, you'd be lost. You'd be stupid. You'd be foolish.
- That's why Psalm 119, 105 says, Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. When we know God's Word, it makes us sensitive to the Spirit's conviction.
- When we're convicted of our sin, we don't ignore it. We respond with repentance. When the Spirit is prompting us to act in a situation to help someone, what do we do?
- We don't delay. We do it. We obey immediately. Living in the Spirit just isn't about avoiding sin.
- It's about actively pursuing righteousness and holiness. That's why Paul says in Galatians 5, 25, If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.
- [31 : 31] What that means is when we're living in the Spirit, we're doing the will of God. Amen? When people said, I don't know what the will of God is. Sure you do. Live in step with the Spirit.
- He wants you to be saved, Spirit-filled, sanctified. And finally, living in the Spirit means relying on His power.
- Ephesians 3, 16 tells us that according to the riches of His glory, He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being.
- The fact is we all need the Spirit's strength to overcome temptation, to endure trials, and to live a life that honors God.
- If you remember the last verse or in that last chorus song we just sang, it was about we're being called to live a life that brings glory to God.

[32 : 31] Amen? So in conclusion, I want you to understand, church, that real change isn't just possible, but it's promised.

It's not something that you do on your own. But if you follow these statements that I've laid out to you, if you are willing to get real, recognize the problem, embrace God's work, act in faith, and live in the Spirit, God's plan will be for your transformation.

So stop trying to change yourself through your own efforts. Stop trying to change yourself through rules or disciplines and physical willpower.

Instead, surrender to God's work. Trust His power. Walk in the Spirit. Write it down on this moment. You're going to surrender so-and-so, whether it be a relationship or a situation in life or a work.

Just see what God does in that. Let me leave you with this final thought. Philippians 1.6 says, And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

[33 : 58] What that means is, you're going to get there whether you like it or not. So, either go kicking or screaming, or you go along in the power of the Spirit.

Because He's going to break you one way or the other. Because God's got an agenda for us that is for His glory and not our own. Alright, let's pray.

Dear Lord, Heavenly Father, I think if we're honest, some of us don't need big change. Sometimes it's just small things in our life that we know that are keeping us from You, keeping us from hearing the Holy Spirit, keeping us from engaging with You in all the ways that we want to.

Sometimes those excuses even sound good, sound spiritual, but at the end of the day, the question to ask ourselves is, are we surrendering ourselves to You?

Are we resting in You? Are we trusting in You? is my faith in You? Father, I ask that You would make us into real people.

[35 : 17] Father, I ask that we would ask to be made into real people. People that are led by You, led by Your Word, led by Your Spirit.

to be attentive to the Spirit's work. If we have got that prompting, to go pray and encourage someone to do so.

There's someone that the Lord brings us to mind. May we call them, or do what we would normally do. Maybe that is just the Spirit prompting us at the right time to bring love, encouragement, wisdom into their life when they really need it.

Other times, it's to bring wisdom before they do something foolish. Father, we're coming to this table today to testify that we have indeed surrendered ourselves to You.

That we have embraced the love that You have for us. So, Father, as we come to enjoy this communion, to enjoy this blessing that You've given to us, where we remember the work that You have done for us on the cross, where we remember that You are coming back for us, where this table reminds us that this life does matter.

[36 : 57] I pray we think about these things. May the Spirit bring to mind people we need to repent to or to be forgiven from.

Maybe there's some aspect of how I act that is bringing reproach on Your name. May we take this time to seek forgiveness.

May we confess our sins before You this moment, before we come to this table. For some, maybe it means a time of recommitment.

that they recognize that they have been living in the flesh rather than the Spirit in how they conduct their business, their relationship, how they act in their marriage, how they treat their kids.

There's so many different applications, oh God. And I pray that You'd bring each and every one of those applications to every individual person that is represented here this morning.

[38 : 14] Thank you, Jesus.