

transforming

a guide for individuals and small groups

This guide is an expansion of the methods taught by Pastor Larry. The intent is to help you grow in Christian maturity. Each section has an opening explanation of topic followed by a selection of resources. These resources are meant to assist you. They are only tools. You are encouraged to make them your own. We just want to encourage you to try the different methods presented in this guide. We believe that these methods can help you grow in Christian maturity, put off sin, and put on virtue. We believe that these methods can help deepen your prayer life. Try these methods on your own and try them with your spouse, family, and small group. Above all, we believe these methods will draw you closer to our great King—*solī deo Gloria*.

chapter one

biblical transformation

The primary goal of the Christian life is to become increasingly like Christ. When you and I repented and believed in Christ for salvation the grace that allowed us to do this is the same grace that we live in every day. In that very moment, a battle began. It is a battle within our very selves. The apostle Paul says it like this, “*For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin*” (Rom. 7:18-25).

The truth is that we are all *good* sinners — and our sin took a long time to reach the heights of achievement at which it stands. This means that, as we seek to become more like Christ, it will take more than a quick fix to begin to shed that sin. So how can biblical change happen?

Motivation for Growth

Jesus told his disciples that the first and greatest commandment is to love God. Love is the basis upon which we should pursue every action (1 Cor. 13). God’s mercy and grace are given based on his love (John 3:16). We understand that love is not an attitude that we cultivate, but a deeper understanding of the love of God expressed through the gospel.

It is only by the power of the gospel that any change is possible. In fact, as we think about the gospel we can be encouraged by four truths. 1) God’s past grace to sinners demonstrates that he is *for* us. 2) God’s present grace to sinners demonstrates that he is *with* us and *in* us. 3) God’s future grace to sinners demonstrates that he will come *to* us. 4) God’s past, present, and future grace to those who suffer demonstrates that he hears the cry of the afflicted. As we grow in our knowledge of the gospel, we will grow in our ability to love God.

God’s Desire For Us

Growth is becoming more holy — not primarily, initially, or only in action, but by God’s gift. Holiness represents the state of a heart and life in conformity with God’s will brought about by a process called *sanctification* (which means, literally, ‘becoming set apart’ or ‘being made holy’). This process is the work of God. Jesus prays that the Father may sanctify His disciples in truth (John 17:17). So Paul prays for the Thessalonians (1Thess. 5:23), and declares that Christ is to sanctify His church (compare Rom. 6:22; 2Thess. 2:13; 2Tim. 2:21; 1Peter 1:2).

As Christians we are set apart to God. This setting apart has an ethical component. Our motives and our practice are transformed. We become in practice what God has declared us to be in truth.¹

Growth as Fellowship with God

Growth is also fellowship with God. The Christian life is a life with God in which He graciously gives Himself to us, and which we live with Him and with our brothers in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is God’s gift — not primarily forgiveness, nor victory over sin, nor peace of soul, nor hope of heaven. What God gives us is nothing less than Himself.

The fruit of this fellowship is holiness. Christian holiness is personal, not something formal or ritual, but flowing from our fellowship with God. This process is the moral surrender of our life to God, who has the authority to command. We open ourselves to God’s definite moral truths and

¹ Borrowed from Dr. Mark Liederbach.

powers — to love, meekness, gentleness, humility, reverence, purity, and righteousness. This fellowship means a new spirit in us — a renewed and *daily renewing* life.

Growth and Community

While we acknowledge that growth is largely personal, you and I were re-created for community. We are now part of the body of Christ. It is in this body that we learn what it means to become more Christ-like as we live and learn with other believers. Christian growth happens most fully when we engage with other people. Bring others into your life to encourage, exhort, and correct you along the way. Bring others along that are not as far along as you in your Christian journey. Americans tend to be isolationists. Therefore, this is an area where we must be intentional about bringing others alongside.

In the Bible, the “one-another” passages give us the clearest picture of growth in community. First, we are instructed to live in harmony with one-another (Rom. 5:15) in fellowship (Heb. 10:25; 1 Pet. 4:9) and mutual encouragement (Rom. 1:12; Heb. 10:24). The foundation of this harmony is the fact that we are one “body” even in our diversity of gifts and personalities (Rom. 12:5). Therefore, we are to do good to one-another (1 Thess. 5:15), speak the truth to one-another (Eph. 4:25; Col. 3:9), serve one-another in love (John 13:14; Gal. 5:13; 1 Pet. 4:10), and pursue peace and mutual up-building of one-another (Rom. 14:19).

We are further taught to submit to one-another as we submit to Christ (Eph. 5:21) and esteem others more highly than ourselves (1 Cor. 11:33; 2 Cor. 10:12). We are to confess our sins to one-another (James 5:16) not to judge or hinder one-another (Rom. 14:13), but to forgive (Col. 3:13; Eph. 4:32) restore (Matt. 18), and instruct one-another in proper conduct (Rom. 15:2). Much of the language of Christian growth is plural. It is in the context of relationships. Ideally, these relationships, over time, become less and less superficial and move toward authentic community described by the one-another passages.

resources

Biblical ‘Accountability’

We find in the Bible two key words that assist us in understanding mutual encouragement to Christian growth. The first word is “exhort.” Exhort is the translation of a word that has the common meanings of come alongside, invite, implore, encourage, exhort, and comfort.

The Greek word is *paraklesis*. It is the primary word used of the type of ministry to one-another that we are considering. It is used 109 times in the New Testament. The basic idea of the word is encouragement, by coming alongside, to walk rightly (Luke 3:18; Acts 15:32) or worthily (Eph. 4:1; Hebrews; 1 Peter) and to encourage someone to continue in the faith (Acts 14:22). This is not so much as an authority figure, but more like the “helpmeet” concept of husband and wife. We are all equal and we come beside each other to help one-another walk the road of Christian growth.

The second word that is helpful in understanding mutual encouragement in Christian growth is “edification.” Here the word edification comes from a word that means to build, build up, or the process of building. The word is always used in the context of community. The basic idea is that all that we do with, to, and for one-another has the purpose of building one-another up (Rom. 14:19; 15:2; 1 Cor. 14:3-5, 12, 17, 26; Eph. 4:29; 1 Thess. 5:11).

Biblical accountability is...

Simply stated, biblical accountability is “to help restore people to where God wants them to be.”¹ It is based on God’s word and not our opinion. Alternatively, we might say it is “speaking the truth in love.”² The Bible teaches that ‘biblical accountability’ is coming alongside one-another. This ministry of coming alongside rises out of authentic relationships. Another important feature of this type of ministry is that it can happen through modeling — not just words. Sometimes those who don’t say anything, but show us the proper way by their actions provide the strongest help.

When we first begin to interact with others in a small group or Bible study setting our relationship is likely very superficial. We do not know each other well and are still trying to understand personalities and the like. At this point, if we were to try to have ‘accountability’, no one would feel comfortable enough to engage in more than a support group. Accountability ‘sessions’ at this point will consist of nothing more than going around the room airing our ‘dirty laundry’ and waiting for others to respond to what we have said.

However, as we move toward more authentic relationships, spending time learning about one-another, our accountability moves toward this idea of coming alongside. Here, as we engage each other at a deeper level, we do not wait for the next men’s or women’s ‘accountability night’ to engage our brother or sister — we do it in the moment. Here, because we are no longer strangers, we have the ability to speak authentic care, encouragement, comfort, correction, and help. Paul Tripp captures the essence of biblical accountability, *[God] calls us to stand with people as they step out in faith, obedience, and courage. This is the ministry of accountability. It is not about lying in wait to catch them doing wrong. The purpose of accountability is to assist people to do what is right for the long run. It provides a presence that keeps them responsible, aware, determined, and alert until they are able to be on their own. It directs eyes that have just begun to see, and strengthens weak knees and feeble arms. We seek to encourage flagging faith and to keep God’s goal before people’s eyes. We help them understand when they need to flee from sin and when they are called to stand and fight.*³

¹ Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemers Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 268

² Tripp uses this term in *ibid*.

³ Tripp, *Instruments*, 269.

As we think about this type of expression of love toward another brother or sister, we must give two words of caution. First, it is possible to have an unhealthy level of accountability in our relationships. Remember, we are not relating to our boss or an authority figure, as is the case in the secular use of accountability. We are looking toward building authentic, well-rounded community, so focusing solely on accountability can bring building community to a halt.

A second caution is to remember that we are not God. Tripp's caution is important for us to hear: "*Accountability is not about being a private detective, trying to do the work of the Holy Spirit, being someone else's conscience, forcing someone to obey, chasing someone who is running, or looking for someone who is hiding. Accountability provides loving structure, guidance, encouragement, and warning to someone who is fully committed to the change God is working in his life.*"⁴ In other words, we must never make someone our "project." We are simply tools that point back to the gospel and God himself.

Biblical accountability is a ministry of really *shepherding*, and I use that word purposefully. In this ministry of coming alongside one-another, we fulfill the proverb "iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another (27:29)."

The "Tools" of Accountability

Illegitimate Means

Before we give attention to the proper motivations for biblical change, it is imperative that we examine an area the Bible describes as illegitimate. The first of these is the "fear of man." The fear of man has been described as an "epidemic of the soul"⁵ that is "such a part of our human fabric that we should check for a pulse if someone denies it."⁶ It is a snare which comes upon us unawares as well. Today we call it "peer pressure," "codependency," and "people pleasing." Fear in this sense "includes being afraid of someone, but it extends to holding someone in awe, being controlled or mastered by people, worshipping other people, putting your trust in people, or needing people."⁷ Fear of man lacks security and protection. Fear of man is such a problem that the Proverbs says "The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe (29:25)." It can cause us, like Abraham (Gen. 20:11), to fear to speak the truth and do right for fear of reprisal or making someone angry. It also takes away our focus on God and trusting in him to provide and protect.

In the context of biblical growth in community, fear of man can be problematic for two reasons. First, what we are trying to provoke in biblical growth in community is the fear of God. Fear of God is the goal. Our aim is to bring each other farther along the path from immaturity to maturity. Jay Adams rightly says that the goal is "to bring men into loving conformity to the law of God."⁸

Second, the counselor may attempt to use fear of man to provoke change. That is, he or she may say something like "if you continue to do *x* then you will have to answer to me *y*." The problem here is that this use of human-centered deterrence — behavior modification or emotionalism — is not focused on heart change. However, this type of 'counseling' is too easy. Maybe that's why we often resort to these methods. The counselee may change the behavior but only out of shame or not wanting to provoke anger in the counselor.

⁴ Tripp, *Instruments*, 269.

⁵ Edward T. Welch, *When People are Big and God is Small: Overcoming Peer Pressure, Codependency, and the Fear of Man*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1997), 14.

⁶ Ibid, 17

⁷ Ibid, 14

⁸ Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), 55.

In reality, this is very much like how we often parent our children. When all else fails, we fall into behavior modification or emotionalism rather than speaking to the heart of the child. In essence, there is no difference between parenting and ‘accountability’ relationships. External modification is not the goal — heart level change is the goal.

Prayer

It should not have to be said, but prayer is vital to any type of growth in community. We must not just pray about problems. We must spend time in prayer for, with, and about each other. We must pray before we enter into a *paraklesis* ministry time and long after the conversation is over. We must pray to ensure that we are not approaching the situation with a sinful attitude of our own, seeking God’s direction, and asking him to provide words (most importantly, Scripture) to guide the conversation.

Scripture

The Apostle Paul provides the blueprint for using the Bible in *paraklesis* ministry in 2 Timothy 3:16-17. He instructs Timothy here that “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” There are two helpful terms in this passage for understanding the nature of biblical accountability — reproof and correction. Together, these words carry the idea of setting straight or making upright by bringing conviction. In a negative sense, reproof functions to “show sinners their failures, clarify the point of the mistake, and lead them to a new sense of peace and wholeness.”⁹ In a positive sense, correction functions “to restore [one’s] doctrine or personal practice to a right state before God.”¹⁰

This passage informs us that the Bible works in five ways. First, it teaches—it provides divine instruction. Second, the Bible reproves/rebukes—it convinces and convicts of sin. Third, the Bible corrects—it builds back up after bringing conviction and confession. Fourth, the Bible trains—it nourishes, instructs, and provides teaching. Finally, the Bible enables—it provides for preaching, teaching, defense, and living its truths. John MacArthur rightly says, “*Through the convincing and convicting power of the Holy Spirit, Scripture is God’s own provision for every spiritual truth and moral principle that men need to be saved, to be equipped to live righteously in this present life and to hear one day in the life to come, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant... enter into the joy of your Master.’ (Matt. 25:21).*”¹¹

Confession

The Bible confronts us with admonitions to confess our sins to God (see for example, Lev. 16:21; 26:40; Num. 5:7; Ps. 32:5; 38:18). Paul teaches us that confession is what brings us into our new-creation relationship with God (Rom. 10:10-13). Confession is also what keeps our fellowship in that relationship close.

There are three places in the Bible that we are told to confess our sins to another brother or sister. None of these is for mediation of our sin; they are for restoration of fellowship. The book of Hebrews teaches us that we no longer need a priest to stand in our place before God because Christ is our priest. However, there are principles that we can draw from the other passages relating to confession.

⁹ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffith, *The New American Commentary*, Vol. 34, 1, 2 *Timothy and Titus* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 237.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 163.

The first passage is Matthew 5:23-24. Here, Jesus commands confession of sin for restoration of fellowship with another brother or sister before coming to God for worship. This would coincide with the Great Commandment to love God first and neighbors second. Jesus places a high priority on right fellowship with other believers.

The second passage is Matthew 18:15-20. Here, the purpose of confession is to restore fellowship again, but also to maintain the purity of the community. This passage provides the guidelines for how we should approach a brother or sister whose sin is apparent. The ultimate goal is to bring a lost sheep back into the fold.

The third passage is, quite honestly, the most curious. In James 5:16 it says, “Therefore, confess your sins to one-another and pray for one-another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” It is possible that James is talking about “sickness caused by sin [that] can be alleviated through public confession and prayer for healing.”¹² It is true that public confession was important in the Old Testament, so James could simply be teaching that it remains so in the New Testament. One commentator suggests that, “pastors experienced in the Christian healing ministry repeatedly witness to times when the confession of a resentment, a grudge, or an un-forgiven injury has led to physical healing with or without further prayer.”¹³ John MacArthur provides a helpful insight saying, “The inspired writer was well aware that sin is most dangerous to an isolated believer. Sin seeks to remain private, and secret, but God wants it exposed and dealt with in the loving fellowship of other believers.”¹⁴ In a way that we likely understand better in these modern times, guilt, shame, and other abnormal emotions affect our whole bodies. We could say then that there is emotional, spiritual, and physical value in sharing our burdens and exposing our sin to others so that they can come alongside us.

Confession is good — to God and to brothers and sisters. The purpose of this confession is two-fold — to bring restoration and maintain purity by allowing others to come alongside us. Sometimes we willingly open ourselves in confession, while at other times we will need others to come to us and point us to our sin. Sometimes our confession will be to the one person that we have offended. Other times we will confess sins to one person with whom we are close. At other times, it will be beneficial to shine more light on our sin and confess it to the group to maximize prayer and *paraklesis* ministry on our behalf.

Confrontation

If there are times that we will be required or find it necessary to approach another brother or sister that we know is in sin, how do we do so? This is quite likely the hardest aspect of *paraklesis* ministry and we don’t often do it well. We go either to the extreme of ignoring it or to the extreme of coming as an authoritarian figure to the other. Therefore, it is of great value for us to explore proper confrontation.

First, the purpose of confrontation is to “speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15) with a sincere desire for the wellbeing of our brother and sister (Phil. 2:3-4). The purpose is to point the brother or sister back to the gospel, applying the principles found in Matthew 18. Ken Sande rightly says “*there are times when you must speak to others in a firm or even blunt manner, especially if they have refused to pay attention to a gentle approach and are persisting in sinful behavior. Even so, it is wise to take a gentle approach first and get firmer only as necessary (1 Thess. 5:14-15). Strong words are more likely to evoke defensiveness and antagonism, and once a conversation takes on this tone, it is difficult to move to a friendlier plane.*”¹⁵

¹² David P. Nystrom, *The NIV Application Commentary: James*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 307.

¹³ Peter H. Davids, *New International Biblical Commentary: James*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 124.

¹⁴ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: James*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), 271.

¹⁵ Ken Sande, *Peacemaker*, 171.

To do this rightly requires that we first pray and remove the “log from our own eye” and remind ourselves of our own gospel need. Then there are four steps to follow as we approach confrontation and attempt to move forward. First, we ask them to consider what it is that God wants them to see in this situation. Second, we ask them to consider what does God want them to admit and confess. Third, we ask them to consider what new level of committed living is God calling them to pursue. Fourth, we ask them to consider what kinds of change will result from this new commitment. Note two things about this process — it is God-centered, and gospel-focused. Any result of confrontation following these principles will point the wayward one to God, not to self or another person.

We have an example of this type of confrontation in 2 Samuel 12:1-7. Here Nathan uses an interactive story to show King David that he has sinned against God. Nathan helps David to see his own sin and points to his need for confession without anger or belligerence. In the end, David himself pronounces his own sinfulness, and Nathan calls for commitment and change. Jesus followed the same pattern with those around him in Luke 7:36-50 and Luke 14:1-14. We should follow this pattern as well, when we take the sometimes hard step of confronting a brother or sister in our *paraklesis* ministry.

Conclusion

In the end, Christian accountability goes beyond the secular definition. The ministry that we are to pursue with other believers in community is *paraklesis* ministry. In the relationships we have with one-another we are to truly come alongside, confronting when necessary, pointing to everyone’s need of the gospel to bring about Christian growth. This is the nature of Christian growth in community—that in the end, we all together are more like Christ because of our interaction and submission to one-another. In the end, we can say that Christian growth in community truly does go beyond simple accountability.

chapter two

the half day of prayer

One of the keys to lasting Christian transformation is prayer. Yet, if we are honest, many times we struggle to even have short times of prayer. Perhaps spending more than five minutes in prayer is intimidating. I also imagine you are likely wondering how you could pray for this extended period. Perhaps you envision trying to keep your eyes closed and kneeling the whole time and wonder how that even works. However, there are great benefits of spending a half day in prayer. I believe that over time, you will learn the value of extended time in prayer.

There is no biblical mandate for how much time you should spend in prayer. The closest is 1 Thessalonians 5:17 where we are commanded to pray *without ceasing*. Actually, even here there is no limitation on how long or short to pray.

When I mention praying for a half day, I say “half day” loosely. For some a half day may be five hours. For others, it may be longer or shorter depending on what you consider a “day” to be. When I refer to a half day of prayer, I am thinking of roughly three to four hours or about the length of a football game. It is not the length of time that is important, but spending time with God, away from the craziness of life long enough to cry out to Him and allow Him to speak to us through His Word.

Our hearts are cluttered so quickly with all sorts of distractions that come from living in the routine of everyday life. Taking the time to retreat for solitary prayer and reflection is a great way to put aside distractions and focus solely on God and His word. It allows us to refocus our heart’s attention exactly where it needs to be. It also allows God’s Word to penetrate deeply into our souls. Taking the time for this type of prayer and meditation is highly effective in keeping our lives in accord with God and His Word.

Meditating on God’s Word and crying out to him as you look at the condition of your life before Him can be a catalyst by which God can reorient your heart back to himself. You may not walk away from a time like this with any new revelation, and it is not intended to be a “burning bush” experience. This is more of Jesus-in-the-garden type of praying. The kind where you need to get away for awhile and pour your heart out to God while asking Him to pour His Word back into it.

Why Spend a Half Day in Prayer?

This time is about hearing from God. It is intended to be a time of attentive, worshipful listening and crying out to him. He is in charge! Do as he leads!

You can also make this time profitable for other reasons. Perhaps you are facing a major life decision, or have been given a grave diagnosis. Perhaps you are considering marriage, or have major problems in your marriage. Perhaps you just long for silence and solitude with the One who created you. Perhaps you need to evaluate the condition of your life before God. Any of these situations would benefit from an extended time of prayer.

As you encounter God through this time, your heart may become so broken or burdened that you feel you must pray for someone else. That is perfectly fine. In fact, if God is leading you in this direction and is teaching more about considering others as more important than yourself, then by all means incorporate intercessory prayer into this time.

Get alone with God! Let him search your heart! Put aside all distractions and just be still! Read God’s Word and talk with him about what it means for your life. Cry out to him as His Word moves your heart.

Spending an extended time in prayer can be a great way of worshiping God. Suppose you and a special loved one are walking along through the woods together talking and sharing about all that is going on in your lives. That time would be a very special time for both of you. Well, that is

precisely how this time is intended to be for you and your Heavenly Father. You have the privilege of getting alone with the Creator of the Universe! This is an incredible opportunity! Make the most of it. There is no rules...only worship!

A Divine Mirror

Many fairy tales and great pieces of literature use the image of a mirror to describe some sort of inner, magical desire to discover something that would otherwise be unseen. God's Word serves as a great mirror as we read it and examine our hearts. There is what C.S. Lewis would refer to as a *deeper magic* to the things that can only be accomplished by God himself. God uses His Word to penetrate our hearts and discern our thoughts. It is essential to make God's Word the centerpiece of this extended time away from it all. This half day of prayer is to be a time rooted in the Word.

Use the Word liberally! Read it. Pray it. Sing it. Listen to it. Journal it. Meditate on it. Obey it. Stay in it! God will speak to you about your life through the Word by the gracious work of His Spirit. Keep listening to the Word! How can you spend time with the Father without hearing from Him through the Word He has given us? A great place to start would be in the Psalms. Read a favorite Psalm as a way to unwind from distractions and slow down. Since this time is to be a slow, peaceful interaction with the Father, then start slowing down by reading a passage or two. Once you have settled down find a core passage on which to meditate. Let God's Word inform you of your sin, comfort, guide, and direct. Do not settle for anything less than God's authority.

Eliminating Distractions

Life is so very busy. Each day brings with it all kinds of stresses and demands. From simple decisions like deciding what to eat to surviving the unending list of irresolvable issues at work, each day adds to the weight of life. Just the thought of spending a half day in prayer, then, may not only sound hard, but may sound a bit impractical.

We are so accustomed to being on the go. We live in a very fast-paced world where seconds can seem like hours if we have a slow internet connection. We relish the thought of not having to wait more than five minutes in a drive-through line. What in the world, we wonder, would we fill up a three-hour span of time with? Can we really pray that long?

The first step in spending a half day in prayer is finding a time that best suits your schedule. It likely means you need to reschedule some things. As busy as life is, if you do not plan for spending a half day in prayer, then the time may quickly fill up with other obligations. Once the time has been set, then stick to it. Do not allow something to be planned in its place unless absolutely necessary. Do your best to make it happen. Why shouldn't prayer take priority in our lives? The attitude with which we treat prayer will reflect our desire to submit ourselves to God's leadership over our lives.

When the time comes for you to spend this time in prayer, it will likely take some time to unwind. Be sure to plan how you intend to slow down. For some, this might mean listening to peaceful music or using a prayer guide. For others, this might mean finding your favorite spot or taking a walk. Figure out what it is that will help you detox from the crazy pace of your life and plan to use that as you begin your half day in prayer.

It is important to remember that this should be a time primarily of solitude. This is where location is an important factor in your time of prayer. In order to eliminate distractions you may need to get away from people as much as you can for this time to be effective, but it may not. Some people are able to have experience solitude in a crowd. However, do whatever you can to eliminate those things that may distract you from being able to read God's Word and pray without interruption. Keep those closest to you informed about what you are doing. By doing this you can

use them to help keep you undisturbed, and will also allow someone else to be praying for you as you go through this time.

Retreating like this will hopefully become something you look forward to. You will find that getting away from the craziness of life and getting alone with God and His Word is actually quite refreshing and even necessary. After Jesus heard that John the Baptist had been beheaded, the crowds started to gather around him. People were coming and going so much that they didn't even have time to eat. As he and His disciples were reflecting on the news, Jesus said, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place," (Mark 6:31-32). Jesus understood the value of treating a weary soul to a good, solitary retreat.

Some Practical Suggestions

You do not have to kneel or close your eyes as you spend this time in prayer. In fact, movement is a good thing. Walk around, but pray while you walk. If it helps, jot down a verse on a scrap of paper to meditate on and pray through while you walk. Worship Him as you walk about! As Isaiah says, "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth" (Isa. 40:28). Pray about what you are seeing and what it reveals to you about God. Variety of location and space can help you stay focused, stimulate you to worship, and pray in new ways.

Journaling is a great way to meditate on God's Word. You will not spend the whole time directly praying. Feel free to write out your thoughts as you interact with a passage of Scripture. I call journaling, "pouring out your heart on paper" because that is precisely what it is. When I pour out my heart with my pen, I am able to think more clearly and process thoughts more specifically. Journaling is also a way to chronicle what God is doing in your heart so you can recall what he brought to mind during this time. It may be difficult to remember all you were thinking and praying about during this time. Journaling allows you to not only process the thoughts, but also have a record to which you can refer back.

One thing you can do during this time is just rest. Don't miss the point that the purpose of this time is not to take a three-hour nap. However, if, by slowing down, you find that you do not know the last time you sat still for longer than five minutes, then you should consider simply resting. Jesus often stole away with his disciples simply to rest. Our lives are so jam-packed that rest can be hard to come by. For some, a little nap may be the ideal way to begin slowing down. For others, a nap at the end of the time may be the best way to praise God for revealing His truths. There is a divine peace in finding literal rest in the Lord. But, be sure to not make this a time of self-worship by desiring the *rest* more than the *One Who gives rest!*

As you walk with your Heavenly Father, you will find that this can be a sweet time of fellowship. Let God guide your heart as you spend time interacting with Him and His Word. The time may seem long at first, but in the end you will find it time well invested. There is something to be said about taking time for the things that matter most in your life. While you do not have to spend a half day in prayer every week, it is something you should consider incorporating into your life on a regular basis.

Conclusion

A half day of prayer likely will not transform you. Sorry to disappoint! But it could very likely change your orientation. Whether you are changed by this time will depend on the degree to which you follow through on what God is showing you today. This time will be a very important step in aligning your life with God's good purposes for you, but it is just a step.

resources

Half Day of Prayer Reference

1. This time is about **hearing from God about the condition of your life before Him**. It is intended to be a time of attentive worshipful listening and crying out to Him. It is not *primarily* a time of intercession or planning, as helpful as those times can be. Having said that, God may have a totally different agenda for you along those lines. He is in charge. Do as He leads!

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” Psalm 139:23-24.

2. This is to be a **time of prayer rooted in the Word**. Use the Word liberally. Read it. Pray it. Sing it. Listen to it. Journal it. Meditate on it. Obey it. Stay in it. God will speak to you about your life through the Word by the gracious work of His Spirit. Keep listening in the Word!

“Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight. Turn my heart towards your statutes and not towards selfish gain.” Psalm 119:35-36.

3. This is to be a **time of solitude**. Resist engaging in conversations or reading unrelated stuff. You really can be quiet for half a day and live to tell about it! Music is OK (ipods, etc...) if it serves to draw you to God and not distract you. Devotional guides are OK, too (e.g. Valley of Vision), but they are the appetizers, whereas the Word is the main course. Use them to get you to the Word where you will meet God!

“After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,” Matt. 14:23.

4. It will likely **take you a good bit of time** to wind down enough to begin to hear from God. Persist. Don't give up. As distractions and other matters come to mind, use this time to “cast your cares on Him.” Pray for “ears to hear”. You may need to walk a bit or change locations. There are many places to be alone here. Persevere. Don't give up! The promise is for those who seek Him with all their heart and soul!

“But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul.” Deut. 4:29.

“Cast all your cares on him, because he cares for you.” 1 Pet. 5:7

5. **Journaling** can be a great tool to focus your thoughts as well as recording them to pursue further later. It has a way of slowing you down enough to cause you to honestly reflect on the Word as it relates to your soul. No one is ever going to read your journal. Let it be what it is — a humble, poorly written, sin-riddled tool to help you focus your thoughts on what God is saying to you. You can always burn it later if you need to!

“Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.” Heb. 3:1.

6. Reflecting on the **condition of your soul** is vital. Ask God to show you things you need to repent of and turn from. Ask Him to show you things He wants to grow larger in your character. You can use the lists of deeds of the flesh to get started on the former and the fruit of the Spirit on the latter (see Gal. 5:18-26). Pray through these lists asking God to show you where your greatest need is in becoming more like Jesus.

“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” Gal. 5:19-23.

7. **Movement can be good.** You don't have to kneel in prayer in one place for the entire time. Walk around, but pray while you walk. If it helps, jot down a verse on a scrap of paper to meditate on and pray through while you walk. Change locations. Variety of location and space can help you stay focused, stimulate you to worship, and pray in new ways. Pray about what you are seeing and what it reveals to you about God. Prompts for worship abound! Worship Him as you walk about!

"Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth." Isa. 40:28.

8. **Above all, seek God!** Seek Him in His Word. Seek Him in prayer. Seek Him in His creation. You are on a hunt to find God and hear from Him about the condition of your life before Him. Happy hunting!

"Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon." Isa 55:6-7.

"Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the LORD's anger." Zeph. 2:3.

"I have sought your face with all my heart; be gracious to me according to your promise." Psalm 119:58.

Disclaimer: A half day of prayer likely will not transform you. Sorry to disappoint! But it could very likely *change your orientation*. Whether you are ultimately changed by this time will depend on to what degree you *follow through* on what God is showing you today. This time is a very important step in aligning your life with God's good purposes for you, but it is just the first step. Determine before you leave this day to be faithful to act on what God has spoken to you about today.

"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him." Job 14:21.

Spend this time...

*Hiking, Sitting, Resting, Watching, Listening, Reading, Worshiping, Thanking, Repenting,
Weeping, Rejoicing, Journaling, Interceding, Singing, Pondering
... in the company of your Lord!*

Some Core Texts to Meditate On

Sermon on the Mount — *Matt. 5-7 (especially the beatitudes in 6.1-16)*

Great commandment & Commission — *Mark 12.28-34; Matt. 28.18-20*

The Word's affect on our hearts and lives — *Psalms 119*

Fruit of the Spirit vs. the flesh — *Gal. 5.19-23*

Becoming like Christ in His humility and sacrificial love — *Phil. 2.1-11*

On serving — *John 13.1-17*

The hope of the resurrection — *1 Cor. 15*

Crucifixion/resurrection — *Mark 15-16*

Worship! — *Rev. 1.4-8, 12-18; ch. 4-5; 7.9-17*

The hope and glory of Heaven — *Rev. 21, 22*

Selected Psalms — *1, 8, 15, 19, 23, 25, 27, 31, 34, 40-42, 51, 63, 66, 70-71, 86, 90-96, 100, 103, 104, 112, 113, 115, 116, 119, 121, 123, 127, 128, 136, 139, 145, 147-150*

Praise of God as Creator — *Ps. 147, 148; Job 38-42*

Half Day of Prayer for Couples or Small Groups.

1. Spend time together in worship.
 - Select one of the Psalms and read it together, alternating verses. When you have read it aloud, give praise to God in prayer for who He has shown Himself to be in what you have just read.
 - Spend time giving thanks for the kindness of God in your lives! List the multitude of things you are thankful for and then read 1 Chronicles 16:8-36 aloud together (alternating verses if you like). Then take time together to give thanks in prayer.

2. Share what you understand to be the big issues that God has before you in becoming more like Christ.
 - This may involve sharing around questions like these:
 - What is the great virtue you need to grow in/put on in order to become more like Christ?
 - What is God calling/drawing you to become in your character?
 - What is the great vice you need to work at killing/putting off in order to become more like Christ? What is God revealing to you that dishonors Him in your character?
 - How would you describe your relationship with God right now? How do you wish you could describe it?
 - How can I pray for you? Tell me things you need me to bring before God each day on your behalf.

3. Repent well and often.
 - As you talk and share together, you may be acutely aware of a way that you have sinned against your spouse or others that needs to be confessed and forsaken. Go ahead! That's what this time is for! Just remember to "forgive as the Lord forgave you." (Col. 3:13).

4. Some things to remember:
 - It is good to walk and talk, but especially for couples, it is good to sit and make full eye contact. Defer to one-another in love.
 - Some people are like turtles, rap on the shell and they pull back never to be seen again! This is a time to listen compassionately, encourage freely, and intercede passionately! It is not a time to critique or problem-solve.
 - Persevere in this. If you hit a bump in your conversation, take a moment to pray and recalibrate.
 - Remember that this time is not first and foremost about you. This is a time for you to worship God by serving your spouse in conversation and prayer.
 - Make some time for solitude.
 - If you are doing this as a small group, have a debriefing time at the end and don't be afraid to spend time seeking forgiveness and confessing to one-another if necessary.

chapter three

transformational bible study

There are many ways to approach reading the Bible. We might simply want to read the Bible devotionally because our hearts are heavy and we need comfort. We might read the Bible in order to study for a sermon or teaching time. We might read the Bible to learn about God or some other doctrine. We might seek to do a verse-by-verse study of a passage or a topical study of pride. All of these are good in and of themselves, but they are primarily for information.

It is good to study the Bible to inform our minds. But our intent ought always to seek to be transformed by God's word. The goal is for the truths that we find in the Bible to get into our hearts where change happens by the power of the Holy Spirit working in us.

When we approach reading the Bible with transformation as our goal, we are not seeking to master the text. We are not attempting to cast a critical eye, analyze, or pass judgment upon the text. We are approaching it with a humility that asks the text that we are reading to shape us. We seek to allow the text to master us. We bring no agenda to the reading of the text, but allow the text to guide us as we pray and seek to spend time in meditation on the text. We might say that transformational reading of Scripture is more like a strategic soaking in the Bible than a process of examining the Bible. In transformational Bible study, we are reading the Bible with the expectation of the Holy Spirit encountering us there.

A Brief History

Without going into too much detail, it is important that we understand that this is not a new practice for a very important reason. Medieval monks practiced what they called *lectio divina* (lit. sacred reading) as part of their daily pattern of life. The goal of the practice was spiritual formation, but as the practice developed through the years, it became in many cases a very mystical practice. There was little regard in some cases for solid interpretation, which led to an overly emotional, even allegorical response.

Around this same time, schools and universities began to arise. In these schools, Bible study was often very cold and rigorous. It was an intellectual practice. The goal was information not transformation. Thus, the Bible was treated as an object to study for its precepts and principles, not for an encounter with God.

This history is important because we must avoid either of these extremes. We *should* read the Bible informationally to help us make sure that we understand it correctly. At the same time, we don't want to be cold academics.

Transformational Bible Study Questions

When we approach transformational Bible study, we are going to ask a series of questions of the text that we are reading. The first question is "What does this text mean?" It is very important to establish this. Improperly understanding the meaning of the text can be very dangerous. To understand the meaning of the text you should read it through several times. It is also good to read the context of the passage. Read the verses or chapters before and after the section of text you are reading. After you have done this, write a summary statement in your own words. Make it as specific as possible. This will help you establish the meaning.

The second question is, "What does this passage tell me about God?" In the first question, we are seeking to know about God's person, character, will, plan, purpose, etc. Virtually every passage of the Bible tells us something about God. It might be that your passage speaks of His love, mercy, and grace. These are vitally important things to understand about God.

The third question is the question of application. We can ask, "How should my life change in response to this truth about God?" or "Is there a command to obey, a sin to address, or a truth to appropriate from this passage?" In the third question, we are seeking to understand what kind of transformation needs to happen in response to what we learned about God. You might sometimes

hear this called application. Again we are not just looking for precepts and principles, we are seeking change. When we honestly assess our lives in light of the revealed truth of the Bible then we will see those areas that need change. If your passage speaks of God's love, mercy, and grace, you might ask yourself "Do I really understand God's love?", "Do I live my life by grace, or do I do good things in an attempt to earn His favor?" It is here that we seek to become *doers* and not just *bearers* (James 1:22). What we are talking about is "*the thoughtful appropriation of biblical truth in our lives—how we take it in, embrace it, and adjust our lives to bring them in line with the truth of God's word.*"¹ This process takes time. You cannot expect that you will spend a few minutes reading a text and come away radically different. Often, the things you learn about yourself will require a lengthy time of concerted effort to change.

A Process

Determine a time and place that will be set aside for this time. The fact is we are busy people with many distractions. If we are not intentional about planning for this time then other things will fill up our calendars quickly or we will be distracted. Don't be overly rigid about this, but consider it like a doctor's appointment. Unless some kind of emergency arises, you generally make sure that you keep this kind of appointment. Why not think of time with God the same way? You are not being legalistic; you are making an appointment to meet with your Father. Over time, it will become more naturally part of your life and you will become more consistent in it.

Once you have determined time and place, pray. While you are reading, pray. When you are finished reading, pray. This process must be saturated in prayer. Pray the passage you are reading. We cannot expect to change unless we are praying to that end. Go and spend a half day in prayer asking God to reveal to you a book of the Bible that would be beneficial for you to study in this season of your life. You should approach this time with the intention of learning God's will for your life, having already determined to do it.

Try to be systematic. It would be beneficial to read through whole books of the Bible in this process. In this way, you will come across new subjects and not be able to avoid some of the hard ones. Meditate on the text. Read it multiple times. Read it in several translations. Try to memorize portions of the text. Try to use a Bible without study notes so that the notes do not distract you.

Use a journal to write down thoughts, questions, and answers as you interact with the text and follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Be willing to repent quickly — and well — as the text confronts you. Remember that you are seeking to be shaped by the Bible rather than informed by the Bible.

Transformational Bible Study in Community

Transformational Bible study is great for small groups and couples as well. If you are a new believer, or have not spent much time really reading the Bible before now, this is a great exercise to do with someone else for a while. When you interact with someone who is more mature than you in the faith, he or she will be able to help guide you in asking questions of the text you are reading. Don't be shy about seeking someone to help you.

If you are a small group leader, guide your group through this type of reading. If you are a husband, lead your wife and children in it. Certainly, this is a perfect practice for personal solitude and reflection, but as we have stated before, we are meant for community.

¹ George H. Guthrie, *Read the Bible for Life*, (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 63.

Conclusion

Transformational Bible study is an important aspect of transforming. We do not approach this process seeking to become more knowledgeable about the Bible, but to allow the Bible to inform us about God and how our lives must change in response. Transformational Bible study is part of a process — our approaching the Bible to be shaped by its words thus being transformed.

resources

Transformational Bible Study Quick Reference¹

1. Choose a special place (preferably away from your desk and other areas of activity) that is suitable for this purpose. Sanctify this space by reserving it as a regular meeting place with the Lord. Choose a special time in which you can be alert and consistent. Invite God to lead you to rearrange your life to allow more time with Him. This will be more a matter of making time rather than finding time. Whenever it is, give God your best time: when you are least sluggish, and when you can be quiet, still, and unpressured by outward hindrances. Consistency is critical, since there will be many temptations to postpone and neglect this time.
2. This is ideal for a systematic study through a book of the Bible.
3. To avoid distraction, it is better to use a Bible without study notes. Use an accurate translation rather than a paraphrase. Keep the passage brief—do not confuse quantity with quality.
4. Begin with a prayer of preparation: for example, “Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law” (Psalm 119:18) or, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer” (Psalm 19:14). Start with a clear intention to know God’s will for your life with a fixed resolution in advance to do it. Slowly read the text repeatedly until it is in your short-term memory. Try making your first readings audible, since this will make them slower and more deliberate.
5. Seek the meaning of the text; ask questions. However, come more as a disciple than as a collector of information. Listen to the words in humility accompanied by a willingness to obey. Hearing the Word must be united by faith (Hebrews 4:2) with an intention to apply it in practice (James 1:22). Open yourself to be addressed by the Word in your attitudes, habits, choices, and emotions. There will be times when you resist a penetrating encounter with God, and these generally have to do with areas of disobedience. Thus, it is wise to examine your being and doing in the light of the text by asking, “Lord, what are You saying to me in this passage?”
6. Remember that you are seeking to be shaped by the Word more than informed by the Word. The whole process should be infused with a prayerful attitude. Seek to avoid the usual pragmatic reflex that seeks to “net out” some immediate nugget or benefit. Approach sacred reading with no conditions, demands, or expectations. The Word may not meet your perceived needs, but it will touch your real needs, even when you don’t discern them.

¹ Adapted from the article by Ken Boa, *Introduction to Sacred Reading*, accessed at <http://bible.org/seriespage/introduction-sacred-reading-our-image-god> on May 8, 2012.

chapter four

meet mort and viv

We have already said that the goal of our Christian walk is to become more like Christ. Nevertheless, we know that is easier said than done. This is perhaps the most difficult aspect of discipleship. We have spent a long time perfecting the sin patterns that we have in our lives. We can expect, therefore, that it will take a long time to begin to fight a sin pattern and replace it with a godly virtue. This process is called mortification and vivification—or, more affectionately, Mort and Viv.

What is Mort and Viv?

The concept of Mort and Viv comes from several Bible passages. The essence of the teaching is to put off the old self and put on the new self. We see that the old self means that we walk in corruption (Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9) and immorality (Rom. 13:12-14; Gal. 5:19-21). We make provision for the flesh (Rom. 13:12-14) and to fail to crucify it (Gal. 5:24). To continue to walk in the desires of the flesh is against the will of God (Gal. 5:17) and leads ultimately to death and judgment (Rom. 8; 1 John 1:6). We are told that to continue in sin is to deny the grace of God in our lives (Rom. 6).

By contrast, we are told that when we seek by the power of the Holy Spirit to put on the new self we are, in essence, putting on Christ (Rom. 13:12-14) by being renewed (Eph. 4:23-24) into the likeness of God in His holiness and righteousness (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). When we put on the new self we are walking in the Spirit and not seeking to gratify the flesh (Gal. 5:16; Rom. 8), and our walk will be called *worthy* and we will bear fruit in our lives (Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:12). The fruit in our lives will be the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23, 25).

Mort and Viv is the process of allowing God to shape us into the likeness of Christ, by both mortification of sin and vivification of virtue. It cannot be one or the other. It happens as we allow God to work in us to prompt us to become more righteous and holy. Though this change is primarily a work of the Spirit and not something we accomplish on our own, we should run hard after it as we pursue God.

Partnering for Change¹

We do not naturally desire to do this. Therefore, it is vitally important to make clear that the work of transformation is primarily the work of the Holy Spirit. Life change is, as we said in Chapter 1, a gift of God that flows out of fellowship with Him. However, it is also up to us to run hard after God. How does the Holy Spirit work this process in us?

First, he causes our hearts to abound in grace and the fruits of grace that are contrary to the work of the flesh. That is, when we live and walk in the fruits of the Spirit, they restrict our lusts. He causes us to grow and abound in the grace that is contrary to indwelling sin. Second, He changes us by taking out our heart of stone and replacing it with a new one. This new heart is able to hear and obey God bringing us into communion with Christ, where we live in His grace.

Going a Little Deeper

When we speak of mortifying sin, we are not talking about utterly rooting it out or destroying it. We will constantly battle sin until we are with Christ in the New Heavens/New Earth. We will do all we can to destroy sin, but can't lose heart if it continues to plague us. Second, we must be sure the change that comes is not only outward. The goal is heart change. Third, sin is not mortified if it is only diverted. That is, just because our interest in something changes for a season, it doesn't mean that the interest will not return.

¹ This section and the next largely follow John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin*, edited by Richard Rushing, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2007) chapters 3, 5, 6.

So what exactly is mortification? First mortification is the continual weakening of our lust. This is not just that we fight against an ‘outbreak’ of a sin, but we are constantly going to the heart issue behind the sin and seeking to fight against *that* by putting on a virtue that fights against the sin. Over time, the virtue will weaken the natural lust that causes us to commit the sin. Second, mortification is a constant fight against sin. Again, you cannot expect to stop becoming angry in six weeks when you have worked your whole life to perfect that anger. It is a long, slow, strategic process of growth. Third, mortification is success in the battle. As you see temptation come and you are able to stand against it, these victories are evidence that mortification is happening. Cling to these victories, but know that there will be other battles to fight. Trust that God is willing and able to help you fight the battles.

We change slowly. You will want to make a commitment to a long, strategic soaking in the Scriptures. Let’s say that you have an issue with anger. You could do a 6-9 week Bible study on anger, but all you might gain is knowledge. This process is more like Jesus’ words in John 15. He says that we are to abide in him. As we seek to abide in Him and meditate on His words, we will be changed over time. We must rely on his power to work this change in our lives. But we must hold to him as closely as we can to truly abide.

How Do I Know What Needs to Change?

This is a great question. There are several ways that we can answer this. First, you could ask your spouse, children, small group, or even your co-workers. Whether you like it or not, the people around you know what things trigger sin in your life. So don’t be afraid to ask.

However, I want to suggest a better way. Go spend a half day of prayer alone with God. Ask Him to identify a vice and a virtue that need to be put off/on. I have already given instructions on this in Chapter 2, so go back to that and take the time to do this. While you are praying, look at the X-ray Questions in the resources for this chapter. Read these and honestly assess yourself in light of them.

So, let’s say you have taken your half day and still are not sure. Go back and ask others. They can help you to further clarify any insights gained during your half day of prayer. Remember the value of community for change.

A Process

The first step is to become an ‘expert’ in what the Bible says about your area of character transformation. You can use a computer² or a concordance book to compile all the relevant verses on the topic. For example, if you are looking at anger, look up anger, angry, wrath, etc. Try to be as comprehensive as possible. Not all verses will be pertinent, but give yourself the biggest possible amount of verses to examine. Also, don’t just look up the vice words. Look up the corresponding virtue to that vice. For example, if I struggle with anger, I would want to study patience as well. Some subjects are very large, so it would be acceptable to limit your search to certain books of the Bible if you want.

Second, as you look through the verses you find, you will want to ask the same questions introduced in the transformational Bible study chapter. Your goal is transformation — make this highly reflective and personal. You are not seeking to master the passage, but for *it* to master *you*.

A word here about context and meaning is important. When you are looking at these verses, you will not have them listed on a page in context. In this type of study, it is vital to ensure that you spend extra time ensuring that your understanding of an individual passage is kept in its proper context. Read the surrounding context of the verse and ensure that it is pertinent to your study.

² Try www.biblegateway.com or www.blueletterbible.org.

Third, based on your study of the passages you found and the insights you gained, go back and develop a summary of what you have learned. Think of this as a quick reference guide that you can use in the future or hand to someone else struggling with the same issue. You will also want to mark key verses that would be good to commit to memory or meditate on further. Finally, develop specific application steps based upon your study. There is a sample action plan included in the resources for this chapter.

Some Practical Suggestions

Remember that just because you have spent a considerable time studying the subject, you have not put an end to your sin. You want to sustain application for the foreseeable future. Use your plan, add to your study over time, and include others in the process.

You want to spend a long time on this process. It is important that you understand that this process should last months, if not a year or more. Stay consistent. Build in community and accountability so that, should you lose steam, there will be others who can help stoke the fire.

Journaling is a good thing — especially in a study as involved as this. As these Bible passages confront you journal your thoughts and insights. This will help for your summary and application.

This is not an easy type of Bible study. Don't be afraid to get help from small group members, a pastor, or an elder. You may even want to undertake this with someone else who has done it before on your first try.

Conclusion

Sin does not die a quick death. You have done a lot of work to learn what the Bible says about a vice and corresponding virtue. Keep the momentum. Remember that this is a process. You will experience victories and failures. God desires that you grow into the likeness of Christ. A Mort and Viv Bible study is not easy, but it is fruitful.

resources

Mort and Viv Quick Reference

1. Pray. A lot.
 - Remember this work is primarily the Holy Spirit's, but it is up to you to run hard after God for the part that is yours.
2. You are seeking the fullest knowledge possible about your area of need. Compile every relevant Scripture you can find on the topic related to a vice and a virtue.
3. Persevere. Commit to a long, strategic soaking in God's Word. This process ought to take an extended period of time.
4. When reading ask the following questions:
 - What is the meaning of this passage?
 - What does this passage reveal about God?
 - What does this passage say about the condition of my soul before God?
 - What does this passage say about the vice/virtue I am learning about?
5. This should be reflective and personal, not informational and exegetical.
6. Journal as you go.
 - Write down insights and prayers based on the passages.
 - Write down applications from the passages.
 - Select key verses to meditate on and memorize.
7. Sustain your application and meditation.
 - Write a summary of your study.
 - Consider writing an action plan for your own use and to give to others for accountability and encouragement.
 - Though you have completed this study your sin is still there. Return to this time and again.
 - As you gain new insights on this subject in the future, add to what you have already completed.

Using Mort and Viv in Small Groups

1. Purpose to seek the Lord together.
 - Plan a time when the group can do a half day of prayer together. If the whole group cannot do it the same time, plan separate times for the men and women to go together. Set a firm date, but remember to be open to emergencies. Try to plan so that everyone gets time within a 1-2 week period.
2. Plan a time for sharing after the time of prayer.
 - Come together at the end of the half day of prayer. This will allow a time of encouragement, prayer, and thanksgiving for what has happened.
 - Realize that some people may need to talk out what they learned to be able to really understand what they have learned.
 - Encourage members to share what they have learned — this is a time of encouragement, not rebuke.
 - Pray diligently and continually throughout the process.
 - You will want to come up with a tool for accountability, encouragement, and progress. Encourage all members to fill out an action plan similar to the one provided.
3. Take the plunge and start the study.
 - The goal is a long strategic soaking in what the Bible says about the issues each person identified. It would be good to use the guide to Mort and Viv to teach through the process of this.
 - Remember that this process is individual and corporate.
 - Individual members of your group will have to remain committed to the process. Be ready to provide encouragement and accountability.
 - This process can also be corporate. For example, it is probable that more than one person will have the same issues. You could then teach these issues in small groups. Alternatively, if your group follows a Bible reading plan together you could do group topical studies to supplement the process.
4. Provide constant support.
 - Pray for each other often.
 - Encourage each other often.
 - Exhort each other often.
 - Learn from each other.
 - Listen and don't be afraid to seek advice of a pastor or elder.
5. Plan a process to sustain.
 - Spur one-another on.
 - Encourage review and expansion. After everyone has written their synthesis, consider giving them an opportunity to teach what they have learned through their Mort and Viv study to the group. It will help them continue to synthesize and apply and it may help others you may have similar struggles.
 - This is not a short process — it should and ought to take time.
 - Given the amount of time it should take, it will take constant encouragement to stay the course.

(Example) Action Plan for:**Year:****Primary Target:** *What is the concern/vice/virtue/need that you want to engage. Be specific***Primary Goal:** *This is the application. Try something like: "At the end of one year, by God's grace I will..."***Prayer***Give others some specific prayers for you in this time as well as list some for you to continually pray.***Study***What Bible books or passages are pertinent to your goal. What extra-biblical books or resources could be helpful.***Actions***Be specific about what you will do to work toward your goal.***Amor Bearer Questions (2 Samuel 14:1-14)***These are specific questions that you write and give to others for encouragement and accountability.*

X-ray Questions: Drawing Out the Whys and Wherefores of Human Behavior *by David Powlison* (edited) from *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Volume 18, Number 1, Fall 1999

Notice that each question circles around the same basic issue: Who or what is your functional God/god? Many of the questions simply derive from the *verbs* that relate you to God: love, trust, fear, hope, seek, obey, take refuge, and the like. Each verb holds out a lamp to guide us to Him who is way, truth, and life. But each verb may also be turned into a question, holding up a mirror to show us where we stray. Each question comes at the same general question. In individual situations — different times, places, people—one or another may be more appropriate and helpful. Different ways of formulating the motivation question will ring the bells of different people. The questions that follow are “Why?” questions, framed concretely as “What?” questions. These questions can help you draw out what gives specific direction to a person’s life. You do not see into anyone’s heart, but you can make intelligent inquiry into “Why are you angry? Why do you manipulate him? Why are you anxious in that situation? Why do you have a problem of lust at that particular time? Why do you drink to excess?” The Bible—the penetrating and light-giving word of the Searcher of hearts—is concerned to pierce below behaviors and emotions in order to expose motives, to lay people bare before Him. Reorienting motives through the grace of the gospel can follow when there is conviction of particular forms of disorientation. These questions can be used in several different ways. Each can be focused “microscopically,” to dissect the details of one particular incident in a person’s life. Or each can be focused to give a “wide-angle” panoramic view, to illuminate recurrent and typical patterns that characterize a person’s entire life. You will find in the course of counseling—and your own growth in grace—that the details and the panorama complement each other. The panorama alone is too general; change happens in specifics. The details alone seem trivial; the panorama gives large meaning to such tiny details. The Bible references are meant to be pump primers to get you thinking. They barely scratch the surface of the Bible’s treatment of what motivates people. Be sure to ask the questions first “existentially.” What *is* motivating you or another? Do not run to the “Christian right answer” without working hard and honestly to analyze deviant “functional gods.” Intelligent repentance will make the right answers really right and will make the love of Jesus your joy and hope.

1. What do you love? Hate?

This “first great commandment” question searches you out heart, soul, mind and might. There is no deeper question to ask of any person at any time. There is no deeper explanation for why you do what you do. Disordered loves hijack our hearts from our rightful Lord and Father. (Matthew 22:37-39; 2 Timothy 3:2-4; Luke 16:13-14.)

2. What do you want, desire, crave, lust, and wish for? What desires do you serve and obey?

This summarizes the internal operations of the desire-driven “flesh” in the New Testament epistles. “My will be done” and “I want _____” are often quite accessible. Various desires rule people, so go for details of *this* person, *now*, in *this* situation. Notice, sometimes another person’s will rules you (peer pressure, people-pleasing, slave-like, or chameleon behavior). In such cases, your heart’s craving is to get whatever good they promise and avoid whatever bad they threaten: “I crave to be included, appreciated, accepted, admired by you.” (Galatians 5:16-25; Ephesians 2:3, 4:22; 2 Timothy 2:22; Titus 3:3; 1 Peter 1:14, 2:11, 4:2; 2 Peter 1:4, 2:10; James 1:14-15, 4:1-3; Proverbs 10:3, 10:28, 11:6-7; Psalm 17:14-15, 73:23-28.)

3. What do you seek, aim for, pursue? What are your goals and expectations?

This particularly captures that your life is active and moves in a direction. We are purpose-full. Human motivation is not passive, as if hard-wired needs, instincts, or drives were controlled from outside us by being “unmet,” “frustrated,” or “conditioned.” People are active verbs. (Matthew 6:32-33; 2 Timothy 2:22.)

4. Where do you bank your hopes?

The future dimension is prominent in God’s interpretation of human motives. People energetically sacrifice to attain what they hope for. What is it? People in despair have had hopes dashed. What were those shattered hopes? (1 Peter 1:13; 1 Timothy 6:17.)

5. What do you fear? What do you not want? What do you tend to worry about?

Sinful fears invert cravings. If I want to avoid something at all costs—loss of reputation, loss of control, poverty, ill health, rejection, etc.—I am ruled by a lustful fear. (Matthew 6:25-32, 13:22.)

6. What do you feel like doing?

This is street talk for question 2, what do you desire? To be “feeling-oriented” means to make your wants your guide: “I feel like cursing you. I don’t feel like doing my chores.”

7. What do you think you need? What are your “felt needs”?

Questions 2 and 3 exposed your aims in terms of activity and pursuit. This question exposes your aims in terms of what you hope to receive, get, and keep. Felt needs are frequently taken as self-evident necessities to be acquired, not as deceptive slave-masters. Our culture of need reinforces the flesh’s instincts and habits. In most cases, a person’s felt needs are street talk for idolatrous demands for love, understanding, a sense of being in control, affirmation, and achievement. (Matthew 6:8-15, 6:25-32; 1 Kings 3:5-14; all the prayers in the Bible express reoriented felt needs.)

8. What are your plans, agendas, strategies, and intentions designed to accomplish?

This is another way to size up what you are after. The egocentricity lurking within even the most noble-sounding plans can be appalling. No one ever asserts, “The expansion of our church into a mega-church will get me fame, wealth, and power,” but such motives are garden-variety human nature. Their presence, even covertly, will pervert and stain one’s actions to some degree or other.

9. What makes you tick? What sun does your planet revolve around? Where do you find your garden of delight? What lights up your world? What fountain of life, hope, and delight do you drink from? What food sustains your life? What really matters to you? What fairy castle do you construct in the clouds? What pipe dreams tantalize or terrify you? Around what do you organize your life? What magnetic north orients your world?

Many gripping metaphors can express the question, “What are you really living for?” Notice that to be ruled, say, by deep thirsts for intimacy, achievement, respect, health, or wealth does not define these as legitimate, unproblematic desires. They function perversely, placing ourselves at the center of the universe. We are meant to long supremely for the Lord Himself, for the Giver, not His gifts. The absence of blessings—rejection, vanity, reviling, illness, poverty—often is the crucible in which we learn to love God for God. In our idolatry we instate gifts as supreme goods, and make the Giver into the errand boy of wandering desires. (Isaiah 1:29-30; 50:10-11; Jeremiah 2:13, 17:13; Matthew 4:4, 5:6; John 4:32-34, 6:25-69.)

10. Where do you find refuge, safety, comfort, escape, pleasure, security?

This is the Psalms’ question, digging out your false trusts, your escapisms that substitute for the Lord. Many of the “addictive behaviors” are helpfully addressed by this question. They often arise in the context of life’s troubles and pressures, and function as false refuges. (Psalms 23, 27, 31, 46, and about two-thirds of the rest of the Psalms.)

11. What or who do you trust?

Trust is one of the major verbs relating you to God – or to false gods and lies. Crucial Psalms breathe trust in our Father and Shepherd. Where instead do you place life-directing, life-anchoring trust? In other people? In your abilities or achievements? In your church or theological tradition? In possessions? In diet, exercise, and medical care? (Proverbs 3:5, 11:28, 12:15; Psalms 23, 103, 131.)

12. Whose performance matters? On whose shoulders does the well-being of your world rest? Who can make it better, make it work, make it safe, make it successful?

This digs out self-righteousness, or living through your children, or pinning hopes on getting the right kind of husband or wife, and so forth. (Philippians 1:6, 2:13, 3:3-11, 4:13; Psalm 49:13; Jeremiah 17:1-14.)

13. Who must you please? Whose opinion of you counts? From whom do you desire approval and fear rejection? Whose value system do you measure yourself against? In whose eyes are you living? Whose love and approval do you need?

When you lose God, you enter a jungle of distortion. You tend to live before your own eyes or before the eyes of others—or both. The “social idols” take numerous particular forms: acceptance or rejection, being included or excluded, approval or criticism, affection or hostility, adoration or belittlement, intimacy or alienation, being understood or caricatured. (Proverbs 1:7, 9:10, 29:25; John 12:43; 1 Corinthians 4:3-5; 2 Corinthians 10:18.)

14. Who are your role models? What kind of person do you think you ought to be or want to be?

Your “idol” or “hero” reveals you. Such persons embody the “image” towards which you aspire. (Romans 8:29; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10.)

15. On your deathbed, what would sum up your life as worthwhile? What gives your life meaning?

This is Ecclesiastes' question. That book examines scores of options—and finds all but one option ultimately futile. At some point, translate Ecclesiastes 2 into its modern equivalents! (Ecclesiastes.)

16. How do you define and weigh success or failure, right or wrong, desirable or undesirable, in any particular situation?

The standards that you serve and employ may be wildly distorted. God intends to renew your “conscience,” that by which you evaluate yourself and others. If you approach life “in your own understanding” or “in your own eyes,” you will live as a fool. (1 Corinthians 10:24-27; Proverbs 3:5; Judges 21:25.)

17. What would make you feel rich, secure, prosperous? What must you get to make life sing?

The Bible often uses the metaphor of treasure or inheritance to speak of motivation. (Proverbs 3:13-18, 8:10f, 8:17-21; Matthew 6:19-21, 13:45-46; Luke 16:10-15; 1 Peter 1:2-7)

18. What would bring you the greatest pleasure, happiness and delight? The greatest pain and misery?

Blessedness and accursedness are the Bible's way of discussing happiness and woe. What calculation do you make about where and how to find blessing? Your calculation reveals what you live for. (Matthew 5:3-11; Psalms 1, 35; Jeremiah 17:7-8; Luke 6:27-42.)

19. Whose coming into political power would make everything better?

This used to be less true of Americans than of many other nations, where politics is a major locus of idolatrous hopes. But as cultural consensus breaks down, many people increasingly invest hopes in political power. (Matthew 6:10.)

20. Whose victory or success would make your life happy? How do you define victory and success?

How does inertial self-interest reveal itself? Some people “live and die” based on the performance of a local sports team, the financial bottom line of their company, their Grade Point Average, or their physical appearance. (Romans 8:37-39; Revelation 2:7, etc.; Psalms 96-99.)

21. What do you see as your rights? What do you feel entitled to?

This question often nicely illuminates the motivational pattern of angry, aggrieved, self-righteous, self-pitying people. Our culture of entitlement reinforces the flesh's instincts and habits. “I deserve_____”? (1 Corinthians 9; Romans 5:6-10; Psalm 103:10.)

22. In what situations do you feel pressured or tense? Confident and relaxed? When you are pressured, where do you turn? What do you think about? What are your escapes? What do you escape from?

This question comes at matters from a slightly different direction. Many times certain patterns of sin are situation-dependent. Teasing out the significant aspects of the situation can hold up a mirror to the heart's motives. When public speaking “makes you” tense, perhaps your heart is ruled by your own performance in the eyes of others (fear of man and pride). When paying bills generates anxiety, perhaps a strand of mammon-worship operates within you. (See the dozens of Psalms of refuge.)

23. What do you want to get out of life? What payoff do you seek out of the things you do? “What do you get out of doing that?”

This is a concrete way to restate questions 3 and 8, digging out your operative goals. Idols, lies, and cravings *promise* goodies. Serve Baal, and he'll give you fertility. Get that cute guy to like you, and you'll feel good about yourself. Make \$100,000, and you'll show up those people who thought you'd never make it in life. (Proverbs 3:13-18; Matthew 6:1-5, 16-18)

24. What do you pray for?

Your prayers often reveal the pattern of your imbalance and self-centeredness. Of the many possible things to ask for, what do you concentrate on? Prayer is about desire; we ask for what we want. Do your prayers reflect the desires of God or of the flesh? (James 4:3; Matthew 6:5-15; Luke 18:9-14.)

25. What do you think about most often? What preoccupies or obsesses you? In the morning, to what

does your mind drift instinctively? What is your “mindset”?

Hold up a mirror to your drift, that you might reset your course! (Colossians 3:1-5; Philippians 3:19; Romans 8:5-16.)

26. What do you talk about? What is important to you? What attitudes do you communicate?

This question and the next presume the closest possible connection between motives and behavior. Notice both what people choose to talk about and how they say it. Our words proclaim what our hearts worship. (Luke 6:45; Proverbs 10:19; Ephesians 4:29.)

27. How do you spend your time? What are your priorities?

Notice what you and others choose to do. It is a signpost to the heart’s operative loyalties. (Proverbs 1:16, 10:4, 23:19-21, 24:33.)

28. What are your characteristic fantasies, either pleasurable or fearful? Daydreams? What do your night dreams revolve around?

We are still responsible human beings even when more or less detached from consciousness. Your patterns of concern and desire are revealed in reverie. (Ecclesiastes 5:3-7)

29. What are the functional beliefs that control how you interpret your life and determine how you act?

Hebrews 4:12 speaks of the “thoughts and intentions” of the heart. Perhaps we could translate this “beliefs and desires.” Both the lies you believe and the lusts you pursue undergird visible sins. A person’s functional, operative beliefs control responses. The ways you understand God, yourself, others, the devil, right and wrong, true and false, past, present, future...have pervasive effects. (See the entire Bible, as God seeks to renew darkened minds from falsehood)

30. What are your idols or false gods? In what do you place your trust, or set your hopes? What do you turn to or seek? Where do you take refuge? Who is the savior, judge, controller, provider, protector in your world? Who do you serve? What “voice” controls you?

This entire list of 35 questions pursues things that usurp God. Each of these can metaphorically be termed an “idol” to which you give loyalty. The voices you listen to mimic specific characteristics of God. Start to trace that out into the details of life lived, and your ability to address the vertical dimension relevantly and specifically will mature. (See the entire Bible, as God seeks to deliver people from idols, to serve the living and true God; Ezekiel 14:1-8; Acts 26:18; Colossians 3:5; Ephesians 5:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:9f)

31. How do you live for yourself?

This is a general way of asking any of these questions. “Self” takes a thousand shapes and wears a thousand disguises. (Luke 9:23-25; 2 Corinthians 5:14f.)

32. How do you live as a slave of the devil?

Human motivation is not purely “psychological,” “psychosocial,” or “psychosomatic.” When you serve lusts and lies, you serve a personal enemy who wishes to deceive, enslave, and murder you. Human motivation is thoroughly “covenantal.” You may serve the devil, or you may serve the Lord, but you’re going to have to serve somebody, as Bob Dylan put it. (John 8:44; Acts 26:18; Ephesians 2:2-3; 2 Timothy 2:26; James 3:14-16.)

33. How do you implicitly say, “If only...”(to get what you want, avoid what you don’t want, keep what you have)?

The “If onlys” are street talk that can uncover many motivational themes in the interest of creating biblical self-understanding and repentance. (1 Kings 21:1-7; Hebrews 11:25; Philippians 3:4-11.)

34. What instinctively seems and feels right to you? What are your opinions, things you feel are true?

You not only “feel like” doing some things (question 6 above), you also “feel that” certain things are true. On the contrary, wisdom is correctable, as it listens and learns. (Judges 21:25; Proverbs 3:5, 3:7, 12:15, 14:12, 18:2; Isaiah 53:6; Philippians 3:19; Romans 16:18.)

35. Where do you find your identity? How do you define who you are?

The Bible says radical things about self-knowledge, identity, and the categories of self-evaluation (“conscience”). The places people typically look for identity are dry wells. (For example, take the book of Ephesians and notice every word or phrase that describes “identity,” either about Paul himself, or about who we used to be, or about who we now are. You will find over 30 different statements in this short letter.)