

Change from the inside out

“Be more concerned with your character than your reputation. Your character is what you really are while your reputation is merely what others think you are.”

Basketball coach John Wooden (Lawrence p123)

As a very young Christian in 1967, the first Bible study group I was involved in were studying The Navigators *Studies in Christian Living* book 4 “The Character of the Christian”. I was really excited about this, because it had been the life and character of the Christians in the residence we lived in as students that had got my attention. They had something that I didn’t have and I desperately wanted to change and be different. God used this lever to open up my heart to Him.

Several years ago we began to think about the changes that occur from midlife onwards and how we need to respond and adapt in order to transition those changes effectively. But what about our inner self, our character? How have we changed in who we really are in recent years? Do we still have that desire to grow? Are we continuing to seek to become more like Christ or are we, as Derek Prime would put it “tending to grow more like ourselves” (Prime p114) i.e. continuing to entrench the inherent character traits that we have grown to live with and perhaps feel will never change now.

What is character? Why should we change? Why is it so difficult to change in our character? How can we grow in Christlikeness? How do we change from the inside out?

What is character?

D.L. Moody is famous for saying that “Character is what you are in the dark” and Bill Hybels said something similar, when he described character as “who you are when no one else is looking”. We begin to get the idea that character is something deeply internal to each individual but will ultimately be revealed in our behaviour.

Willard (p115, 118) states that:-

“Character is that internal, overall structure of our self that reveals our long-running patterns of behaviour...Character develops from our will as specific choices become habitual and to some extent automatic. Character is revealed most of all in what we feel and do without thinking.”

Wright (p113) makes clear that although character is more than our stated beliefs and values, our character will reflect our deeply held beliefs so that they emerge in our behaviour and attitudes. “If someone watches our actions they will see our true character, regardless of the values we espouse.”

The Lord Jesus was brutally honest to the Pharisees and teachers of the law when he pointed out that rules and regulations that controlled outer behaviours did nothing to change the inner person:-

“What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean’. For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean’.” Mark 7:20-23

As a new creation in Christ, we seek to change from the inside out; to grow in godly character, in Christlikeness and manifesting the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

“Character, in the final analysis, is based on a vision of God at work in this world and the renewing presence of the Spirit within us. Character is lived in relationship with God. It is about being the person whom God intends you to be for the sake of the people God brings across your path.” (Wright p116)

Why should we change?

We are called to live holy lives – to grow in Christlikeness of character so that we honour and glorify God. “As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written ‘Be holy, because I am holy’ ” 1 Peter 1:14-15.

This seems to be an impossible objective until we read that “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.” 2 Peter 1:3

God’s agenda is our growth – “God is not working for our comfort or our ease; he is working on our growth. Making us holy is God’s unwavering agenda until we are taken home to be with him. He will do whatever it takes to produce holiness in us.” (Lane and Tripp p6)

They go on to say that it is so easy to coast in our Christian life; we know that we have been accepted into God’s family and one day we will be with Him. But in the time between God calls us to grow and to change, to be transformed by the presence of his Spirit within us to become like his Son. “Jesus is the perfect person, the true image of God, the glory of the Father. And God’s agenda for change is for us to become like Jesus.” (Chester p17)

To live a life of integrity – The apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesian believers from his prison cell “I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” Ephesians 4:1. He also wrote to the Philippian believers “Whatever happens conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” Philippians 1:27. Paul knew that the gospel would only impact the lives of those they took it to, if the lives of those sharing the gospel matched up to what they were saying.

James Lawrence tells how during a year out he worked for a factory owner, who was also a leader in the local church. This man was greatly admired by all at the church and in the community for all that he contributed, but Lawrence was shocked to observe the way that he behaved on the factory floor towards his employees and dismayed at the level of incongruity between his words and his character. (p123)

“Integrity exists when habits are congruent with values, deeds are consistent with words, and expressions in harmony with feelings.” (p134)

None of us is perfect and we all make mistakes for which we need the forgiveness and grace of God, so let’s commit ourselves to ongoing change so that our lives, with God’s help, will adorn the gospel of Christ and be worthy of Him.

Because we have a responsibility for the influence we have on others – whether we are aware of it or not we all have a degree of influence on others. This is especially so, if we are in leadership of some kind. Within the context of the family this is an important role with our children and grandchildren. They may directly ask us for advice or guidance but they will certainly observe our lives, our actions, reactions and attitudes. It is a great challenge to live godly, Christ-like lives within our homes, even under pressure and provocation at times.

Why is it so difficult to change?

It is difficult to change, since we prefer not to acknowledge what we are really like, both to ourselves and to those around us. Horsfall would suggest that from childhood we have learned to have both a private face and a public face that we show to others. This public face is the mask behind which we hide our real self, presenting others with a version of our self that we think will be acceptable. We fear that if people knew what we are really like they would reject us, so our shame and fear of not being good enough, causes us to hide. Like Adam and Eve in the garden after they had disobeyed God they hid, and so do we.

“Covering and hiding are two very common defence mechanisms to avoid painful exposure, and we are all adept at using them.” (Horsfall p63)

It may be that when we first came to Christ, we were happy to accept the reality of our sinfulness, the need of forgiveness and a Saviour to bring change in our lives, but down the line we get comfortable with who we are and don’t like the inference that there may be aspects of our lives that need to change.

“We accept the doctrine of total depravity, but when we are approached about our own sin, we wrap our robes of self-righteousness around us and rise to our own defence.”
(Lane and Tripp p13)

In the 1960s the psychologist, Erving Goffmann, based a theory about human behaviour on the metaphor of the theatre. He proposed that to understand what drives our behaviour we should look at what our behaviour is trying to achieve. He suggests that over time behaviour develops as a strategy to reduce the risks and threats presented by other people. So our behaviour becomes a performance intended to ensure that the response is favourable.

He uses the analogy of the theatre to describe our life as having a “front stage” i.e. the place where we present and promote the right signs, props, evidence and script to win approval, praise, success or relationships. When we do this, our “back stage” which is our private/real life, is the repository for our ideas, thoughts, relationships and experiences that could undermine our performance.

The “back stage” is where we hide the doubts, confusions, the ambiguities the defeats, along with the struggles, uncertainties, unmet needs and unresolved problems that we cannot own up to. But the “back stage” is also the place where the script is written, learnt and rehearsed. A person’s thoughts, dreams, plans and feelings may be hidden away “back stage” giving away little of what they are really like.

But the “front stage” and “back stage” are always connected, never completely separate, so that the “back stage” will always leak into the “front stage.” For example, someone who performs on the “front stage” in a caring profession, whose own unmet needs are pushed “backstage” may generate resentment, envy, pride, anger even rage. The powerful emotions build up and begin to leak onto the “frontstage” as aggression, irritability or lack of sympathy to others suffering, since their capacity for emotion has been exhausted by their own unmet needs so that there is no space left for anyone else’s.

For some the response may come not as a slow leak but as an explosion with the loss of emotional control. The lid comes off and the resentment pours out. For others the burden of sustaining the front stage performance simply becomes too great. Driven by the expectations of the audience until there is nothing left, their strength and energy give up and they collapse.

The person’s “backstage” has not been able to renew them, because it has been given no time, attention or resources. The whole performance falls apart, the actor has no more to give, the show can’t go on and the consequences are devastating.

The only answer is to cry out for help and to allow others to come “backstage”. To be willing to share honestly, to make ourselves vulnerable and to start to allow people not only to see the glossy image but the mess as well. At this point the “back stage” ceases to be a place of fear containing all the mess that we avoid and instead becomes available for fruitful exploration. (Analogy as expounded by Simon Walker p24-33)

Although character may be who we are when we are alone it will always “Seep through into the public arena, shine though and be seen by those around us.” (Lawrence p123-4) The writer goes on to say that this is so important because “Character is foundational to everything. You can be a gifted person, a talented leader, a natural enthusiast, an amazing speaker, but without godly character it all falls apart.”

It is difficult to change since we have come to rely on our own gifts and assets. Lane and Tripp point out this subtle danger, that over the years as a Christian, we can put our confidence in our performance and obedience rather than recognising them as gifts and strengths that should lead us to gratitude. Strengths that lead to pride not gratitude, can be a liability not an asset, because they keep us from seeing our need for Christ, our need for change and our need to depend on God’s grace. The apostle Paul had to recognise that he could not place confidence in the assets of his own achievements, pedigree and morality but rather counted them as loss for the sake of knowing Christ. (Philippians chapter 3)

It is difficult to change when we excuse ourselves and avoid change by blaming others for how we behave and the character traits that are revealed in us. This is nothing new since it

was acted out after the Fall, when God challenged Adam and Eve about their disobedience. Adam said “The woman *you* put here with me – *she* gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” Eve said “The *serpent* deceived me, and I ate it.” Genesis 3:11-13 (italics added). The growth in our lives can be stunted for years when we insist on blaming other people, our background or certain life circumstances for what we are like instead of taking responsibility, and with God’s help, seeking to change.

The Pathway to Change

Recognition and acknowledgement of our need – God can only change us when we are ready and willing for him to do so. This often comes through times of pressure, struggle, and sometimes a crisis that both reveals what we are really like and provides the impetus to change.

“God is transforming us, changing us from the inside out. This character formation does not happen easily and we often resist it; it requires a degree of pressure, otherwise deep change will not take place.” (Horsfall p61)

Think of the lives of Jacob or Peter, who had to undergo times of struggle and testing, to face what they were really like, in order that they surrendered to God allowing him to change them.

“We are often surprised to discover that what we thought we were is not who we actually are! In the crucible of life the dross that is within is brought to the surface, and it is not always a pretty sight. We may well shed our own tears as we come face to face with the sobering reality of our own failure.” (Horsfall p111)

How do you react under pressure? Lawrence suggests that on good days we can keep the mask in place but what about when you are tired, overwhelmed by the amount you have to do, when things go wrong or someone makes a mistake or wrongly accuses you, how do you respond under the pressure? Unfortunately the worst aspects of our character often surface in our relationships, especially with those we are supposed to love.

“Few of us ever make fundamental changes in the shape of our character or in the deep patterns of our personalities by elective choice alone. The need or imperative for deep going change in our lives usually comes in response to some experience of shipwreck, of failure in love or work, or of spiritual struggle or illumination.” (Fowler p103)

God allows ‘necessary suffering’, as Rohr calls it, to expose what we are really like and where we need to change. “The crises of life, painful and traumatic events that come to us all, have a way of forcing us to evaluate ourselves, and stripping us of pretence.” (Horsfall p65)

Remorse and repentance – this must be our starting point. It is not enough to know that we need to change or even to know what needs to change. We must be sorry for our failure to please God, for those ways we persistently let down or hurt others and for our complacency with character traits and behaviours that do not glorify God.

“Our aim is not first to act differently *but to become different in our inner being*. We are not just learning how to be nicer versions of our old selves. We are dealing radically with the fundamental wrongness of human life left to itself and introducing the Kingdom of righteousness that is Christ into the depths of our heart.” (Willard and Simpson p18)

It is because our character traits have become so entrenched and habitual that we find change so difficult and thus resist it. True remorse and repentance is needed to turn us around towards God, recognising that it is he alone who can genuinely change us from the inside out.

“Character is also revealed in our remorse and repentance – in our sorrow over sin and our plea for God’s help to break the patterns of habitual thinking and willing that move us in wrong directions.” (Willard and Simpson p118)

Lawrence points out that we live in the tension of the between times. That we have been given the gift of becoming a ‘new creation’ in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) but we long for the day when that new creation will be fully realised. In the meantime we live with our character flaws asking God to change us by his Holy Spirit.

“We, who with unveiled faces all reflect (contemplate) the Lord’s glory, and are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”(2 Corinthians 3:18)

Identification of our will with God’s will – Jesus said of himself “The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.” John 8:29.

The apostle Paul said “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 loves me and gave himself for me.” Galatians 2:20

Willard and Simpson describe the will as the core of who we are as individuals, central to our personhood and our means of self-determination. It is therefore essential to our growth in godliness and Christlikeness that our will is devoted to and totally identifies with God’s will. Willard and Simpson suggest that this occurs as a progression:-

- *Surrender* – “When we surrender our will to God, we consent to His supremacy in all things.” It takes grace and wisdom to surrender our will in practice not just in theory and to do so without resistance, grumbling and complaining.
- *Abandonment* – This is when there is no part of ourselves that we hold back from God’s will. In all the circumstances of life, in those things that happen that God allows but are difficult to understand or cause us pain and loss; we accept these things as part of God’s good plan for those who love Him and refuse to respond with bitterness or disappointment.
- *Contentment* – with the will of God, who he is, what he has ordained and with the lot that has fallen to us. Contentment is linked to gratitude, joy and an assurance that God has done well by us and will always do no matter what!
- *Participation* – in accomplishing God’s will in our world. We are no longer spectators but active participators seeking to play an essential part in God’s plans and purposes.

To surrender our will allows us to move toward identification and single minded devotion to doing the will of God in everything and thus for him to change us into the image of Christ.

Lane and Tripp outline a view of how God Changes us in four elements:-

Life as God sees it - Change as He does it

Heat – This is the person’s situation in daily life, with difficulties, blessings and temptations. We always react to things that happen to us and this will affect our emotional responses, how we interpret the situation and ultimately what we believe.

“God makes it very clear that he understands the heat we face.” By reading the scriptures we realise that “we will never face an experience, no matter how dark or difficult, that would be a shock to our God. The hope and help God offers his children reflect his knowledge of the full range of human experience.” (Lane and Tripp p96)

Romans 5:1-5 expresses that we are able to rejoice in our sufferings because we know that, in God’s hands and as we persevere, those sufferings are the very means that he uses to prove and develop character in us. (cf James 1:2-4)

Thorns – this is the person’s ungodly response to the situation. It includes behaviour, the heart driving the behaviour, and the consequences that result. This is what Paul is referring to in Colossians chapter 3 and Ephesians chapter 4 when he exhorts us to ‘put off’ and to ‘put on’ certain responses and behaviours.

“It is easy to give way to thoughts, emotions and desires that should no longer rule us, and easy to be more defined by our problems than by the grace of Christ. That is why it is so important to remember the new character qualities and behaviour patterns that are in your life because of Jesus. You already have a new heart. You have been radically changed by his grace and are being progressively restored day by day.” (Lane and Tripp p117)

The Cross – This focusses on the presence of God in his redemptive glory and love. Through Christ, he brings comfort, cleansing, and the power to change. The cross enables us to be accepted by God and adopted into his family, to have new life in Christ with the Holy Spirit living within us. As Christ dwells in us through the person of the Holy Spirit, he gives us a new heart and power to live out of an entirely new potential. Galatians 2:20

Fruit - This is the person’s new godly responses to the situation resulting from God’s power at work in the heart. It includes behaviour, the heart renewed by grace, and the harvest of consequences that follow.

“The bible uses the word *heart* to describe who we are at our core.....the heart is mentioned as the seat of motivation....the outward fruit of a believer’s life does not grow out of a stoic obedience to God's commands, but from a heart that has been captured and captivated by the Giver of those commands.” (Lane and Tripp p172-3)

How do we cooperate with God?

“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,

for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”

Philippians 2:12-13

Paul makes it clear that although change is brought about by God, we have an active responsibility to cooperate with him in accomplishing that change. We have already considered the fact that real change will only happen when we recognise our need, when our single minded devotion to God causes us to truly desire His will in our lives and to surrender ourselves to him (Romans 12:1). The next step seems to be the transforming of our lives by the renewing of our mind (Romans 12:2)

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

This idea of the renewal of our mind is referred to and seen as pivotal in other passages of scripture that exhort us to be different in our character and behaviour:-

“You were taught with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; *to be made new in the attitudes of your minds*; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Ephesians 4:22-23 italics added

Colossians chapter 3:1-17 describes attitudes, habits and behaviours that need to be either ‘put off’ or ‘put on’ in order that we live a holy life. The passage begins by saying “set your hearts on things above” and “set our minds on things above”. In other words, we cannot change ourselves but we can choose what we desire and what we think about, which will ultimately influence our will and our actions.

“Thoughts are where we can truly begin to change.....the ultimate freedom we have as human beings is the power to choose what we let our mind dwell on.....we must inform our thinking with the word of God. We must thoughtfully take the word of God in, dwell upon it, ponder its meaning, and explore its implications – especially as it relates to our own life.” (Willard and Simpson pp83 and 89)

Reflection leading to godly change

“An unreflective life is often an uncritical life that leads to little change.” (Lawrence p139)

James Lawrence sees reflection as playing our part in allowing the Holy Spirit to direct His change in us. He goes on to explain:-

“Such reflection is not about unhealthy introspection, or self-absorption or in depth analysis. It is a means of being open to the Holy Spirit as He convicts us of sin and gives greater self-awareness. It is not about self-reformation, but Christ transformation.” (p140)

He describes four aspects of reflection:-

1. Meditation on the scriptures, Psalm 119:9-16, 33-37
2. Meditation on life, Psalm 77:12
3. Taking time out with God to be still before him, Psalms 37:7, 46:10

4. The role of close relationships in aiding personal development, Psalm 27:6,9 and Ecclesiastes 4:10

Godly change through meditation on the scriptures- “The word of God is perhaps God’s primary means of changing us. ‘Sanctify them by the truth,’ prays Jesus, adding, ‘your word is truth’ (John 17:17). It’s the water by which we are washed, the weapon with which we fight, the toolkit with which we are equipped and the milk by which we grow.” (Chester p153)

James 1:22-25 encourages us to see the scriptures as a looking glass allowing us to see ourselves as God sees us and what may need to change in our lives as a result of what we see. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that the word of God is faithful in revealing the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. The purpose of meditating on the scriptures is to develop greater intimacy with God allowing him to mould us even more into the likeness of Jesus.

“Without such reflection, our horizon shrinks to the limits of our own understanding. Through such reflection our eyes are raised, our hearts are warmed, our hurts are healed, our troubles are comforted, our sin is revealed and our character is changed.” (Lawrence p141)

Godly change through reflecting on life – Lawrence recommends that we reflect on life by using the Psalms, since they record the insights and experiences of real people both in their personal and corporate lives. The Psalms are brutally honest and cover the whole gamut of human emotions the writers are experiencing and how they bring them to God to receive his comfort, strength, encouragement and yes, to be changed by him.

Lawrence finds that journaling helps him as a means of monitoring what is going on in his life. As he prays and meditates over the scriptures, then reflects on his own life so that he might spot patterns of unhealthy living that need to change, encouraging ways in which he has changed, the triggers that cause him to react badly in situations as well as the ways he has seen God at work. Looking back over time the journal may reveal patterns of where growth needs to happen, where there needs to be change in the family or in work or perhaps where God is leading next.

“Show me your ways O Lord,
teach me your paths,
guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Saviour,
and my hope is in you all day long.” Psalm 25:4-5

Godly Change through taking time out – this is meant to be a time that we plan on a regular basis to be alone, quiet, unpressured having left all the other demands of life behind so that the time can be spent in unhurried reflection. It needs to be in a place where we can be still, quiet, relaxed and undisturbed. It should be a day with no other commitments to get back to so that our full attention can be on God and not worrying about what is happening next. It is the sort of thing that will not happen unless it is in the diary well ahead and preferably should be at a regular interval, like once a month or once every three months.

This is not supposed to be a study day or prayer day but it would be good to have decided beforehand on some passages of scripture to meditate on, so that time is not frittered away on the day trying to decide. But having said this the objective of the time is to be open and available to listen to God and to allow him to set the agenda. There should also be time for relaxation and exercise, perhaps in the countryside or seaside. It would be good to make notes in order to capture what we think God may have been saying through the time and what we might do as a result and how that might shape the future. (Lawrence p143-4)

Godly change through relationships – Proverb 27:6 says “Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.” Good friends tell us the hard things that we would rather not hear, but probably need to hear. The best relationships are not just honest but nurturing, encouraging and provide us with a perspective we might have lost sight of. Those who know us well can bring insights into who we are, why we are reacting in a certain way and how God may be at work in our lives helping us to change.

“I realised that though I had many acquaintances, I had very few of what I now call fruitful friendships. We must have relationships where we really care for one another, care enough to encourage and, where necessary, to confront.”(Maiden p131)

We need to be honest and open about our faults and mistakes and secure enough to receive feedback. Remember that it is easier to share about something you struggled with in the past but is now sorted out than to be really vulnerable enough to allow others into an issue that is current and still a problem.

Another way that a trusted friend can help is by devising strategies which prevent the worst excesses of our character flaw, such as avoiding situations in which we might be more likely to succumb to temptation, or working out boundaries for work/life balance to reduce the fatigue that makes us more vulnerable to irritability and lack of patience.

Godly change, a community project – “One of the reasons God has put us in Christian communities is to help us change. The church is to be a community of change.” (Chester p156) When Paul wrote his letters to the various churches in the New Testament his encouragements to grow and mature in Christ were written to communities e.g. Ephesians 4:11-16.

We are to love one another in such a way that it gets the attention of a watching world (John 13:34-35).

We are to model Christ like behaviour and attitudes towards one another that promote unity (Philippians 2:3-5).

We are to encourage each other’s faith and dependence on God’s grace by sharing our experiences of his provision, his goodness and his love (2 Corinthians 1:8-11).

We are to be the listening ear that comforts, encourages, accepts, raises others eyes to Christ and yes, at times confronts, for their benefit (2 Corinthians 1:4).

We are also to “stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the Gospel.” (Philippians 1:27)

“These are the very reasons why community is such a big part of God’s plan to transform us into the image of Christ. Living in community pushes us to die to ourselves. There are times when loving others and allowing others to serve and love us will feel like death, but this is the pathway to real life in Christ. The more we understand our own hearts, the more we see that it takes a work of God’s grace to transform self-absorbed individuals into a community of love. Being in redemptive relationships shows us our need for change and helps bring it about!” (Lane and Tripp p72)

Godly change by sowing to please the Spirit - Tim Chester describes change as both a lifetime task and also a daily task. We are like the farmer who goes out every day to sow the crop which he will reap in the future. Galatians 6:7-10 encourages us to sow that which pleases the Spirit and will reap eternal life.

“As we live our lives, we deal with difficulties or blessings every day. Our hearts are always interacting with these situations and relationships. We are always thinking and desiring, trying to make sense of what is happening. There are always things we want. Those thoughts and desires shape the way we respond to what is going on. And because we are sinners, we tend to respond sinfully. Everything we say or do has some result or consequence. We harvest what we plant and every day we plant seed we will harvest in the future.” (Lane and Tripp p88)

What are the seeds that we can plant each day that will please the Spirit and reap a harvest of righteousness as we are changed from the inside out:-

- To feed our hearts and minds and souls with God’s word
- To grow in knowing, loving and depending on God in prayer
- To worship God for who he is and all he has done for us
- To love and serve and give to the body of Christ.
- To find joy in serving God – how and where he wants to use us
- To fix our eyes on Jesus and our hope of eternity with him.

“This is what the Christian life is all about. With joy I affirm that I am a new creation in Christ. With humility I confess that sin is still in my heart and I need God’s grace today as much as I did when I first believed. The Spirit overpowers the things that once dominated my life. I am in him, though not yet completely like him, so I commit myself to the ongoing heart change that is God’s loving focus.” (Lane and Tripp p56)

“.....being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” Philippians 1:6

Questions:-

1. What motivates you to grow and change as a Christian?
2. How do you tend to resist change? Why is that?
3. Did you find it easier to admit the need to change when you were a young Christian? Why was that?
4. Do you resonate with the 'Front stage', 'Backstage' analogy? What can we learn from it?
5. Have you ever found yourself excusing your behaviour by blaming others, your background or certain circumstances? Why is this unhelpful? How can you move forward?
6. How has God used times of suffering, struggle and pressure to cause you both to recognise the need for change and to be willing to be changed?
7. Do you agree that remorse and repentance are essential to change?
8. What part does our will play in our co-operating with God in changing us?
9. "Thoughts are where we can truly begin to change... the ultimate freedom we have as human beings is the power to choose what we let our minds dwell on." Have you experienced God changing you as a result of meditating on the scriptures?
10. Have you ever taken an extended time alone with God for reflection? Was it helpful? Is it something that you would like to try for yourself?
11. "Good friends tell us the hard things that we would rather not hear, but probably need to hear." Do you have friends like this? Are you this kind of friend to others?
12. Do you consider your church as a community of change? How are you contributing to that objective?

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