

# Can God Help Me Change?

# radiate

## Settling In: *About 10-20 minutes*

- 1) Make a note to yourself who, if anyone, is missing from your home group this week:
- 2) Spend some time finding out how everyone is doing: make a note for prayer requests.
- 3) Introduce a time of conversational prayer. Make it clear that group members are not required to participate if they are not comfortable.

or

- 4) After a more brief time of prayer...
  - a) Ask if anyone has ever experienced God's help to make a lasting change.
  - b) How did it make your life better?

This is only for your information...don't make a big deal of who is missing to the members who are present.

Conversational prayer means each member taking turns praying for various concerns with reasonably short and to the point prayers.

## Opener: *About 10 minutes*

- 1) There is an old saying that goes: "People never really change."
- 2) Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- 3) If you could change one thing about yourself (and still be you; not things like "taller, richer, and better looking"), what would you change?

You may not have time to ask every question in the study. Also, some of the discussion questions may not be appropriate depending on who is at the home group on a particular night. That's okay! We've intentionally given you more material than you can usually use.

## Mini-teach: *About 10 minutes*

### **"Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself." Leo Tolstoy**

- 1) Most people have things they would like to change about themselves.
  - a) Many focus on changes that, in retrospect, are actually quite superficial.
  - b) We would like to change our circumstances, our relationships, our behaviour, or our appearance to others.
  - c) Sometimes these kinds of things do need changed, but unless we ourselves change at some fundamental level, we often recreate our negative circumstances, relationships, etc. in new environments.
  - d) Some people live their whole lives without coming to this realisation.
  - e) They often become embittered at their "bad luck" and/or fix the blame for their frustration on others.
- 2) The question is whether we can really change who we are at the most fundamental level; to change in our hearts and souls.
  - a) Some people would have us believe we are victims of our genes and early childhood experiences.
  - b) It may very well be true that there are some tendencies and traits that are an unchangeable part of who we are.
  - c) However, the Bible is clear that the tendencies within us that defeat us and incline us to harm others and ourselves can indeed be effectively dealt with.
- 3) The Bible's word for these negative tendencies is "sin".
  - a) When people talk about sin today they usually mean naughty fun that

You could take some time to discuss how people who have a major life change ala Extreme Makeover can often end up in the same situation again after 5-10 years.

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. *The Serenity Prayer* by Reinhold Niebuhr

Sin is a bit like trying to operate a delicate piece of machinery contrary to the

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upsets religious types.

- b) But the Bible means something very different when it speaks of sin.
- c) Sinful actions and attitudes are much more harmful than we often realise and are invariably the reason behind our frustrations and failures in life.
- d) God's rules for living (in the Bible) are not arbitrary; they are the directions for a fulfilled and useful life. When we ignore them we harm others and ourselves.

manufacturer's directions. Not only are the results unsatisfactory, real harm can come to the device.

### Discussion 1: About 15 minutes

#### Change is possible only to the willing of heart.

"Brothers and sisters, in view of all we have just shared about God's compassion, I encourage you to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, dedicated to God and pleasing to him. This kind of worship is appropriate for you." (Rom. 12:1, GWORD)

Try reading this passage in several translations to capture its full meaning.

- 1) Paul appeals to God's compassion for a basis of what he is about to say next.
  - a) How can we know that God is compassionate? What has God done to demonstrate his compassion?
  - b) When it comes to dealing with our failings, what difference does it make to know that God is compassionate?
  - c) Does God's compassion go beyond feelings? What can we expect from God?
- 2) According to Paul, what should God's compassion lead us to do?
  - a) What do you think it means to "offer your body as a living sacrifice"? In what sense is it dedicated to God and pleasing to him?
  - b) What mental pictures come to your mind when you think of offering your body as a living sacrifice?
  - c) What is a *living sacrifice*? *A living sacrifice must continue to make the choice to surrender. A living sacrifice must learn how to surrender his/her life in the course of living it before God.*
  - d) Why is this the "kind of worship appropriate for you?" *The living sacrifice communicates the idea of a surrendered life before God. We surrender our will to live our lives for ourselves. We change from being wilful to willing before God. This is the beginning of the kind of worship God seeks.*
  - e) How is this kind of worship different from just attending church services?
  - f) Why the body? *You can't really demonstrate a change of heart apart from a change in actions (see sidebar).*

God's compassion is demonstrated in the goodness of his creation; his forgiveness of sins, his sending his son to die for us, his sending his Spirit to live in us.

You are a spiritual being. But unlike other spiritual beings you have a physical "interface" with the spiritual world. You are able to interact with the physical world with the instrument of your body. So to "offer your body" means to submit your activity in this world to God.

### Discussion 2: About 15 minutes

#### Change must come from the inside out.

Don't become like the people of this world. Instead, change the way you think. Then you will always be able to determine what God really wants—what is good, pleasing, and perfect." (Rom. 12:2, GWORD)

- 1) Why does Paul warn us about becoming like the "people of this world"?
  - a) Who are they? What does it mean to be "of this world"?
  - b) What are they "like"? What are some of their attitudes and actions that are displeasing to God? In what ways are they self-harming?

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- 2) *"Instead, change the way you think."* Why is the way we think so important to change?
- What are some typical assumptions (habitual attitudes) that the people of this world have about life that can lead to actions that displease God?  
*Take the time to make a good list.*
  - What are some harmful (or unhelpful) assumptions or beliefs about life that you have had to change?
  - How can you deal with persistent "worldly" beliefs and assumptions?
- 3) According to this passage, what is so good about submitting to God's will ("what God really wants")?
- How does that help us with the fear that we might miss out on "naughty fun"?
  - Paul says that God's will is good, pleasing, and perfect. Can you think of some other synonyms for the goodness of God's will?
  - Does anyone have an example of discovering just how good, pleasing, and perfect God's will can be?

The biblical word, "repent", means to "change your mind" or "turn 180 degrees".

Suggestions: a) don't allow them to go through your mind unchallenged, b) daily spend time in prayer and reading the Bible, c) ask for God's help to change your thought patterns.

### Closer:

- What changes in your life do you now believe that you can trust God for?
- What is your next step?