

Changing Behaviors

Putting Off the Old Self and Putting on the New Self

Putting off Worry, Putting on Faith

Day 1:

Christians fail to change when they try to change solely by breaking bad habits. Lasting change takes place by replacing bad habits with godly habits. The Bible teaches this "Principle of Replacement" in many places, including Ephesians 4:22-24. God's plan for change is to "put off" the old sinful way of life, "renew" the mind with Biblical truth, and to "put on" the new godly way of life.

Telling God and others that we are sorry for our sin is not enough to achieve real life change. A habitual thief can tell God that he is sorry every time he steals, but he is still a thief. The thief becomes a new creation when he becomes a habitual worshipper, laborer and giver (Ephesians 4:25). Putting off the old man and putting on the new man is the process that God uses to make "new creatures" in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

God intends for Christians to actively put on biblical alternatives to the things that need to be put off. Concentrating or meditating on Biblical truth is necessary to know what needs to be put on, to overcome and replace sinful tendencies. These sinful habits are behavioral patterns that have been learned over time; therefore, they must be unlearned and replaced with God-honoring patterns of living. Positive change takes place gradually as one puts Biblical principles into everyday practice. In time, old sinful ways will begin to disappear.

The Process of Renewal

Ephesians 4:22-24 describes the biblical process of change. Christians must be "renewed in the spirit of your mind" (v.23). This speaks of an inner renewal. The "spirit of your mind" is the inner person - the core of our being: our motives, desires, attitudes and thoughts. It is that inner disposition of the heart that influences our outer behavior: actions, reactions, choices, decisions and words (Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 12:35, 15:19, 23:25-26; Luke 6:45.) The Scriptures teach that sin begins in the heart and works outward. A change in behavior begins with a change in the heart. It is the heart, which rules our actions and behavior.

How does this inner renewal take place?

The primary tool that God uses is His Word contained in the Bible. Personal transformation is the process by which the Spirit of God uses the Word of God and changes us to become like Christ. This is a lifelong process. We are being renewed:

1. By God's work of illumination in our heart (Ephesians 1:15-18.)
2. When we continually grasp and put into practice the truths of God's Word (John 17:17.)
3. When our desires, motives, attitudes and thoughts become more Christ-like. Each time we choose to replace a sinful desire, motive, attitude or thought with a more biblical one, we are being renewed. This inner renewal will lead to putting off the old way of life and putting on a new way of life that is pleasing to God. This is a process that takes time and the exercise of our will in the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Timothy 4:7; Romans 6:11-14, 12:2.)

It is not always easy to change sinful patterns and habits that have been practiced for years. A great struggle can be expected at first. However, as we persevere with a desire to please God, the old ways will eventually fade and become less and less dominant in our life. The motive must be to please God; the benefit is freedom from bondage.

Of course, our desires, motives, attitudes and thoughts can only become more Christ-like if we have placed our faith fully in Christ alone to save us from our sins and to give us eternal life. It is only then that God fills us with His Holy Spirit who can help us to change.

Get Specific - Putting Off Worry

Personal transformation will take place in our life when we identify the specific changes that God wants us to make. We will not make much progress if we are general or vague. We must have a clear understanding of exactly what should be put off. It is often helpful to write down exactly what needs to be changed and the steps to make it happen. The following assignment will help you to put off worry and replace it with faith in a God “who can do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine, according to the power that is at work within us.” (Ephesians 3:20)

Carefully read Philippians 4:6-9, twice, and begin to memorize Philippians 4:6-8.

- End of Day 1 -

Day 2:

Study the following verses and then **record** everything they indicate about anxiety or worry.

Include the effects of anxiety on the person in each passage who worries.

- Luke 10:38-42; Ezekiel 4:16, 17; Luke 8:14; Luke 21:34; Proverbs 15:15; Psalm 38:6; Genesis 45:3; 1 Samuel 28:20-23; 2 Thessalonians 1:7; Psalm 77:4, 8, 9
** If using the King James version Bible, the words 'care' and 'careful' are often synonyms for worry.*

Day 3:

Carefully re-read **Philippians 4:6-9**, **twice**, and note God's threefold program for overcoming worries: ***praying properly, thinking properly, and living properly.***

- Focus today on verse 6 - To overcome worry God says I must ***pray properly.*** Record **three facts** about the kind of prayer that overcomes worry. Then **make a list of everything you are thankful for** - past, present and future. **Pray through this list** each day you pray, thanking God for these things.

Day 4:

Read **Philippians 4:6-9** again, working hard to fully memorize 4:6-8:

- Focus today on verse 8 - I must ***think properly.*** Note the kind of things you must think about (on which to meditate) if you are to become a peaceful person. **Make a specific list** of what some of these things are by carefully examining the biblical definitions of the key words in verse 8, listed below. Record everything that you can think of that fits those definitions, for each word. Note: you might have the same things listed for multiple words below.
 - **True** - What is true is found in God (2 Tim. 2:25), in Christ (Eph. 4:20-21), in the Holy Spirit (John 16:13), and in God's word (John 17:17).
 - **Honorable/noble** - The Greek term means "worthy of respect." Believers are to meditate on whatever is worthy of awe and adoration, i.e., the sacred as opposed to the profane.
 - **Just/right** - The believer is to think in harmony with God's divine standard of holiness.
 - **Pure** - That which is morally clean and undefiled, including things, thoughts, words, and deeds.
 - **Lovely** - The Greek term means "pleasing" or "amiable." By implication, believers are to focus on whatever is kind or gracious.
 - **Commendable/admirable/good report/good repute** - That which is highly regarded or thought well of. It refers to what is generally considered reputable in the world, such as kindness, courtesy, and respect for others.

- **Excellent/virtue** – Moral goodness or excellence
- Read and think carefully on Romans 12:2; 1 Peter 3:14, 15; and Matthew 6:25-32. Plan specific things you can do to make sure you think properly. **Record** how can you change your negative, pessimistic thinking to Biblical thinking.

Day 5:

Read **Philippians 4:6-9** again:

- Focus today on verse 9 - I must **live properly**. Read Proverbs 28:1 and Proverbs 1:33 and notice how anxiety is often connected with wrong living. Notice also the effect of fulfilling your God-given responsibilities. For example, some people are worried about losing their jobs because they aren't fulfilling Colossians 3:22-24 or Ephesians 6:5-8. Some people are worried about finances because they aren't good stewards of their finances. Look over your life and **record** where, if any, you are not fulfilling your God-given responsibilities. Then **record a plan to make changes** and focus on doing what God wants you to do today.

Day 6:

1. Think back over the past two weeks and reflect on those times when you were tempted to be or became anxious. **Record each episode** using the “**Anxiety Journal**” below.
2. If you want to overcome anxiety and become a peaceful person, go through the procedures described under days 3-5 above every time you are tempted to become anxious. Then discipline yourself to put God's threefold program (Phil 4:6-9) for overcoming worry into practice, regardless of how you feel. *If you are a Christian and do this consistently, you can and will overcome anxiety and become a peaceful person.*
3. Now that you have memorized Philippians 4:6-8, when you begin to have anxious or fearful thoughts, immediately begin **praying the verse back to God**. Personalize the words, praising God that in verse 7 He can give you a peace “which surpasses all comprehension”, and one that “will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” If you have not completely memorized it yet, write it out on an index card that you can keep with you until you have memorized it.

Anxiety Journal

For each episode of anxiety, fear, or panic attack, record the following:

Date: _____ Time: _____

What were you anxious about?

What were you thinking about?

What were you doing at the time?

What was happening around you?

Where were you?

Who were you with?

What did you do?

How long did the anxiety, fear, panic attack last?

How could you have responded differently according to Philippians 4:6-9?

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