



THE CHANGE PROCESS

*Jeremiah 17:5-10 "This is what the Lord says, Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength, and whose heart turns away from the Lord. He will be like a **bush in the wastelands**. He will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green, it has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."*

1. What is your difficulty?

Scripture always locates people in a life situation. The letter of James is interesting in this regard. He says, "Count it all joy when you meet various trials." He does not specify the kind of trials, but leaves us to fill in the blanks. For James, an external situation can lead to significant growth at the heart level or it can lead to temptation and sin. In the words of Jeremiah, it can produce **fruit** or it can produce **thorns**. **IT ALL DEPENDS ON WHAT IS HAPPENING INSIDE A PERSON.** We either choose sin or we choose God.

2. Thorns: What sin entangles you?

All of our behavior grows out of a heart that has been captured by something or someone. We are fruit trees by the grace of God. Even fruit trees have thorn bush responses to life. We all tend to respond sinfully to the circumstances of life.

-We bend and twist the truth

-We harbor anger and bitterness

-We shift blame

-We manipulate others to get what we want

-We numb ourselves to painful experiences

The first step to develop into fruit trees is to remove the thorns in our lives.

3. The Cross Brings Us New Identity and New Potential

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing! (Galatians 2:20-21).

Christ's death on the cross broke the dominion of sin. We no longer have to live under the power of the law to meet the righteous demands, requirements, and power it holds.

Then Paul says something even more amazing. Our hearts, once under the domination of sin, now are the dwelling place of Christ, the ultimate source of righteousness, wisdom, power, and love. Our hearts can respond to life in brand new ways because we are no longer dominated by sin, but we are liberated by the gracious rule of Christ.

4. Good Fruit Comes From Real Heart Change

The Christian life should be a state of thankful discontentment or joyful dissatisfaction! We should live every day thankful for the amazing grace that fundamentally changes our lives, but we should not be satisfied. Why not? Because when we look at ourselves, we have to admit that there is still need for growth and change.

God calls us to daily wrestle, meditate, look, consider, watch, examine, run, persevere, confess, resist, submit, follow, and pray until we have been transformed into His likeness. This is different from a paralyzing self-condemnation or self-loathing. It is change based upon thanksgiving for past mercy and promised future grace.

5. God Changes Us in the Middle of our Toughest Challenges

The Heat-Thorn-Cross-Fruit picture represents how God changes us in the middle of the toughest challenges of life.

HEAT: Trials, pressures, temptations, and difficulty

Thorns: We respond in sinful ways to what we face. We have inner reasons for our sin

Cross: God meets us in our sin with His heart-transforming grace

Fruit: We respond in new ways to our old difficulties as our hearts are transformed.