

Steps (Week 4) – The Result: Justification, Adoption and Sanctification

Michael Snetzer – September 25, 2013

You may remember that for the last two weeks we have been working through the idea that we need to have faith, and have faith in the right sacrifice, that it's not just enough to believe in *a* god; we need to believe in the one *true* God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and that we are to respond to that God and all he has done in order to redeem a people in faith.

That faith produces something. There are works that go along with that faith. We don't give ourselves to a program. We're not asking you to give yourselves fully to this program. We're asking that you would give your lives to Christ, to abandon yourselves to him once and for all. That is basically where we left off last week, with the redeemed truth from step 3:

"Through the Holy Spirit's illumination of our desperate and helpless condition before God and the hope that comes through the gospel of Jesus Christ, we step out in faith and repent as an act of worship and obedience, surrendering our wills and entrusting our lives to Christ's care and control. We are reborn spiritually and rescued from the domain of darkness and brought into the kingdom of light, where we now live as part of Christ's ever-advancing kingdom."

Second Corinthians 5:15 says, "**...and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.**" Tonight we're going to look at some gospel truths, we're going to look at some gospel pursuits, and we're going to look at some gospel fruits. Those just happen to rhyme. That's fun.

Now let's turn to the idea many of us believe: Once we're saved, that's it. It's over. We're done. That's the end. In a sense, that is true, because it *is* the end of one life. But it is the beginning of another life. Romans 6:4 says, "**We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.**" It is the end of one life, but it is the beginning of a new life.

The church often confuses the commandment to make disciples with the idea of making converts. I just want to point out a few things first. The idea of conversion... That is God's work. That's not our work. Our work is to make disciples. Part of making disciples is baptizing. Now if you have not been baptized following conversion, we want to invite you to take that first step of obedience, to be baptized, to make a public profession of your faith before others. We have baptism classes, and we have all kinds of things that can help you navigate that decision. This is what God calls us to as believers in Christ.

The second part of making disciples is (this is out of Matthew 28) teaching them to obey all that he has commanded us. God desires obedience from his children; we're to follow the things Christ has commanded us to do. But that should always flow from a heart of who we already are in Christ. It shouldn't be we're obedient to *be* accepted but we're obedient because we *have* been accepted by God. So grace not only saves, it also enables us to live lives that are different.

Here are some examples of confusing this idea of converts and making disciples. I was recently talking to what is called an "old-timer" in AA. Underneath a lot of misguided theology, he said, "I never grew spiritually while I was in the church." He said, "It wasn't until I arrived in AA that I began to grow." Looking beyond all he was saying to the heart of what he was saying, I think he was saying, "There was no one in the church to disciple me. I just became a believer..." He was a professing believer. "...and that was the end of the road." Clearly there *is* discipleship in AA. It's just not programmatically oriented around Jesus.

That's not just in our local churches here in America; it also seems to be evident in other countries. As I traveled to Sudan, the church we partner with there... We went there and did some discipleship training, and the bishop who's responsible for this church said, "That is what has been missing in our churches: this idea of discipleship."

Let's first, before we get too much into the doing, look at what God has already done in our redemption. We're going to look at a nugget in Scripture, nestled within Romans 8. We're going to look at verses 29-30. Then we are going to build out a salvation time line. **"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."**

Let's build out a time line here. First of all, this idea of salvation. We start with the foundations of the earth. Remember when we studied the creation? This goes on into eternity. Does that make sense? Somewhere along this time line, each one of us is born. Those of us who are in Christ have been reborn. There's a conversion where we receive the Holy Spirit.

Then, at some point in the future, because Christ has not returned yet and we are still walking around, we are either going to die or Christ is going to return. Beyond that, we have eternity. This Scripture says that before the foundations of the earth God foreknew us and predestined us to be conformed to the image of his Son and that at some point along the way he calls us.

I just want to talk for a moment about how there's a general calling of God as the gospel goes out, but there is something called *effectual calling*, which is, according to a gentleman by the name of Anthony Hoekema in *Saved by Grace*, God's opening of the heart to enable a person to believe. That's God's effectual calling. He opens the heart and enables us to believe. Wayne Grudem would say it's an act of God that guarantees a response.

The idea of rebirth or regeneration (this is the beginning of that new spiritual life I was just talking about), implanted in us by the Holy Spirit, enabling us to repent and believe. It is a secret act of God in which he imparts new spiritual life to us. At that point of conversion we have what we call "justification." *Justification* is a legal act. It's an instantaneous legal act of God in which he thinks of our sins as forgiven. We have been pardoned for our sins. He erases the record of debt, and Christ's righteousness is counted as belonging to us, and he declares us righteous in his sight.

That's amazing, that we have been justified. Think about this. Think about the idea of all the accusation and all the criticism and all the defensiveness. Somebody attacks you and somebody accuses you, and what do you typically do? You try to justify yourself. *How* do you try to justify yourself is the question. Do you go back and tell them about all of the good things you've done?

What this allows us to do is to not have to get on that treadmill but to rest in the fact that we are justified by God. We have right standing before God. When Jesus says, "It's finished," it's finished. Not like the older son we looked at, who went to his father and told him all of the reasons why he deserved his inheritance. The thing you need to know about this is this doesn't change day to day. It doesn't matter if you had a good day or a bad day. You're still justified. This is a truth that has to sink deeply into your heart. Otherwise, when accusation comes, you'll just be tossed to and fro. So this is a truth we want to root in tonight.

Not only have we been justified; we have also been adopted. *Adoption* is not a change in nature but a change in status. We are now part of a family. We belong. I was listening to a secular researcher not too long ago. She was expanding on those whom she saw a difference in, *this* type of person and *this* type of person and *these* people over here, that they were wholehearted, courageous, and vulnerable. She said what they all had in common was a sense of love and belonging that gave them that confidence to be transparent, to be willing to connect with others.

Think about that. God has loved us in sending his Son. We are loved by God. I don't know if before you were saved maybe you were in a relationship, and all of a sudden you knew that person cared about you. You had a wonderful night and went home. You woke up the next morning, and you were like, "I matter to somebody. Somebody cares about me. They want to be around me." Think about that with a person, and then compare that with God. You belong. The way you relate to him as a believer is as a father. He's not just your Creator anymore; he's your Father.

Not too long ago, I went to a worship service. I'm just going to be transparent with you. I went there, and the gifts were in full operation, and there were people who were being given words of encouragement and prophecies, and I was like, "I want *that*." Then a friend of mine came and said, "Hey, I have something I want to tell you. You're God's son, and he loves you." I'm like, "I know. But what about the...? I want to hear..." Man, that just broke my heart, that somehow I had gotten over the fact that we are, as believers in Christ, children of God. What more could we want? He makes us members of his family, and we belong, and he loves us.

The next part of this on this time line is something called "sanctification." *Sanctification* is the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit involving our responsible participation. So it's God and us. One professor said it's 100 percent God and 100 percent us. It is "our responsible participation, by which he delivers us...from the pollution of sin, renews our entire nature according to the image of God, and enables us to live lives that are pleasing to him."

It's the idea of being conformed to his Son. We have been set apart for holiness. Some of us may be like, "Holiness? That doesn't sound like a whole lot of fun." Listen. There is no happiness apart from holiness. It's God's created design, the way he has wired us to worship him. Sin defiles us. It is the work of God along with our responsible engagement of that, and moving forward and being conformed to the image of Christ.

Just some thoughts here on sanctification. First of all, if you have been justified, you *will* be sanctified. Sanctification is the evidence of your past justification and your future glorification. If you are a new believer, there may be very little you can see in terms of sanctification, just being immature in your faith. God *is* going to mature you. He says he is going to accomplish what he is going to accomplish. He says he's going to finish what he started. You will see progress over the course of years, and sometimes decades. You will become more and more Christlike.

Are there ways our growth can be stunted? Absolutely. We're going to talk about that in a little bit. But there's an idea here we need to take hold of. That is, if you try to be sanctified without being justified, it's dead religion. If you try to clean yourself up before you put your faith in Christ... It's going to be a work of the Holy Spirit. You're not going to be able to do this on your own.

There's an idea here. We see it in the story of the exodus, where God's people are in Egypt (which is a picture of the world), and they're being tormented and oppressed by the taskmasters. They're there to try to help build up an alternate kingdom. God comes in and miraculously delivers them. Remember the Passover? By faith, they put the blood of the lamb on the doorposts, and they're passed over when all of the other firstborn sons in Egypt are killed.

Then they follow Moses, this redeemer who has been raised up to lead them out of their bondage and their slavery to the Egyptians to worship God in the desert. Guess what? They're heading out toward the wilderness to worship God, and guess who's pursuing them? Yeah. Their past. They're standing there at the Red Sea, and God does a miracle and delivers them and wipes out their enemies.

Then guess where they find themselves? Not the Promised Land. They're in the wilderness. We have been set free from *this*, but we're not yet there. It's what we would call the "already but not yet." There are certain things that have already occurred, and there are some things that have been promised *will* occur, and we're kind of caught in the middle.

The desert is difficult. There's difficulty there, but God takes us into the wilderness intentionally. He allows suffering into our lives intentionally, for our good. Reflecting back in Deuteronomy 8, he says he took them into the wilderness to humble them and to show them what was in their hearts, what they loved more than they loved God.

Someone said one time it took 40 hours for God to get his people out of Egypt, but it took 40 years to get Egypt out of Israel. See, they weren't spared because they weren't doing the same things the Egyptians were doing. They were worshipping the same gods. This is sanctification: that we're not yet in all that he has promised. We're not in the Promised Land yet, but he has done so much to deliver us from the slavery we have come from.

We move from being under the law prior to conversion to being under God's grace. That's wonderful, because you know what God's grace allows us to do? It allows us to be transparent. It allows us to confess that which is on the inside to those on the outside, because we're not living a life of performance anymore; we're living a life of faith.

Then there's this idea of *glorification*, future glory. That's our hope. All of this is accomplished back on the cross. So it's faith in what he did there and what he *continues* to do, because he's alive. He has risen, and now he sits at the right hand of God, giving life to those who put their trust in him.

Now let's talk through Romans 8. I wish we did this every time, but we don't really have time to do it every time. The last time we did this, I had somebody stand up and read Romans 8 entirely. Because those who were here in Steps had been in Romans 8 that week... I've never had this happen before. At the conclusion of Romans 8, people started clapping. Have you ever seen that before, that at the end of reading an entire chapter of the Bible the room starts to applaud? It was phenomenal.

Anyway, I'm not going to do that, but I *am* going to point out a few things here in Romans 8. We looked at verses 29-30. I just want to look at the context this sanctification happens in. If you flip up to Romans 8:18, it says, "**For I consider that the sufferings of this present time...**" Uh-oh. He is going to sanctify us in the midst of difficult circumstances. It would seem contrary, right? It would seem that our circumstances would destroy us. But he says, "No. I'm going to accomplish a good work in you, despite all that's going on around you."

If we move down to verse 26, it says, "**Likewise the Spirit helps us...**" God is going to help us in the midst of suffering to accomplish his plan for us. Look at this. It says, beyond that, in this process of sanctification, there are a couple of things going on here. In verses 5-6 it says, "**For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.**"

We're going to look at it in just a second, but this is just setting your mind on things that give life. It's something we talked about this last week in service. It's something we're going to practice here. We're not going to teach a whole lot on it until a little bit later in the study, but it's something called *vivification*. As we're going to see, it's kind of feeding. It's providing the nutrients that are going to produce growth.

If you move down to verse 13, it says, "**For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**" As we live by the Spirit, we will mortify the flesh and we will seek the things of God. There's *mortification* and there's *vivification*, two theological terms we're going to talk about in just a minute.

Now in the midst of that, we are doing this as children of God. That is our status. Our hope is a future glory. We have something waiting for us that is better than the difficulties, that far exceeds the difficulties we go through here. *That* is our hope. Our hope is not in this world. Part of these gospel truths we have to root in will enable us to move forward in these gospel pursuits God calls us to, to mortify the flesh and to live for him.

Now look at the two gospel truths that bookend this section of Scripture. "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." As you're fighting this war, and as difficulties come and you have a temptation to believe God is punishing you in the midst of this... No. God is using the suffering around you, whether it's the result of your own sin or someone else's sin or just the indirect result of living in a fallen world, to conform you to the image of his Son. That's a great thing. He's doing a good work. Oftentimes, it's like, "What's God doing in the midst of all this suffering?" Well, for his people, he's sanctifying them.

On the back side of this chapter it says we are more than conquerors in Christ. We're not victims anymore. We are more than conquerors in Christ. It's easy in the midst of suffering to see ourselves as victims. No. We have been given more in Christ than can ever be taken from us. In fact, everything we've been given in Christ is secure. It can't be taken from you. Is that not just a wonderful truth? What awaits you in heaven cannot be taken from you.

The only things you can lose are things that are temporal that you're going to lose anyway. You're trying to preserve your body. You're trying to not die. Listen, it's going to happen...unless Christ returns. But the things he is doing and the things he is preserving by his grace are secure. The

things he is doing are eternal and cannot be taken from you. There's a wealth of confidence that can come from that. "You can kill me, but you can't kill me." Seriously.

Now we're going to begin to examine this idea of sanctification, but I don't want to move too quickly. I know we're 30 minutes into this thing, but there is a temptation, I think, to move too quickly without driving a stake in the ground. We need to get these truths. We need to root in these truths before we start the doing part, because we're about to go to the doing.

There are things called *gospel indicatives*. These are truths that don't change day to day. These are promises. They are secure. And there are things called *gospel imperatives* that the gospel calls you to as believers. If you get those things confused, all kinds of crazy stuff can happen. We need to be rooted in these truths as we pursue these pursuits.

I'm just going to remind us one more time that we are now children of God. If you have been reborn, you can't be un-born. Everything that needs to be accomplished to secure our inheritance was accomplished through the person and work of Christ. Positionally, we are spotless, made clean through his shed blood and justified by his grace.

We need to know this, and we need to believe this. Otherwise, when the certain trials come ahead, we will be tossed to and fro like waves in the sea. There is no condemnation, and nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. We have to be anchored in these truths by faith. He himself says it's finished. It needs to be believed and savored so we can stand firm as we begin this work of sanctification.

Now we've already said we have positionally been made clean, but practically... I don't know about you, but for me, I have a long ways to go. So what's next after our spiritual rebirth, after we are saved by his grace? "**For this is the will of God, your sanctification...**" You have been set apart for holiness. There are two parts to this sanctification.

The first is *mortification*. It's the putting to death those things that rob our affections for Christ and hinder us from living out his kingdom purposes, hinder us from living out the greatest command, which is to love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. *Vivification* is the filling of ourselves with those things that stir our affections for Christ and enable us to live out his kingdom purposes.

I just want to use a gardening example. This is what's happening. It's like a gardener has gone out to a field, and he has selected a lot, and he has staked off this lot, and he has bought that piece of property. In a field that has only produced weeds he is now going to care and cultivate a garden that is going to be not only beautiful but useful for his kingdom purposes.

In tending this garden, we need to both weed our garden and feed our garden. If you let those weeds grow, is your garden beautiful? And guess what? If you let those weeds grow, it's also going to rob nutrients from the garden. We also need to feed our garden. Those two ideas are *mortification*, kind of the pulling of the weeds, and the *vivification* piece is the feeding of the garden. As we pursue holiness, we're continually in this cycle of mortifying and vivifying as we are pursuing holiness.

Now I don't know if any of you garden. I'm not necessarily the greatest gardener in the world, but I do know some things about weeding a garden. The first is that some weeds come out easier than others. Some are just kind of surface level, and some go deep into the soil. What I believe needs to happen is there needs to be rain from above to soften the ground so those weeds might come out more easily. That is a work of the Holy Spirit by his grace coming down from heaven to soften our hearts so those weeds might come out. If that ground is hard, we're not going to be able... Have you ever tried to pull weeds out of hard ground? You just pull off the tops.

Another thing I need to caution you against in weeding your garden... This is just cultivating what God has entrusted to us in terms of our hearts and what's reigning and ruling in our hearts. Some weeds look like flowers. They do. I was having a conversation with a lady the other day about the idea of disassociation and dissociative personality disorder.

In that horrific place of abuse, one way people cope is by creating an alternate reality in order to deal with something we weren't created for. We weren't created for that. But here's the thing. That worked for a season, but that's not God's plan for redemption. It's not disassociation. If that's what I'm doing in relationships, that's not functional. That's not the way God created me to work, and that's not how Christ dealt with suffering.

We might say, "Well, that's impossible for us." Yes, that's right. It *is* impossible for us, but it's not impossible for the believer who is indwelt by the Spirit to hang in there. Christ was fully present in his suffering, and he enables us not to check out. You can see there, though, it might look like a

flower. It might look like a gracious act of God to help me get through that. It is a way for me to deal independently from God with a horrific situation. It's a way to cope.

Now some temptations in mortification, in the weeding. One temptation in the weeding is to mow over. I have a yard, and it has... When we mow it, it looks like grass. But it's not. None of it's grass. It's all weeds. Jeremiah 6:14 says, "**They have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, saying, 'Peace, peace,' but there is no peace.**" We just kind of deal with things superficially and we don't deal with root issues.

There is even a semi-good part to this when we just behaviorally repent of behavior. Like if I have committed adultery against my spouse, I know my adultery is wrong, but until I start to understand what was driving my adultery... I mean, for most people, it's not physical pleasure. I'd say probably more for men than for women. A lot of times it's for something else, and we need to know what that something else is if we're going to move forward. We have to understand what the roots are that are driving the behavior rather than just looking at the superficial behavior.

Another thing is we want to cover up. That's Genesis 3. "The eyes of both of them were opened. They knew they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made for themselves loincloths." Why? Because they didn't understand the grace of God that was afforded to them by Jesus Christ. Their faith was not in that, so they were still living a life of covering and hiding.

That's not what God calls us to. He calls us to have faith in him. Faith is active. Faith causes us to act differently than the world does. That's why I can stand up here and tell you about standing in a place and going to a service and someone speaking to me about me being a son of God and me wanting to look past that.

There are some temptations on vivification. Growth is going to happen at God's speed. You're not going to be able to get on a fast track. There are organic ways we have to be responsible for growth, but you're not going to bring about maturity at some fast pace. Medications. I'm thinking about fertilizers. These fertilizers sometimes do more harm than good.

They take away symptoms, but they don't really deal with the problem. They make us seem like we're doing well when maybe internally we're really not doing as well as we think. You remove the medication and you realize what's going on underneath the heart. Again, one more time, I'm not against medication. I just think it needs to have a right place. Weekend seminars and inspirational

speakers, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit can get us really excited, but it's not going to have any lasting change.

Another temptation in vivification is just being lazy and not providing our gardens with the nutrients that are necessary for us to grow spiritually. You guys are in an environment right now that is helping provide those nutrients with teaching and gospel community and Bible reading. Some of you are like, "Wow, this is good, this structure that has been provided." It's not necessarily the structure so much as you're feeding on the things that bring life, that you're living more and more by the Spirit, because that's feeding the Spirit rather than feeding the flesh.

Just to deconstruct what is taught in secular recovery programs, here it says, "We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves." There's a right part of that we want to do, but you cannot do this apart from the work of Christ. Why? Because the Holy Spirit is what is going to do the searching. Your heart is deceitful. God is the one who knows what's in your heart. I have a lot of guys I'll disciple through this process, and they'll say, "I don't think I have any bitterness." "Well, ask God. Then come back to me and tell me you don't have any resentments in your heart, that you're totally pure there."

Fearless apart from Christ? You're going to stand before God fearlessly? It says it's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But guess what? We don't approach God as Judge anymore; he's our Father. Outside of Christ, we can't stand before God in our sin fearlessly. So we want to look deeper than moral symptoms to what's reigning and ruling in the heart.

The two heart issues we're going to encounter are *pride* and *various forms of idolatry*. Jeremiah 2:13 says, "**...for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.**" When we're doing our assessments (what the world is going to call inventory)... We want to balance an inventory not by saying, "These are the good things I've done and the bad things I've done. So I need a Savior in these areas, and I don't need a Savior in these areas."

Apart from Christ's work in you, apart from the Holy Spirit's redemptive work in you, you're not going to find anything glorious in the bottom of this dark well. You may say, "But Christ *is* working in me, and I *do* see evidences of that." Guess what? That's great, and we want to praise God for that, but that doesn't go on *your* inventory; that goes on *his*. "There's nothing good that lives in me, that

is, in my sinful nature." I need to be redeemed. I need God to invade every area of my life. But we do want to balance it with these gospel truths versus these gospel pursuits.

As I'm pursuing these things God calls me to, I need to constantly be reminded of these unchanging truths. One of those truths is what's of first importance as we enter this battle. First Corinthians 15:1-5 says, **"Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you--unless you believed in vain."**

As we do this hard work of mortifying sin, as we begin to look at the reality of what's in our hearts as God begins to shine his light, we need to remember the truth. **"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins..."** He has already died for our sins. **"...in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to [many]."**

The Enemy does not want you to know the truth. He's going to come in and accuse you. What you need to learn how to do is not to go, "Oh yeah? But look at what I did" to justify yourself again, but to go, "No, but look at what God did." That's how you defeat accusation. You need to be careful not to think that you're going to be able to just be saved and then you're going to be able to clean yourself up.

"O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?"

The redeemed truth for step 4 is, "Now as children of God, armed with the Holy Spirit and standing firm in the gospel..." Do you hear that? Armed with the Holy Spirit as children of God, standing firm in the gospel. In the truth. "...we engage in the spiritual battle over the reign and rule of our hearts. We have been set apart for holiness and look to put to death those areas of ourselves that keep us from living out the greatest command..."

I was asking the guys I'm sponsoring this time, "Okay, when you're thinking about your resentments for this week, if you're saying, 'I don't think I have any,' place those people in your life, your mom, your dad, people from your past... If they were in the room with you right now, would

there be something in that that would cause you not to be able to reflect the love of God that's in Christ Jesus? You need to ask what that is. Is that guilt? Is that shame? Is that fear? Is that resentment? Is that anger? Is it unresolved? You need to consider those things. You need to ask God to reveal those things."

"...that keep us from living out the greatest command and reflecting the radiance of Christ to a dark and dying world, looking beyond moral symptoms to the source by identifying root issues of the heart, namely pride and various forms of idolatry that drive ungodly thoughts, actions, and emotions." Then step 5 says, "We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."

The redeemed truth there is, "Under the covering of God's grace, we step out in faith, leaving behind our old protective ways of covering sin and hiding from God, and prayerfully come into the light. We confess sins before God and to one another, and pray for one another so that we might be healed." That's what's going to be going on in that inventory.

Here's the last principle I want to leave with you before we conclude for tonight. This is a principle we have to apply in biblical counseling. It's the difference between the active and the passive heart. You have to get this, because it's going to have implications when we teach on abuse next week. When we teach on all of these other things, it's going to have implications.

The passive heart model is what the world subscribes to. It's what the world says. It says, "My joy and contentment are dependent on others and my circumstances." This is what advertising is built on. "If you just had this or you just had that, then you'd be okay." Then we chase those things and realize... If my joy and contentment are dependent on others and my circumstances, what will I try to change? Others and circumstances. Then who do I start trying to be like? God.

So I have this heart that lives within a body. I'm trucking along. I've encountered this situation. Circumstance creates this perfect storm. I have a response I don't like. I'm uncomfortable. I'm angry. I feel guilty. I feel ashamed. Whatever it is. What do I want to do? I want to eliminate the circumstance or the situation. That's a natural reaction.

The passive heart is the belief that our responses are determined by outside influences. Guess what? If that's true, then we have no culpability for what comes out of us. Whatever happens to me, I am essentially a victim of what's done to me. I *can* be victimized. Don't get me wrong. We're going

to talk more about a victim mentality next week. But this is this debate over nurture or nature. Am I a product of my environment?

The truth is my environment *can* affect me. Don't hear me say these influences don't affect me. They do. But the heart is an active agent that produces fruit, and this I *am* responsible for. We need to look at the reality that without Christ, the sin that we are exposed to as a result of a fallen world will defeat us, because we cannot defeat it ourselves. In Christ, we may be affected by the world around us, but it does not determine us. We will overcome.

The active heart model is what the Bible subscribes to. It says, "My joy and contentment are dependent on a right vertical relationship with God." You have Galatians 5:22-23, Philippians 4:11-13, and you could look at the last three verses of Habakkuk. What will I seek to *be* changed? Well, in this situation, what if God is less concerned about changing my circumstances, and what he's really after is my heart? Because guess what? My response doesn't come from my circumstances; it comes from my heart.

What if God wants to sanctify me in such a way that enables me, despite my circumstances, to still produce the fruit of the Spirit by the grace of God and through the power of the Holy Spirit? I can reflect Christ; that as he suffered, I can suffer, and reflect the radiance of Christ to the world. So I am affected but not determined by the difficulties in my body or the difficulties within my family.

It depends on what's reigning and ruling in my heart. If self is reigning and ruling in my heart, I'm going to respond selfishly. If Christ is reigning and ruling in my heart, I'm going to respond in a Christlike way. I must take responsibility for my affections, my attitudes, my thoughts, my motivations, and actions. Without taking responsibility... Remember, part of repentance and growth is accepting responsibility for what's coming out of me.

This is what I alluded to last week in terms of the danger of using labels incorrectly. If I blame a label for the reason I am the way I am and for what's coming out of me when it's sinful, I'll never grow spiritually. I'll hide behind that label and won't take responsibility for what's coming out of my heart. I *am* responsible, and I'm not a victim, according to Scripture. I may be victimized, but I'm not a victim. That's not my identity.

So passive-heart versus active-heart statements... What is this, a passive- or an active-heart statement? "You make me so angry." Who's responsible for my anger in that? Don't we say that all

the time? "You make me feel so guilty." No. What's true is you've given me fertile ground and I've taken the bait. I have to take responsibility for what's coming out of me.

As far as your assessments this week... You're going to be working this week on resentments and abuse. You should be working with your sponsors. They should be communicating with you what kinds of things should be under abuse. If you've been abused and the world would call it abuse, put it on there. Even if the world *wouldn't* call it abuse but it has affected you in such a way that hinders your ability to love God and to love others the way he has called you to, put it on there. But you can't put every way you've been abused, because every time someone sins against you, that is biblically abuse by definition, and people sin against us all the time. You don't have enough pages for that.

Schedule a time with your mentor to talk about these things. You can schedule three 2- to 3-hour sessions, or you can schedule one 6- to 8-hour session, but this has to be finished in the next four weeks, because in four weeks we're going to have a night of worship and prayer, where we're going to take all that has been unearthed through this inventory process and bring it before the Lord together, corporately, and we're going to ask him to do what only he can do. Isn't that cool? He already knows what he's going to do in our hearts and our lives. We just need to be obedient to join him in that process.

This isn't meant to take you the next 10 years. This isn't meant to take you the next 10 months. It's supposed to take you four weeks. You're not going to have a perfect inventory. You're not supposed to put down every sin you ever committed. They're the things that are hindering your ability to relate to God in a loving way and to relate to others the way he has called you to. Those are the things: the hindrances in your life. All mentors should have completed the most current mentor training. You can contact stepsfm@thevillage.net with questions.

Finally, avoidance is not freedom. I've heard so many people say, "Why do I want to dig up all that stuff?" If you can't talk in a healthy way about your past, you are not healed from it. We don't want you to be hitched to your past, but we want you to be free from it. So we want to look at it, the reality of what it was, and bring it before the Lord so he can heal you. Let's pray.

Lord, these are some wonderful truths we talked about tonight: the fact that we don't have to justify ourselves anymore, the fact that we're your children, the fact that nothing separates us from the love of God, the fact that our sins are forgiven, the fact that you're going to complete what you

started, that there's no condemnation. So what fear do we have in facing the reality of our past and the wounds and all of the things, Lord, that we may avoid apart from you?

I pray you would empower by your Spirit, that you would send gospel rain on the hearts of these people, that the things that have, over years and years, caused us to get tripped up, Lord, these weeds in our gardens that detract from the beauty and keep us from being useful for your kingdom purposes, that you would just bring that rain and you would soften that ground, and, Lord, that you would remove, that you would move mountains, literally. Help us to remain faithful in the work ahead and help us to remember the gospel. It's in Jesus' name I pray, amen.

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