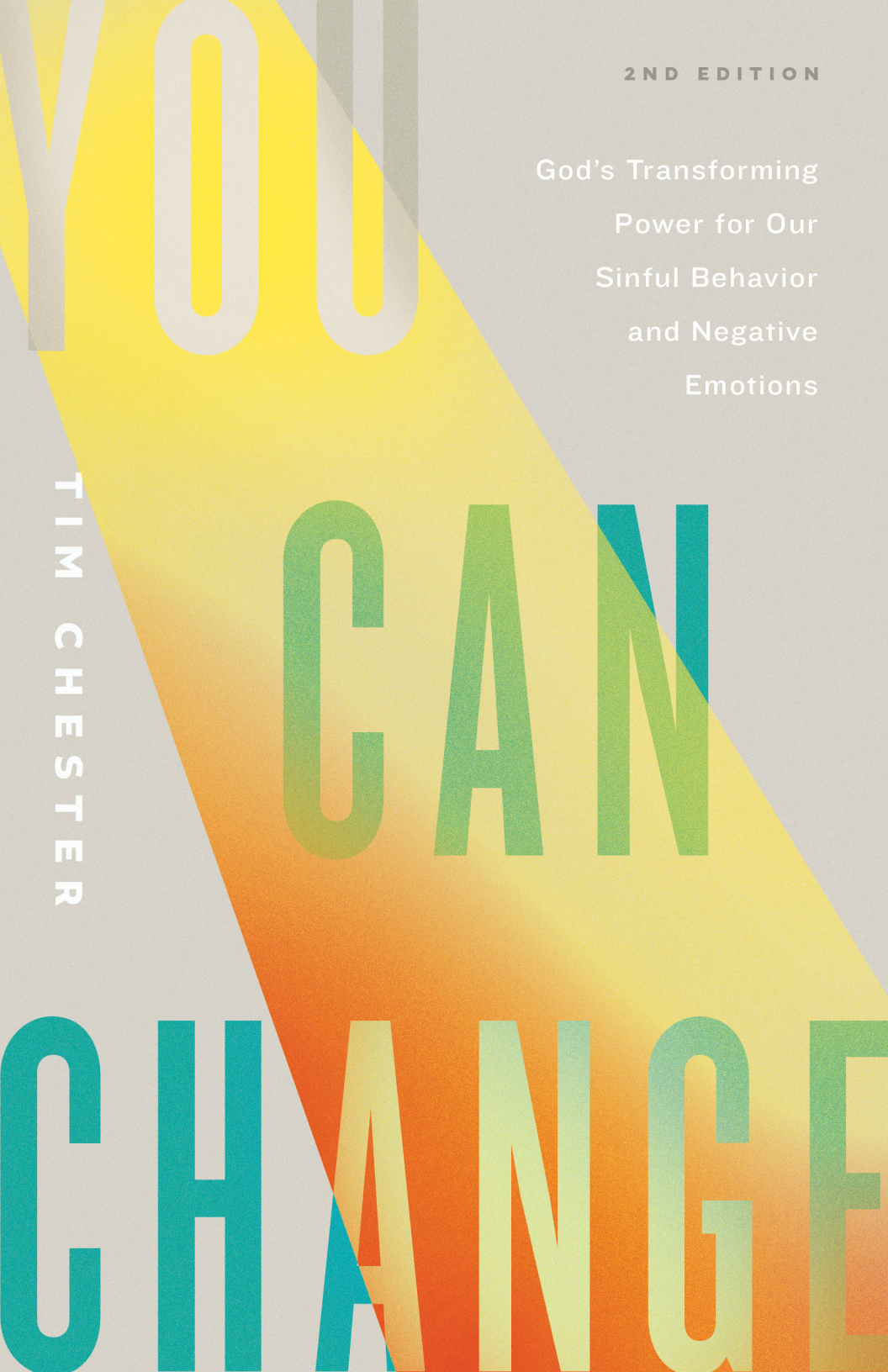


2ND EDITION

God's Transforming
Power for Our
Sinful Behavior
and Negative
Emotions

TIM CHESTER



“There are few books that are shockingly honest, carefully theological, and gloriously hopeful all at the same time. Tim Chester’s book *You Can Change* is all of these and more. He skillfully uses the deepest insights of the theology of the word as a lens to help you understand yourself and the way of change and, in so doing, helps you to experience practically what you thought you already knew. The carefully crafted ‘Reflections’ and ‘Change Project’ sections are worth the price of the book by themselves. It is wonderful to be reminded that you and I are not stuck, and it’s comforting to be guided by someone who knows well the road from where we are to where we need to be.”

Paul David Tripp, author, *New Morning Mercies: A Daily Gospel Devotional*

“As a counselor, reading *You Can Change* is refreshing. I’m in the business of helping people to change, but they often lack clarity on exactly what needs to change and how (and how long it might take). Tim’s book gives clear, practical guidance that brings Jesus to the forefront, reminding us that it is only by his power that we become more like him. This book is full of grace and hope. I highly recommend it!”

Kristin L. Kellen, Associate Professor of Biblical Counseling, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

“The first edition of this super book has been a great help to me. Its content has been significant in my own progress toward holiness, and it has helped shape much of my pastoral approach to the same subject, as I have the privilege of a front-row seat in people’s lives. It is still needed, not least because of the unchanging spiritual battles we all face. In fact, I think the need now is greater, and this revised volume keeps the content fresh and applies it in new and helpful directions that resonate with today’s challenges. Tim writes as a fellow traveler first and pastor second, but it is the unique combination of self-awareness, honesty, and spiritual hopefulness that makes reading and rereading this book worthwhile. Here you will find pastoral carefulness and historical insight, all filtered through the lens of biblical faithfulness, from the pen of one of our finest Christian authors.”

Adrian Reynolds, pastor; author; Head of National Ministries, Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches, UK

“Tim Chester’s helpful book should have a place in the libraries of all who desire personal heart change and are looking for a resource to share with others. It is filled with Scripture and an amazing variety of quotes from Christians, who point the reader to truth about the need for change and the means to implement such change. The reflections at the end of the chapters are useful for further study. May the Lord bless his church through this book.”

Caroline Newheiser, Director of Women’s Counseling, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte

“When I was a new believer battling depression, *You Can Change* was one of the first books I read to better understand my own volatile emotions and the process of growing in Christ. Years later, I’m glad to recommend this updated edition to those who want to better understand their inner world in light of the Lord’s transforming mercy and grace. Heart work is hard work, to be sure. But as Tim demonstrates in these pages, there is hope and help for meaningful change in Christ. Let this useful book meet you where you are today—then let it show you how to take your next step in dependence on Jesus.”

Christine Chappell, author, *Midnight Mercies*; Host, *Hope + Help Podcast*;
Certified Biblical Counselor, Institute for Biblical Counseling and Discipleship

You Can Change

You Can Change

*God's Transforming Power for Our Sinful
Behavior and Negative Emotions*

SECOND EDITION

Tim Chester

 **CROSSWAY®**
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

You Can Change: God's Transforming Power for Our Sinful Behavior and Negative Emotions,
Second Edition

© 2026 by Tim Chester

Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

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Cover design: Jordan Singer

First printing 2026

Printed in the United States of America

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All emphases in Scripture quotations have been added by the author.

Trade paperback ISBN: 979-8-8749-0624-5

ePub ISBN: 979-8-8749-0729-7

PDF ISBN: 979-8-8749-0728-0

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Chester, Tim author

Title: You can change: God's transforming power for our sinful behavior and negative emotions / Tim Chester.

Description: Second edition. | Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, [2026] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2025026148 (print) | LCCN 2025026149 (ebook) | ISBN 9798874906245 (trade paperback) | ISBN 9798874907280 (pdf) | ISBN 9798874907297 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Christian life | Change (Psychology)—Religious Aspects—Christianity

Classification: LCC BV4599.5.C44 2026 (print) | LCC BV4599.5.C44 (ebook) | DDC 248.4—dc23/eng/20250922

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2025026148>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2025026149>

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

BP	35	34	33	32	31	30	29	28	27	26				
15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

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Preface to the Second Edition

IT'S BEEN FIFTEEN YEARS since *You Can Change* was first published. In that time I've benefited hugely from talking with the readers I've met around the world. My ongoing pastoral involvement and interaction with students, especially with my Crosslands students, has continued to clarify my thinking. I've also read a number of helpful new books that have been published in that time.

It's also been fifteen years of change for me. I've grown in my understanding of the gospel and my appreciation of Jesus. Some of that change has come from my studies, but much of it has come through my own struggles with sin and adversity.

All these factors have both clarified my thinking and helped me to find better ways to explain the process of change in the Christian life. So it seemed a good point to revise *You Can Change*. The overall message and aim are unchanged. I want to show how we can and should approach change in a way that is centered on "the truth [that] is in Jesus" (Eph. 4:21). I want to foreground the work of God as well as show what it looks like to respond with faith and repentance. Above all, I want to help Christians become more like Jesus in a practical, down-to-earth, easy-to-understand way that is rooted in God's transforming grace.

I've retained the structure of ten chapters shaped around ten questions because this provides a clear route for readers to apply what they're reading to their own lives. But I've made changes to every chapter—adding clarifications, moderating overstatements, and anticipating questions. Some changes have been more substantial, introducing new material and involving revising larger sections. At the same time, I didn't want to make the book more daunting to read, so I've also removed material that I no longer thought was helpful or necessary.

Alongside this revised edition of *You Can Change*, I've written a new companion devotional book of daily reflections on Scripture. Its ten chapters follow the same ten questions that are in this book, so the two books can be read in tandem. In my ideal scenario, people will read a chapter of *You Can Change*, meet up once a week to discuss it, and read the devotional book each day at the same time. But neither *You Can Change* nor its devotional companion need to be read alongside each other.

This is my prayer for you as you read this book:

That your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Phil. 1:9–11)

Introduction

JACK STARTED STRUGGLING with lust in his teens. Access to porn on the internet made matters worse. Twenty years or so later, he's still fighting sinful fantasies. He thought marriage would sort it all out, but it didn't. He's put in place a regimen of spiritual disciplines. All to no avail.

You'd think Carla was a respectable Christian. She doesn't swear, steal, get drunk, commit adultery, or do any of the sins that we use to measure one another's godliness. But her Christian service has little joy. She's often irritable; often complaining.

Colin's life was turned around when he converted. He left an adulterous relationship and stopped getting drunk. But after a few years, his Christian growth seems to have plateaued. Like Carla, he looks respectable enough, but those who are close to him know that he has a temper. He's not someone you want to cross.

If shopping were an Olympic sport, Emma would be a medal contender. She's not had an easy life and shopping cheers her up. New clothes, something for the home, luxury foods—these are the bright spots in her life. They're her compensations. But it means that money is tight and she has little to give to others.

Everyone said that Jamal would be a great asset: He was godly, diligent, taught well. But it soon became apparent that his diligence was driven by a need to prove himself. He “needed” a role, but his fear of failure was debilitating. There were dark moods with periods of withdrawal.

Baptizing Kate had been the highlight of my year, but where to begin now? With her racism? Her drinking? Her innuendo? She had gladly accepted the call to be ready to die for Christ, but how would she respond to the call to sobriety? How would that be good news?

Is there hope for these people? I’m convinced there is. There’s the hope of change through Jesus. I know there’s hope because, though I’ve created composite pictures and changed some details, I *know* Jack, Carla, Colin, Emma, Jamal, and Kate.

When Jack went through an early version of this material with me, he stopped masturbating almost overnight. The struggle with porn has continued with some lapses but also many victories. Every now and then he sends a text asking for prayer and suggesting that I ask “the question” next time we see each other.

Carla has blossomed. There hasn’t been a massive change in behavior, but her attitude is radically different. She often expresses her delight in God and amazement at his grace. She serves willingly, looks for opportunities, takes initiatives. When she speaks of others’ faults, it’s with grief and love, accompanied by affirmation.

Colin has a new lease on life, with a growing delight in God. He still has occasions when he feels angry, but he knows his anger reflects a desire for control so he responds with repentance. He’s learning to trust God’s care in those moments.

Emma still likes shopping, but she has other things to do now and other places to turn. She’s too busy either cooking for others

or looking after their children. The highlights of her week are times spent with other Christians. She's learning to find refuge in God.

Jamal is a lot more relaxed. It's still a challenge not to let failures overwhelm him, but it's been delightful to see him resting in God's grace. With this has come a freedom to serve both at work and in the community.

It's been a joy to see Kate grow as a Christian. Some changes we've had to talk with her about; others have taken place naturally as she's seen more of Christ's glory. It's not always been straightforward, but gradually Kate is working it out for herself. I can't help smiling when I hear her begin to say, "I think maybe I ought to . . ."

Many books are written by experts. This book isn't one of them. It was written out of my own struggle to change. My long battle with particular issues set me searching the Scriptures and writers from the past. This book shares the wonderful truths I have discovered that give me hope. For years I wondered if I'd ever overcome certain sins in my life. I can't claim to have conquered sin—no one can in this life—but here are truths that have led to change in my life and the lives of others.

You may be a new Christian, struggling to change the habits of your former way of life. You may be an older Christian who feels like you've plateaued—you grew quickly when you first believed, but now your Christian life is very much the same. You may be a Christian who's fallen into sin in a big way, and you're wondering how you'll ever get back on track. You may be helping other Christians grow and, while you can tell them about the way they should live, you're not sure how to help them get there.

This book is about *hope*. It's about the hope that we have in Jesus. It's not only about hope for forgiveness but also about hope for change. Not that this book alone will change you. We're not

changed by systems or rules. We need a Redeemer to set us free and we have a great Redeemer in Jesus. So this book points to Jesus and explains how faith in Jesus leads to change—what theologians call “sanctification” or becoming more like Jesus.

You can change. Maybe you’ve kind of given up. Like me, you may have tried too many times already. Like me, you may have read books that have given you lots of things to do. Please don’t despair. I believe that you can experience *hope for a change*. I’ve read books full of good theology, and I’ve read books full of day-to-day advice. What this book tries to do is *connect* the truth about God with our Monday-morning struggles.

One of our problems is that we think of holiness as giving up things we enjoy out of some vague sense of obligation. But I’m convinced that holiness is *always, always good news*. God calls us to the good life. He’s always bigger and better than anything sin offers. The key is to realize why change is good news in your specific struggles with sin.

So I want to encourage you to work on a particular issue in your life as you read this book—your “change project.” Each chapter takes the form of a question that you can ask of your change project, combined with more questions at the end of the chapter to help you explore this further. There are reflection sections with exercises and quotes that can be used for individual meditation or group discussion. Let me also encourage you to read this book with a friend or group so that you can provide encouragement and accountability to one another as you work on your change projects.

So let’s begin with our first question.

What Would You Like to Change?

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO CHANGE? Maybe you'd like to change your appearance or find a partner or figure out how to improve your children's behavior. Would you like to be one more step up the career ladder or maybe just to get a foot *on* it? Would you like to be more confident and wittier? Or maybe less angry or depressed? Would you like to have more control over your emotions?

We all want to change in some way. Some of these are good things to want to change; others maybe not so good. The problem with all of them is that they're not ambitious enough! God offers us something more—much, much more.

Created in God's Image

In the opening chapter of the Bible, we read that

God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:27)

We were made to be God's image on earth—to know him, to share his rule over the world, to reflect his glory. The idea is probably like that of a statue of a god that represents the authority and glory of that god. We're not to make images of the living God because *we* are his image. We're God's representatives on earth. We're God's glory. We display his likeness.

After each day of creation, God declares what he's made "good." But on the sixth day, God's verdict on a world that now includes humanity is that it is "*very good*" (Gen. 1:31). God's work wasn't finished until there was something in the world to reflect his glory in it. We often excuse our actions, saying, "I'm only human," but there's nothing "only" about being human. We're truly human insofar as we reflect God's glory.

A Broken Image

The problem is that humanity is a broken image because humanity rejects God. We try to live our lives our way, and we make a mess of things. We struggle to be God's image on earth. We no longer reflect his glory as we should. God's verdict on humanity is this: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). "Paul's language here," comments Sinclair Ferguson, "is loaded with the biblical motif of the divine image. In Scripture, image and glory are interrelated ideas. As the image of God, man was created to reflect, express and participate in the glory of God, in miniature, creaturely form."¹ We've failed to be the images of God we were made to be. We can't be the people we *want* to be, let alone the people we *should* be.

A True Image

Enter Jesus, "the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4):

1 Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 139–40.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (Col. 1:15)

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. (Heb. 1:3)

Jesus is the glory of the Father. He makes God known in the world. He is God in human form. He shows us what it means to be the image of God and to reflect God's glory. That's why the New Testament sometimes says that we should be like God and sometimes that we should be like Christ. It's because Christ is the true image of God.

So Jesus shows us God's agenda for change. "It is Christ who supplies the pattern for the renewal of the new self," says Douglas Moo.²

God isn't interested in making us religious. Think of Jesus. He was hated by religious people. God isn't interested in making us "spiritual" either, if by spiritual you mean detached. Jesus was God getting stuck in. God isn't interested in making us self-absorbed. Jesus was self-giving personified. God isn't interested in serenity. Jesus was passionate for God, angry at sin, and wept over the city. The word "holy" means "consecrated." For Jesus, holiness didn't mean being set apart *from* the world but being consecrated *to* God *in* the world. He was God's glory *in* and *for* the world.

2 D. J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Apollos, 1996), 68.

The glory of God is the sum of all that he is: his love, goodness, beauty, purity, judgment, splendor, power, wisdom, and majesty. The earthly life of Jesus reflected the glory of God in the goodness of his actions, the beauty of his attitudes, and the purity of his thoughts. He reflected the power of God in what appears to us a more topsy-turvy way. He displayed the infinite freedom and grace of God not by clinging to splendor but by voluntarily giving it up in love to rescue us (Phil. 2:6–8). Jesus is the true image of God, displaying God’s glory through his life and through his death.

“At least I can put my feet up when I get home,” Colin told himself as he nudged through traffic. But when he walked through the door, their youngest was screaming and his wife was going on about a broken vacuum cleaner. “Give me a break,” he muttered, slumping in the chair.

Jamal came back to his desk with a mug of coffee. It was mid-afternoon—the graveyard shift. His hand wavered over the mouse button. He looked at his inbox. Then he clicked on solitaire. Yes, he’d work. But a quick game first.

“I’m a grown woman,” Kate told herself. But she loved being in Pete’s presence. He seemed to understand her—much better than her husband. Lately, her marriage has seemed hollow. She paused, then took the long route around, past Pete’s desk. She didn’t want sex or anything. Just a smile.

It had gone on for three years. Three years of patiently teaching and doing good with only misunderstanding and hostility in return. He wanted to say, “I quit, I don’t need this.” But instead he said, “Not my will, but yours be done.” A few hours later, he hung on a cross. Nails cutting into his limbs. Lungs struggling for air. Crowds spitting venom. He wanted to say, “I quit, I’m coming

down.” But instead he said, “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34). He kept going until he could cry, “It is finished” (John 19:30).

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:

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Rom. 8:28–30)

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Eph. 5:1–2; see also 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 2:5; 1 Pet. 2:21)

Whoever says he abides in [God] ought to walk in the same way in which [Jesus] walked. (1 John 2:6; see also 3:16–17; 4:10–11)

In Romans 8, Paul says God uses everything that happens to us to make us like Jesus—both the good things and the bad things. Indeed, the bad things become in some sense good for us because they make us like Jesus. They may be evil in themselves, but God uses them for the good of those who love him, and that *good* is our becoming like Jesus.

This isn’t a letdown. We shouldn’t be disappointed that the promise of good things turns out to be conformity to Christ. It’s not like offering a child something good from the candy shop and then

giving them salad. We know salad is good for us, but we'd rather enjoy some sweets. Jesus isn't just good *for* us, he is goodness itself. He defines *good*. The secret of gospel change is being convinced that Jesus himself defines the good life, and he is the fountain of all joy. Any alternative we might choose would be the letdown.

Making us like Jesus was God's plan from the beginning. God "predestined," or planned, for us to be like his Son (Rom. 8:29). Before God had even made the world, his plan for you and me was to make us like Jesus. And everything that happens to us is part of his plan. One day, his plan will be complete, and we will share God's glory, reflecting it back to him so that he is glorified through us (8:30).

I was dropping off my daughter at school. It was the day of her school Easter service, and she was playing Jesus, miming as the class acted out the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. On the way, we picked up Anna—a young Christian girl who'd been baptized in our church a few months before. As Anna was getting out of the car, she shouted to my daughter, "Be a good Jesus today." "Same to you," I shouted back. Except, of course, I wasn't quick-witted enough to do it until after Anna had shut the car door and walked away.

Be a good Jesus. Our job is to study the glory of God revealed in the life and death of Jesus. We're to study his character, learn his role, and understand his motivation so that in every situation we can improvise his part. We'll face situations that Jesus never faced, but if we understand his character well enough we'll be able to improvise. Each of us should be a good Jesus.

Re-Created in God's Image

I'd like to play soccer like Lionel Messi. I could watch videos of Messi in action. I could study what he does. I might even persuade

him to tutor me. All this might even lead to a small improvement in my abilities. But it's not going to turn me into a great soccer player.

I want to be like Jesus. I can observe him in action as I read the Gospels. I can study the life he lived and the love he showed. I could try very hard to imitate him. But at best that would only lead to a small, short-lived improvement. Indeed, even that small improvement would probably only make me proud.

The great news is that Jesus is not only my example; he's also my Redeemer.

"If anyone is in Christ," says Paul, "he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). When you become a Christian, something amazing happens: There's a new creation. The power of God that made the sun and stars is focused down like a laser into your heart. God steps into the world, as it were, and creates all over again. We're transformed, reborn, made new. "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). God spoke a word into the darkness, and there was light. He spoke a word into the chaos, and there was beauty. And now God again speaks a word through the gospel. He speaks into the darkness of our hearts, and there is light. He speaks into the chaos of our lives, and there is beauty.

What does it mean for us to be a new creation? It means we're *re-created* in the image of God. It means we're given new life so that we can grow like Christ. And being like Christ means being like God: It means reflecting God's glory as God's image.

Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. (1 Cor. 15:49)

Put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph. 4:24)

Do not lie to one other, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. (Col. 3:9–10)

Jesus came to remake us in God's image. He's the second Adam. Everyone takes their imprint from our common ancestor, the first Adam. We were made in Adam's image. That should have meant we were made in *God's* image, but, in fact, it means we're made in a broken image of him. We all have a built-in bias against God. But Jesus is the second Adam, and all who are united to Jesus by faith are being made new in Christ's image, which is the image of God as it should have been. Jesus took our brokenness, our hatred, our curse; he took all this on himself on the cross. He took the penalty of our sin and gave us, in its place, a new life and a new love. Charles Wesley put it like this in his famous hymn "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing":

Adam's likeness now efface,
stamp thine image in its place:
Second Adam from above,
recreate us in thy love.

"Efface" means "wipe" or "rub out." God is like an artist sketching a portrait of Jesus onto our lives. He takes his eraser and rubs out the ugly features in our lives and carefully draws in the beauty of Jesus.

God is in the business of change. And the change he's interested in is to make us like Jesus. God is restoring his image in us so that we can know him again, rule with him, and reflect his glory.

Seeing Glory and Reflecting Glory

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai after meeting with God, his face shone with the reflected glory of God, so much so that the Israelites were terrified and he had to cover his face (Ex. 34:29–35). Paul says that, in a sense, this veil remains to the present day:

Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:12–18)

People don't recognize the glory of God because they don't recognize Christ. So their hearts shrink in fear of God's glory.

But "when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed" (2 Cor. 3:16). When Moses was in the tabernacle before God, he could take the veil off because he was turned toward God and not toward the people (Ex. 34:34). It's the same when we turn to God

in repentance. The veil that hides God's glory is taken away. Our eyes are opened to see the glory of God in Christ.

Moses coming down the mountain after meeting God is a picture of what should have been. Moses radiated God's glory because he saw God's glory. That's how it should have been for all humanity.

And that's how it can be again. We can be glory reflectors—people who radiate divine glory. When we turn to Jesus, we see the glory of God. We see, says Paul a few verses later, “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). And when we see the glory of God, our lives shine with that glory. It transforms us so that we reflect God's glory, bringing light to the world and praise to God. We reflect God's glory when we see God's glory in the face of Christ.

The message of this book is that change takes place in our lives when we turn to see the glory of God in Jesus. We see the glory of Christ as we hear the gospel of Christ (4:4–6). Moral effort, fear of judgment, and sets of rules can't bring lasting change. But amazing things happen when we turn to the Lord (3:16).

First, “the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (3:17). On our own, we can't be the people we want to be. We certainly can't be people who reflect God's glory. We're trapped by our emotions and desires. But when we turn to the Lord, Jesus sets us free through the Holy Spirit. Instead of hearts that shrink in fear from God's glory, we receive hearts that delight in his glory. We're no longer motivated by the fear of law but by the opportunity to experience divine glory.

Second, “we all, with unveiled face, [behold] the glory of the Lord” (3:18). When we turn to the Lord, we begin again to display God's glory. We become like Moses, our faces shining with the radiant glory of God.

Third, we “are being transformed into [his] image” (3:18). When we turn to the Lord, we become more like Jesus—people of grace and truth, love and purity.

Fourth, when we turn to the Lord, we’re changed “from one degree of glory to another” (3:18). We already reflect God’s glory, and we reflect his glory more as we increasingly appreciate his glory in Christ. And one day we will be glorified and will enjoy him forever. The time of Moses was glorious (3:7). The present is more glorious (3:8). The future is “ever-increasing glory” (3:18 NIV 1984). Puritan Thomas Watson said that sanctification—this process of change—“is heaven begun in the soul.” “Sanctification and glory differ only in degree,” he continues, “sanctification is glory in the seed, and glory is sanctification in the flower.”³

So what would you like to change? Who do you want to be like? Please don’t settle for anything less than being like Jesus and reflecting the glory of God. And what must we do if we want to reflect God’s glory? Look on the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Most of us don’t live lives considered great by the world. For us, holiness consists not in heroic acts but a thousand small decisions. But God gives us the opportunity to fill the mundane and the ordinary with his glory. We can be radiators of divine glory in a drab world—reflectors of his light in a dark world. Here’s Charles Wesley again:

Finish then, thy new creation,
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation
perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory,

3 Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (Banner of Truth, 1965), 242.

till in heaven we take our place;
 till we cast our crowns before thee,
 lost in wonder, love and praise!⁴

Reflections

Reflection 1

Think of specific people you consider to be Christlike in good measure. What is it about them that makes them like Jesus? What is it about them that's attractive? What has happened in their life to make them the people they are? What do they think about themselves? What do they think about Jesus?

Reflection 2

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). The service, submission, and suffering seen in the cross are the special marks of what it means to be like Jesus. How does the New Testament apply this to the following?

1. other Christians (see Rom. 15:7; Phil. 2:1–11)
2. cultural influences and peer pressure (see Gal. 6:14)
3. those in need (see 2 Cor. 8:8–9; 1 John 3:16)
4. our partner or spouse (see Eph. 5:22–33)
5. suffering (see 1 Pet. 2:19–25)
6. sin (see 1 Pet. 4:1–2)

Change Project: What Would You Like to Change?

Think of an area of your life that you'd like to change. It might be a behavior (e.g., lying, lust, overeating, excessive spending, or inap-

4 Charles Wesley, “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” (1747). Public domain.

propriate relationships) or it might be an emotion (e.g., depression, envy, anxiety, greed, or anger). It might be a Christian virtue or a fruit of the Spirit that you feel is particularly lacking in your life.

Is your change project about changing your behavior or emotions?

It's no good choosing something that you would like to see changed in someone else. You can't choose "well-behaved children" or "more attentive friends." You must choose something about *you*—such as "not shouting at my children" or "getting less irritated by my housemates."

Is your change project about something specific?

Try not to choose something too general—"be a better parent," for example. Choose a specific behavior or emotion. It should be specific enough that you can remember the last time you did it or felt it.

What would it mean for you to be more like Jesus?

1. You may have thought about the *negative* behavior and emotions you would like to change. What does the *positive* behavior look like?
2. Describe the goal of your change project.
3. How would Jesus behave or think if he were in your situation?
4. Can you think of any stories or teachings of Jesus that illustrate what you should be like?

Write a summary of what you would like to change.