

What Changes Fast, What Changes Slowly

Big Idea: Some things change immediately when we trust Christ. Others things change very slowly over years. We need to be patient with ourselves, our spiritual children, and other brothers and sisters. Community is critical for Christian growth. It takes the whole village to raise a child.



Many believers feel disappointed and frustrated that certain aspects of their character are so slow to change. Some of us expected change to be automatic when we started believing in Christ and attending church. Others have labored for years at spiritual disciplines but still see stubborn weaknesses in ourselves. So what should we expect of ourselves and those whom we are helping to grow? What changes immediately at conversion and what changes more slowly? What is God's part of the job of change, and what is ours?

1. What is one challenge you are facing as you try to be an insider?
2. What did you learn about change in this segment?

- Maturity takes time, a lot of time.
- The important thing is progress, not instant perfection.
- Change must occur to our worldview, not just in our behavior.
- Sin's power is broken, but it hangs on because "it knows its way around" in our lives.
- The Holy Spirit is our chief ally, the main change agent.
- We have to yield to the Spirit's influence.
- What we do flows out of who we are. Life change is based on character.
- Staying focused on Christ protects us from legalism and the narrowness of any particular religious traditions.
- Christ changes our motives for doing what we do.
- Community is essential for growth.
- Problems often get worse before they get better as we dig for the roots of the problems.

"For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want."
Galatians 5:17

3. Read Galatians 5:17. This verse describes a war between our flesh and God’s Spirit inside us. What signs of this war do you see in Gerry?

He knows in his mind and heart not to let his emotions control him, but he is not to the point of depending on the Holy Spirit.

In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul compares his life to that of an athlete. An athlete disciplines his body to overcome its natural tendency to flab. Likewise, Paul disciplines his mind and body to overcome the natural tendencies of the flesh. He describes an aspect of his discipline in Romans 8:5-8 by choosing to set his mind on what the Spirit wants, rather than on what his flesh wants.

4. How did Bill help Gerry set his mind on what the Spirit wants in relation to Erik?

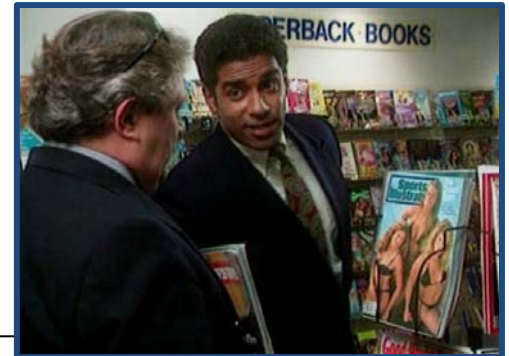
He reminded him that Christ was able to sympathize with him.

5. What do you think about the way Bill handled Gerry’s rage against Erik?

Bill treated Gerry with grace and truth. He neither condemned Gerry for his failures, nor tried to sweep them under the rug. Neither did he try to fix Gerry or tell him what he should have done.

6. How did being Thomas’ spiritual parent help Raz grow?

It made Raz accountable to be responsible to be a good model and deal with his own battle between his flesh and the Spirit.



Two key ideas emerge from this session:

- Change occurs at a glacial pace because character matures slowly
- Community brings accountability and encouragement for growth.

For Further Thought:

Disciplines like prayer, learning the Scriptures, serving others, asking forgiveness, etc. are as important to spiritual health as regular exercise is to physical health. Such disciplines condition us to set our minds on the Spirit instead of our fleshly desires. We need to make them part of our lives without viewing them as means to earning God’s favor or to feeling good about ourselves.

Suggested Additional Reading:

Read chapter 5 of *Lifestyle Discipleship*