

CHAPTER I, SESSION I: WHAT ARE YOU SEEKING?

CHAPTER CHALLENGE

Perhaps the greatest challenge of this first chapter is simply processing all the information it contains. In particular, the four components of transformation may be overwhelming. Some readers may be familiar with “narrative” language, others may be familiar with soul-shaping exercises, some may be familiar with small group experience, and most will be familiar with the Holy Spirit. Few people will be familiar with all four of these areas, and certainly some people will be unfamiliar with all four of these areas. For this reason, as a leader you will need to be thorough in helping people to understand what they have read. Be prepared to draw illustrations from the chapter itself as well as from others in the group so they can more fully understand what they have read. Have a clear image in your own mind of these three areas—and especially how the Spirit works in and through them to bring us to fullness of life.

SUPPLIES

- ☞ Mustard seeds
- ☞ Small pots
- ☞ Potting soil
- ☞ Water for watering the seeds
- ☞ Name tags
- ☞ DVD *Be Still* cued to “Being Still” segment
- ☞ DVD player and television or computer and video projector

WELCOME

If your group members do not know each other well, spend a few minutes having everyone tell their name again, share a blessing they received this week and one experience that was difficult this week. Their sharing can be simple. Following this conversation, have the class recite Colossians 3:1-2. Go directly from the Colossians passage into 5 minutes of silence.

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

[Near the beginning of each class there will be 5 minutes of silence. Why 5 minutes of silence? We live in a world that is filled with noise and distractions. It is easy to enter one conversation still processing the last conversation. In the midst of all this busyness it is also difficult to hear the whispering voice of God. When we gather with friends to share our spiritual journey, what we want is to hear God’s voice in the lives of those around us. With a little silence we will be prepared to listen. Initially, 5 minutes of silence will seem like a very long time, but trust the value of this practice. Before long the group will crave this time rather than dreading it.]

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

At the end of the silence you could offer this prayer or a prayer of your own:

*God of power,
God of love,
God of transformation.*

You are present here, and you are inviting us to find our deepest questions answered in you.

We long to be the people you have created us to be.

By your Spirit, guide our time together so that we might live as your Apprentices.

Amen.

SOUL-TRAINING [10-15 minutes]

If you are in a group of seven or more people, divide into small groups of three or four. Spend 10 minutes discussing what you learned from the soul-training experience of sleep. To help everyone get started, share your thoughts on these questions.

1. Were you able to practice the discipline of sleep this week? If so, describe what you did and how you felt about it.
2. What, if anything, did you learn about God or yourself through the exercise?

ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [30-45 minutes]

THE BIG IDEA IN THIS CHAPTER: Most people want to change, but fail—not because they are not trying but because they are not training properly.

MAIN POINTS

These points are here to serve you as the leader. They can help refresh your memory on the content of the chapter and specific points you may want to discuss with the group.

- ☞ The first component of change is to adopt the narratives of Jesus regarding God—to come to know the God Jesus knows.
- ☞ The second component of change, the spiritual disciplines, should be seen as wisdom, not righteousness. They do not earn us favor with God; rather, they are means of training and shaping our souls.
- ☞ The third component of change is participation in community. We need the help and support of others in our journey toward Christlikeness.
- ☞ Transformation requires the action of the Holy Spirit in our lives, working through the three components of change and other means.
- ☞ Jesus has called you to be his disciple.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

[Note: Each week read through the questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all these questions.]

1. Have you ever tried to change something about yourself? What process did you use? How successful were you in changing?
2. The author gives us a diagram for transformation (p. 24). It is made up of personal narratives, soul-training exercises, community and the Holy Spirit. Have any of these been a part of how you have changed in the past? Explain.
3. Our narratives are stories that shape the way we live. To help you understand the concept of narratives better, think of a story from your life that defines success for you. Talk about that with the group.
4. Many people are tempted and have been taught to practice spiritual disciplines to please God when, in fact, they are a means of transforming the soul. How does that alter your approach to the practices you already do?
5. When has a small group of people spurred you on and encouraged you on your journey?
6. From the section on the work of the Holy Spirit (pp. 28-31), what insights did you gain about the Holy Spirit and how it impacts our narratives, Soul-Training or sense of community?

BREAK [5 minutes]

ENGAGING THE WORD [10-15 minutes]

[Note: Take the time to have someone read the Scripture text aloud each week. It's good to hear it read even if it is also in front of you in a written format.]

Read John 1:38-39 aloud.

1. Listen to Jesus' words; imagine you are the disciple asking the question. What are you looking for?
2. When Jesus tells you to "come and see," what emotion do you feel?

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [15-20 minutes]

[The purpose of this activity is to help participants ponder the slow mysterious process of change.]

Begin by having everyone in the group tell what they are hoping to get from this study. This may resemble the essays they wrote to be a part of the class.

Give each person a seed—preferably a mustard seed. Say:

In many ways, the reason for being in this study can be symbolized in the seed. When a seed germinates it begins to grow. The word “germinate” means to “develop” or “come into being” (see Merriam-Webster.com). From our seed of desire which was planted by the Holy Spirit, new life will “come into being.” Consider how God might use this study to do even more in your life than you can imagine. What might that new life look like? Give thanks to God for this “seed” and this chance now to have the seed nurtured and cared for so it can come to new life.

Read Luke 13:18-19 aloud to the group:

Then Jesus asked, “What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches” (NIV).

Give the group a few minutes to reflect on these thoughts, and then invite them to plant their seeds in the small pots and add some water. When everyone has finished planting the seeds, offer this prayer, or one of your own:

We offer these seeds to you, O God, as a symbol of the desire within us that has brought us here. For some of us, that desire is very clear, for others it is difficult to put into words. There are some of us in this room who have a deep love for you that has brought us here while others of us are troubled more by our inability to live faithfully to your teaching. We believe that in the darkness of the earth your Son sprang forth to new life, and we hope that in the darkness of our lives, in the nurture of this class, these seeds of longing will spring forth to new life in you. We offer this prayer to you because you are the Creator of all things and the Giver of Life. Amen.

Encourage everyone to take their seeds home and care for them over the coming weeks. The plant may serve as a focal point for meditation as they continue over these next several weeks.

During the last 5 minutes have group members discuss their previous experiences of being silent, which is one of the spiritual exercises for the coming week. Some people are completely comfortable with silence and cannot get enough while others struggle with silence, even 5 minutes of silence. To help those who are less comfortable with silence, show the segment “Being Still” from the DVD *Be Still*, which gives helpful tips on being quiet with God.

GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Conclude by having one person in your group read these words from the first chapter of *The Good and Beautiful God* aloud.

When the Spirit has changed our narratives sufficiently, we begin to think differently. As a result we begin to believe in and trust a good and loving God who is strong and powerful. We begin to see how Jesus lived a perfect life that we cannot live and offered that life to the Father on our behalf, setting us free from having to earn God’s love and favor. And as we engage in soul-training exercises—especially in the context of community—our confidence that God is at work in and among us increases. This creates an inward change that manifests itself in outward behavior.

Now, when faced with an airport delay, we can take a deep breath and remember who we are. . . . we can endure these trials with love, joy, peace, patience and kindness (p. 31).

Go from this place, savoring the good news that God is at work in and among you. Amen.

FOR THE COMING WEEK

- ☞ Read Chapter 2, “God is Good.”
- ☞ Do the soul-training exercises of having 5 minutes of silence each day and observing creation.
- ☞ Memorize Colossians 3:3-4.