

CHANGE

1^{session}

HOMework

During this course you have an opportunity to undertake a change project. This week, ask God to help you live with a greater awareness of what is going on around you. (See if you can tune in to your “heat.”) As you go through the week, try to notice times when you are struggling. Where are the hard spots in your life? What are you finding difficult? Your struggles can come in many forms: a challenging relationship, physical health, school problems, disappointments, injustice, your circumstances, unwelcome news, or being treated badly. Remember too that having things easy is also a challenge. Are there parts of your life that are so easy or successful that God seems unnecessary or irrelevant? What in your situation makes it easy to leave God to one side? Considering these things will help you decide what particular area of your life your change project should address.

It will help you to write down your thoughts. Even if they feel jumbled and uncertain, writing down specific areas of “heat” in your life will give you clarity on what your change project should be.



session 2

HOMework

Next week we will be thinking about thorns: our ungodly reactions to heat.

Think about how you respond to the situations in which you are struggling. Maybe you focus on your high expectations of a friend and how you respond when they don't follow through. Perhaps it feels like a friend group is suddenly excluding you, and you respond with frustration. How do you respond when you procrastinate on a project? What about when your friend makes a better grade, or your brother seems to get all of your parents' praise? What about when your parents don't agree with your plans to go out? How do you respond? Where are you feeling pressure? What would people see in you that tells them things are going wrong?

Over the next few days, each time you notice yourself responding badly to your heat, ask yourself some of these questions:

- » What are you saying to those around you?
- » With what exact words and tone of voice?
- » What are you doing?
- » Where are you looking (toward God or toward other people or priorities)?
- » What are you wondering about doing?
- » What are you thinking?
- » What are you feeling?
- » What words are forming but not said?
- » What alternative scenarios are you playing out?
- » What is happening in the moment, and what is happening afterward if you return to it in your memory?
- » What thoughts are you holding on to, and nursing?
- » Are there good things you are not doing?
- » What is being *reaped* as you respond like this? What is the result of your "thornlike" response?

THORNS



session

3

HOMework

1. In preparation for next week, try to spend a few minutes bringing the heart issues you have been talking about to God. This is not simply saying, “Dear Lord, I have done this wrong again.” It is saying, “Dear Father, I am the kind of person who does things like this. My heart is me, and I have been desiring/longing/blaming/running after/hoping in _____.” Spend some time looking at the story of the lost son in Luke 15:11–32. What can you see of his heart issues? Meditate on how the father responds to the repentant son. How does God respond to all those who come back to him convinced of their attitude problems? Keep talking to God about what you are finding.

2. Next sum up—in writing—what you are discovering about the specific issue you are working on. Briefly, describe the heat you are facing, the thorns you are displaying, and the desires hiding in your heart, as well as a summary of the ways in which God responds to you when you come to him in repentance. Writing this out will help to clarify your thoughts and engage you more fully with the process.

3. If you have time, explore other places where the Bible describes how God receives those who mess up and turn back in repentance and faith. You might try Isaiah 54:4–8; Micah 7:18–20; and Luke 19:1–10.

TWENTY QUESTIONS TO DIAGNOSE YOUR HEART

We have looked at how our desires become demands and “needs.” That is one way the Scriptures describe how our hearts go astray (Galatians 5:16–17; Ephesians 2:3). God has many other ways of describing what is going on inside us when we sin on the outside. Here are some questions to help you get at what’s going on in your heart. They all start the same way: When I sin

1. What am I loving?
2. What am I seeking, aiming for, pursuing?
3. Where am I putting my hope?
4. What am I fearing? What do I not want? What am I worrying about?
5. Where am I looking for refuge, safety, and comfort?
6. What or whom am I trusting that is not the Lord?
7. Whose performance or control is making life work for me?
8. Whose opinion of me counts most? From whom do I desire approval and fear rejection?
9. What is making me feel rich, secure, and prosperous?
10. Whose victory or success am I hoping will make my life happy?
11. What am I thinking are my rights? What am I feeling entitled to?
12. What am I praying for?
13. What am I thinking about most? What preoccupies me? What am I obsessed with? In the morning, where does my mind instinctively drift?
14. What am I talking about? What is important to me? What attitudes am I communicating?
15. How am I spending my time?
16. What are my priorities?
17. What are my daydreams?
18. What are my idols and false gods? In what do I place my trust or set my hopes? What do I turn to or seek? Where do I take refuge?
19. How do I implicitly say, “If only . . . ” (to get what I want, avoid what I don’t want, keep what I have)?
20. Where do I find my identity? How do I define who I am?



session
4

HOMEWORK

This week, spend a bit more time thinking about repentance and faith in this one area of your life. What aspects of the gospel seem most relevant to the longings and desires that are driving your behavior? What difference does the gospel make to your life? Forgiveness as you repent, for sure, but anything else? How does Jesus model perfection for you? What hope do you now have? Prayerfully keep aiming to understand this.

Next, consider what your life might look like as you begin to change. As your heart shifts in understanding, how could your life be different? What fruit might replace the thorns? How could things change for you and those close to you, and, in the process, how could this change affect your wider circumstances?

Write down some notes for yourself.

FRUIT



session
5

HOMEWORK

1. The kind of change we are talking about does not start with this course. To explore how God has already been at work in you, consider a part of Scripture that has been significant in your life. Take a moment to write it out here.

What has made it so significant? For example, what does it say about God? What does it say about you? How does it speak to your heart and the desires that live there? How has it changed you from within? How has that affected your relationship with God or encouraged you to live differently with others?

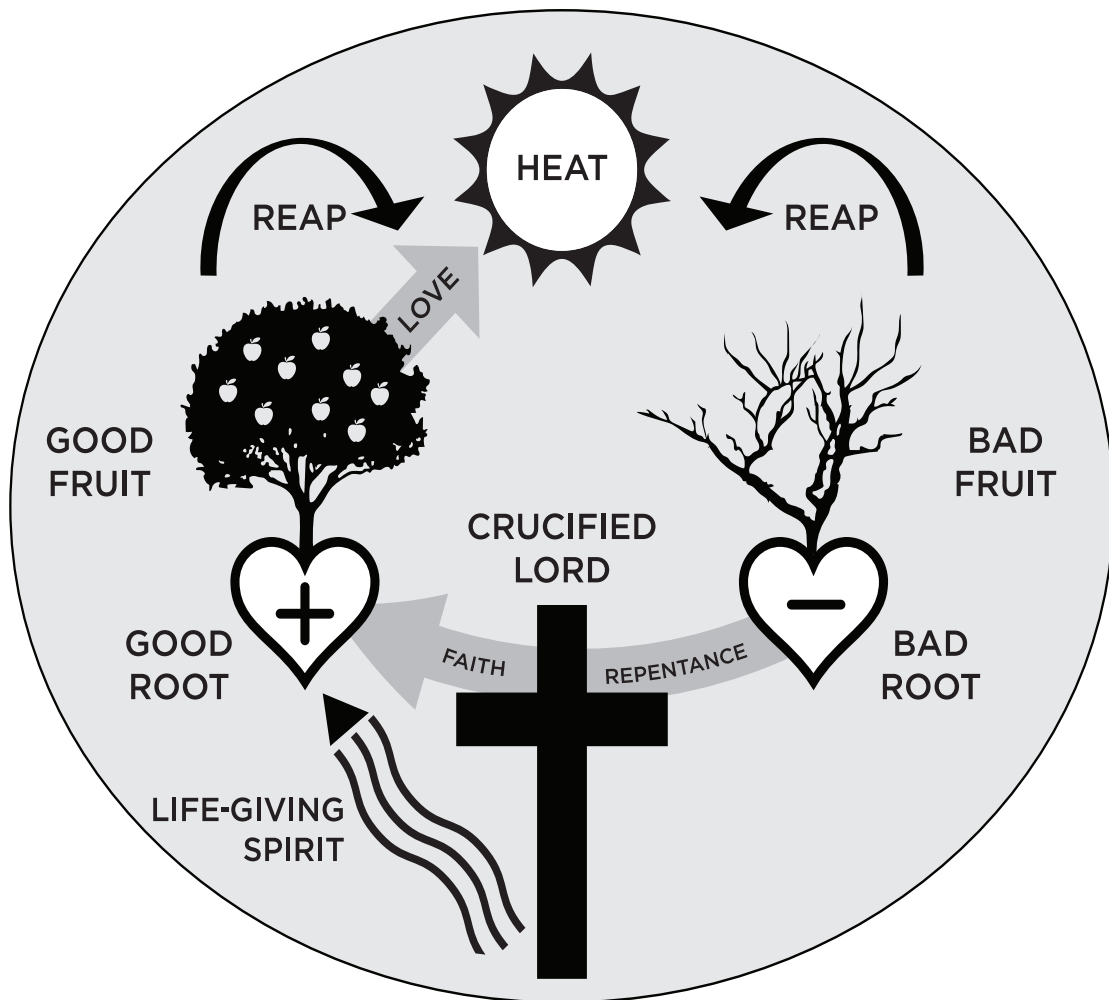
2. In our session this week, you thought about what change will look like as the fruit of the Spirit grows where once there were thorns. How will your heart need to be different for this to happen? (Remember, we are not just looking for your actions to change!) How does the gospel make this change possible and desirable?

Now ask God for help to watch yourself this week in the pressure points of your heart. What is happening? If things are not as different as you want them to be, where will you focus? How does the gospel provide hope in the moments of failure? Are you learning anything else about your thorns and the heart from which they come? If things seem to be different, why is this? Write down your thoughts.

REAL CHANGE

HOMEWORK

Write a page tracking yourself around the Three Trees, building on what you have written before. You can send this to the course leader in the next couple of weeks along with a plan of action for continued growth, confident that it is good and godly to keep pursuing real change!



FEEDBACK

NAME:

(OPTIONAL UNLESS YOU WANT A RESPONSE!)

Something good I am taking away from the course is:

Something I don't understand or want to hear more about is:

Something to think about for running the course better is:

The general issue I have been thinking about during the course is:

One way in which I might use what I have been learning for others is: