

The Foundations of Truth

A FOUNDATION FOR GROWTH

GOSPEL TRANSFORMATION

PRE-GAME

We all recognize our need for change. The number and prominence of self-help books, 3-step plans and New Year's Resolutions betray our society's obsession with personal progress. Although their definition of the ideal might vary, everyone longs for perfection. The apostle Paul writes to the Colossians that he works "so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ." What would it mean to pursue transformation in our Christian lives? After all, haven't our sins already been forgiven? *How* do we change? Scripture speaks of the whole of our Christian lives as a race in which the finish line is a quality of life that reflects the holiness of Christ. Getting the prize involves a lifetime of growth and change. The purpose of this study is to examine the foundation for growth we have through gospel transformation.

THEME

Transformation is the process by which God works in us to make us more like Christ. God initiates this life-long process by grace and calls us to actively pursue change through spiritual disciplines offered as a thank you performance to God.

PRACTICE

Understanding the Gospel as the motivation and foundation for growth should lead us to take off our old ways of life through confession, be renewed in Christ through prayer and put on a new self through spiritual disciplines.

SYMBOL KEY



Indicates discussion questions



Indicates Biblical passages to look up



Indicates application questions to be discussed

The Foundations of Truth Series

A Foundation for Confidence

A Foundation for Trust

A Foundation for Growth

A Foundation for Community

A Foundation for Life

I. OUR CALL TO TRANSFORMATION

✦ What are some areas you want to change in your life? Why is it hard to change?

We can have confidence that “there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). Though we are freed from sin’s penalty, we must also triumph over sin’s power. Gaining freedom from the on-going presence of sin is a life-long process in which we grow in holiness. This process is called sanctification. Through it, we continue to experience the saving power of the Gospel as our hearts are transformed and we grow in maturity. As we construct a foundation for growth, we must discard counterfeit models of spiritual transformation and pursue a Biblical model instead.

False foundations for growth

- **legalism** - “Just try harder.” If we work hard enough at spiritual disciplines like prayer or reading the Bible, transformation will come. *WRONG!*



Read Philippians 1:6-11

- How is our transformation dependent on God?

- **nominalism** - “It’s only human to sin, don’t worry about it.” Because God has already completely forgiven us, spiritual growth is optional. *WRONG!*



Read Philippians 2:12-16

- What does this passage have to say about our attitude towards sin?

- **passivism** - “Just let go and let God.” Because God empowers us to be free from sin, we can sit back and wait for holiness to arrive. *WRONG!*



Read Philippians 3:12-14

- Was Paul passive in his pursuit of holiness?

Biblical foundations for growth



Read Ephesians 4:17-24

- From v 17-19, why is transformation desperately needed?
- What should be our motivation for change? (v 20-21)
- What are the 3 aspects of our transformation? (v 22-24)

✦ Which false model for growth do you tend towards? How would applying Ephesians 4 change your approach?

See “A Foundation For Confidence” for more on our freedom from the penalty of sin.

sanctification = to set apart, make holy

“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord”
- Hebrews 12:14

Philippians is a great place to turn to for a right foundation for growth.

II. TAKING OFF THE OLD SELF THROUGH CONFESSION

✦ What do you think it means to take off the old self? Why is this the first step?

Our foundation for growth begins with taking off the old self, that is, a manner of life apart from Christ. This old way of life is rooted in a ‘hardness of heart’ and a ‘darkened understanding’ (Eph 4:18) and makes us ‘corrupt through deceitful desires’ (v 22). One way Scripture talks about this turning away from our old self is through confession.

What is confession?

Although our relationship with God is secure, our fellowship with him can be broken. Confession is acknowledging our sin before God and taking on an inward change of mind, heart and conviction.



Read 1 John 1:7-9

- Knowing that we are already forgiven, why must we confess our sins?

Restoring fellowship with God

God referred to David as a “man after his own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14), yet even David struggled with sin. He committed adultery with Bathsheba and killed her husband. In Psalm 51, we hear David’s confession of these sins. Like David, our godliness rests on our response to sin.



Read Psalm 51

- On what basis does David seek forgiveness? (v 1-2)
- What sin is David talking about? Who has he sinned against?
- What verses show David acknowledging his sin? Wanting to change?
- What does God really want from us when we sin? (v 16-17)

By acknowledging his sin, David takes off the burden and guilt of his old self and joyfully claims God’s forgiveness.

Examining ourselves

Like David, we must regularly examine ourselves and confess our sins as our foundation for growth. Try using Galatians 5:15-23 as a guide. Ask yourself:

- “How have I pursued the desires of the flesh?” (v 16-21)
- “How have I not pursued the fruit of the Spirit?” (v 22-23)



Do you struggle with feeling excessively guilty about sin? Are there sins in your life that are hard to acknowledge?

“put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires”
- Ephesians 4:22

Read 2 Samuel 11-12:19 for a full account of David’s sin.

Remember the ‘3 calls’ of confession:

- Call it sin
- Call it forgiven
- Call on God to change you

III. BE MADE NEW THROUGH PRAYER

In addition to taking off the old self, our hearts, minds and actions must be made new and shaped in godliness. The passive voice of the verb “renew” in v 23 suggests that transformation is not something we can accomplish on our own. We need God to renew us. One powerful way God has provided for our renewal is through prayer.

“and be renewed in the spirit of your minds”
- Ephesians 4:23

✦ Why do we need renewed minds (perspectives) in order to experience transformation?

What is prayer?

Prayer is simply communicating with God, expressing our dependence on him. As in English, Greek verbs can be in the active voice (“I counsel him”) or the passive voice (“I am counseled”). The Greek also has a middle voice, which is used when the subject participates in an action initiated by another (“I take counsel”).

✦ How does the concept of the middle voice help you understand prayer?

How does prayer renew us?



Read Matthew 26:36-46

- Why does Jesus turn to prayer?
- What change do you see in Jesus’ attitude from v 38 to 46?

When we come to God in prayer, he reminds us of his will, power and love, and he can give us wisdom (Eph. 2:17), strength and peace (Phil. 4:7) to follow him.

How do we pray?

We have freedom to honestly communicate with God through many types of prayer.



Read Psalm 4:4-5, Matthew 14:23

- Why would solitude and silence be important in some times of prayer?



Read Matthew 6:7-13

- What can we learn about how to pray from the Lord’s Prayer?

Although prayer should be an authentic expression of our hearts, we have much to learn from the prayers that are written in Scripture. Praying through Scripture is one way that we can enrich our prayers and learn from the community of believers that has preceded us.

Try praying through the acronym “ACTS” to guide your prayers:

- Adoration
- Confession
- Thanksgiving
- Supplication

For some other Scriptural prayers, try:

- Psalm 8, 25 or 96
- Ephesians 1:17-21
- Philippians 1:3-11

✦ Try praying through Ephesians 3:14-21, contextualizing it to your life.

IV. PUTTING ON THE NEW SELF THROUGH SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Putting on the new self is the last step of our transformation. Though our sanctification is based on grace, God invites us to put on a new self through the pursuit of spiritual disciplines such as prayer, reading Scripture and fellowship. Through these we find ourselves re-created in the ‘likeness of Christ in true righteousness and holiness’ (v 24) as we fight the good fight of faith (1 Timothy 6:13) and train ourselves in godliness.

✦ How should our approach to spiritual disciplines be similar to—or different from—our training in sports or studying?

The role and purpose of spiritual disciplines

Prayer, studying Scripture and fellowship are important spiritual disciplines. But they do not earn us any merit or favor with God because our salvation and transformation are based on grace. God does not frown at us when we fail at a spiritual discipline. We are completely approved of in his sight on the basis of Christ’s work on the cross alone.



Read Galatians 3:1-3

- Like the Galatians, what mistake must we avoid?



Read Isaiah 64:6 and Romans 4:1-8

- Do even our best works earn us merit with God?

Our ‘thank-you performance’ for God

One way to see spiritual disciplines is as ‘thank -you performances.’ When we pursue prayer, Bible study or fellowship, we are expressing our thanks to God for his grace by spending time with him, learning about him and enjoying him with others. God is glorified as we delight in pursuing him. Imagine a child who is given a valuable gift by his parents. She can’t repay them - and they wouldn’t want her to. Instead, she runs to her parent’s arms, embraces them and cries “thank you!” We shout thank you to God when we run to talk with him, study him and worship him with others.

V. POST-GAME

Everyone wants - and needs - to experience change in their lives. We should not ignore our sin neither should we pursue transformation through in the ways of the world. The foundation for our growth rests on the grace of the Gospel. This understanding should lead us to take off our old ways of life through confession, be renewed in Christ through prayer and put on a new self through spiritual disciplines. With joy and freedom, we should pursue this foundation for growth is a lifetime of godliness and holiness.

✦ Which aspect of transformation - taking off the old, be renewed or putting on the new self is most difficult for you? How you are trusting God for change in this area?

“put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness”
- Ephesians 4:24

“For while physical training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”
- 1 Timothy 4:8

For more info on spiritual disciplines...

- See Foundation 3 for ‘prayer’
- See Foundation 4 for ‘fellowship’
- See Foundation 5 for ‘Scripture’

“God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”
- John Piper