

CHANGES THAT HEAL - 1

(Developed from the books Changes That Heal by Henry Cloud and Boundaries by Henry Cloud and John Townsend.)

Learning Objective: To understand and value ingredients necessary for growing in the image of God

Purpose:

1. To recognize the importance of grace, truth, and time in the maturing process; and to see the need to extend these three to others and to ourselves.
2. To evaluate if “bonding” has taken place in the student’s life and to make efforts to bond with God’s family.
3. To evaluate if proper and necessary boundaries have been established in the student’s life and to identify what steps may be needed to either establish necessary boundaries or re-negotiate unnecessary boundaries.
4. To respond biblically to the good and bad we see in others and ourselves.
5. To understand and move into adult peer relationships with others.

Key Verse: Ephesians 5:15-17

In this session, you will see the symbol “☞” followed by *some questions in italics*. These are things for you to think about, jot down some answers and come to class prepared to discuss them. You don’t need to answer every question, but please come prepared to discuss some of them.

I. INTRODUCTION

We are committed to helping others grow (Ephesians 4:16). Growth pertains to the “building” phase of “winning, building and sending.” Yet how do we measure growth? We’ve measured progress and growth through programs (Discipleship Groups, training programs, special conferences, etc.) rather than measuring genuine life change. Growth is not necessarily the programs and events, but rather what happens between the programs and events.

Spiritual and emotional growth involves genuine inner life change. It happens in the ministry programs, but is not necessarily caused by them. A leader’s ability to understand, outline and expound spiritual truth is not necessarily correlated to one’s ability to live it. We plant and water through our programs, but it is God who causes the growth.

How can you tell if your associates are growing or just conforming to a program? How can you discern between the genuinely needy and the chronically needy? Dr. Cloud says in his book Changes That Heal that all of our problems stem from our failure to reflect the image of God.

We're going to look at four areas that need to be cultivated to improve our day-to-day functioning - all four of which can be compared to the growth of a plant: 1. Bonding with others (seed), 2. Separating from others (sprout), 3. Sorting out the issues of good and bad (sapling), and, 4. Taking charge as an adult (tree). All of this growth needs a good soil to grow in which we will first look at in the section entitled "Environment of Growth."

II. ENVIRONMENT OF GROWTH

There are three ingredients of genuine spiritual growth and emotional health - **grace**, **truth**, and **time**. Real change and real growth happens only in the context of truth and grace. Dr. Cloud writes:

Grace is the unmerited favor of God toward His people. Grace is unconditional love and acceptance. Grace is something we have not earned and do not deserve. Truth is what is real. It describes how things really are.

Grace is the foundation upon which all healing of the human spirit rests. It opens the door to transparency in that someone knows the real you and loves you anyway. **Truth** sets limits on bad behavior and points us to correct behavior. Grace is the relational aspect of God's character. Truth is the structural aspect. Jesus Christ transforms us through His **grace** and **truth** (John 1:14,17). People are transformed by the truth - by what is real, combined with grace. In John 8:2-11, Jesus tells the adulterous woman, "Neither do I condemn you (grace). Go now and leave your life of sin (truth)." Paul wrote to the Ephesians in 4:15f to "speak the truth in love..." Truth without grace is judgmental and leads to compliance and condemnation. Grace without truth easily leads to licentiousness - no growth, no change, no limits, and no consequences. Dr. Cloud writes:

Grace and truth are a healing combination because they deal directly with one of the main barriers to all growth: guilt. We have emotional difficulties because we have been injured (someone has sinned against us), or we have rebelled (we have sinned), or some combination of the two.

We cannot grow in isolation. We need acceptance (grace) and direction (truth) in our relationships.

The third ingredient is **time**. Growth takes time. Although time by itself never produces growth, it is impossible to grow without it. Dr. Cloud makes the distinction between "good time" and "bad time."

Good time is time in which we and our experiences can be affected by grace and truth. If we have removed some aspect of ourselves from time (unwillingness to face or deal with the problem), then grace and truth cannot transform it.

To complete developmental tasks well, we needed good parenting/mentoring. If not, uncompleted aspects get "buried" until a later "good time" (brought out by the light of Jesus and fellow believers who are loving, gracious, and truthful).

Our model for growth is Jesus. As He learned obedience from what He suffered (Hebrews 5:8), we must also go through a process (desert) that takes time. The world and the devil want quick fixes, but quick growth often has no root and is superficial (Mark 4:5,6,16,17).

☞ *In the three areas of grace, truth, and time, which one do you need to extend more to others? Of the three areas, which would you like to experience more of in your life from the body of Christ?*

III. FOUR DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

- A. **BONDING.** The first sign of emotional well-being is the ability to establish and maintain meaningful relationships with others. This is called **bonding** and could be compared to the “seed” stage. Dr. Cloud writes:



Bonding is the ability to establish an emotional attachment to another person. It is the ability to relate to someone on the deepest level without fear of rejection.

It is caring for others and having others care for you. God Himself is a bonded being. He created us to be bonded to Him and to others (John 15:5,6,12) in a relationship.

Fruitfulness in the Christian life comes as the product of a bonded relationship, which is called abiding (John 15:4,5). People who have been raised in an atmosphere of belonging, love and affirmation have the ability to trust. This is needed to bond with others. This trust is an integral ingredient in building relationships. Dr. Cloud writes:

If we were blessed with loving caretakers who met our needs when we were young, we develop our “trust muscle” and begin to perceive the world as a trustworthy place. We love because our parents first loved us; we love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19). If our needs were not met and if we were neglected, abandoned, beaten, abused, criticized, hated, or resented for existing, then our very ability to trust and be vulnerable is injured.

God created us to have a meaningful relationship with Himself and with others (Matthew 22:36-40). It was God who first said, “*It is not good for the man to be alone*” (Genesis 2:18). Satan’s plan is to isolate us. God’s plan is that every living thing lives in relationship with others. Scientists call this symbiosis. For believers it is called community and fellowship.

No matter what you may have missed emotionally in your first family, there is good news! As a child of God, you’ve been placed in a second family called the church. The body of believers should be a place of belonging, love and affirmation. We need to be rooted and grounded in love, drawing from the love of God and others to fuel our transformation and fruit-bearing.

Those who can't make emotional attachments usually experience feelings of *protest* over lack of relationships. This could lead to depression as one loses hope and finally they detach themselves from their need for others.

1. Some of the **barriers** that people face in bonding are as follows:
 - *past injuries* (neglect, beaten, abuse, hated - perceives world as untrustworthy)
 - *distorted thinking* about self: "I don't deserve love", others: "I can't trust anyone", and God: "He doesn't hear me or love me."
 - various *defense mechanisms* (denial, devaluation of other's acts of love, etc.).

☞ Which of the previously listed "barriers" have you seen in the lives of those you may be discipling? Have you experienced any of these (past or present)?

Early developmental injuries take time to heal and grow. We inherit distorted thinking from the system of relational rules operating in the family in which we were raised which may or may not align with Scripture. We need to recognize and renounce the "false theologies" of our dysfunctional past and bond to our new family (God's family). As one does this, conflicts may arise. Making human connections, when one grew up without them, will take grace, truth, and time.

Some of the **skills** needed to do this are: *realizing the need for bonding, moving toward others, being vulnerable, challenging distorted thinking, taking risks, and relying on the Holy Spirit*. Again, this is where our new family, the church - God's family is needed to help those who have experienced difficulties in bonding.

☞ What good bonding relationships have you had in the past (parents, siblings, neighbors, friends)? Who in the past may have hurt your ability to bond and trust? Have you forgiven them, or are you stuck waiting for an apology from them? Have you brought the beliefs of your family of origin to the light of Scripture (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)? In what ways could you help provide relationships to those who need to bond with God's family? In what ways could God's family help you to bond with others? Are any of your disciples (or you) involved in a destructive bonding that needs to be confronted or stopped?

B. SEPARATING FROM OTHERS - BOUNDARIES. The second developmental task that all people need to go through is that of establishing **boundaries**. This could be compared to the “sprout” stage of growth. We need attachment (bonding) but also boundaries to be a healthy individual. Just as bonding has to do with connecting with others, establishing boundaries has to do with being separate from others. Dr. Cloud writes:



In a psychological sense, boundaries are the realization of our own person apart from others. This sense of separateness forms the basis of our personal identity. It says what we are and what we are not, what we will choose and what we will not choose, what we will endure and what we will not endure, what we will feel and what we will not feel, what we like and what we do not like, and what we want and what we do not want.

A boundary is a property line that defines where you end and someone else begins. Knowing what you own and what you do not own leads to responsibility and love. Boundaries define what you are responsible for and what you're not responsible for, what you can and cannot control.

The second recorded time that God spoke audibly to Jesus, He recognized His Son's separateness. *“This is My Son, Whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him”* (Matthew 17:5). The Trinity is a theological expression of both bonding and boundaries.

We are created in the likeness of God Who also has boundaries. God loves and hates, He chooses, wills, wants, values and thinks. Problems arise when people try to do what God is supposed to do and fail; or they try to get God to do what they are supposed to do and God refuses.

Boundary problems come up between people as well. A lack of boundaries can lead to all sorts of disorders, lack of intimacy with others, and being controlled and abused by others.

1. The following areas define you and are areas in which you need to establish boundaries:
 - a) Your **body**: What you will or will not do or allow with your body.
 - b) Your **attitude**: Take responsibility for your own attitude and be free from expectations others put on you. Be sure your attitude aligns with God's Word.
 - c) Your **feelings**: You are not responsible for other's feelings. You are responsible for yourself. You can be empathetic and sensitive to other's feelings when making choices, but don't be controlled by how others feel. If you are always trying to keep everyone happy, then you cannot make the choices required to live correctly and freely. Many controlling people use anger and/or sadness, which works on those who have no boundaries. Guilty compliance to a controlling spouse is not love - it's slavery. *Study the life of Christ and see who He didn't make happy and why.*

- d) Your **behavior**: Owning your own behavior is critical for having a sense of power and of control over your life. This is where “consequences” in the law of sowing and reaping is used to correct wrong behavior. A problem here is when enablers get in the way and pay the price for other’s irresponsibility.
- e) Your **thoughts**: Don’t repress or deny them but own them. Confess where you’re wrong and allow God to change you. Don’t worry about what others think about you. Be your own person.
- f) Your **abilities**: Develop what God has given you. Don’t depend on what others say you can/can’t do. Be what God wants you to be. In Matthew 25, the worthless slave was confronted not for his trying and failing, but for failing to try.
- g) Your **choices**: Choose to do something not out of compulsion or compliance, but as purposed in your heart. Do what you believe God wants you to do. Some feel they have no choice in their life, but they do. “But she’ll get mad!”
Solution: Let her get mad. That’s her problem. Others may try to make you feel guilty for your choice - that’s their problem. Don’t try to make other’s choices for them through guilt messages, withheld love, or silent treatment. You can even be angry with God over His choices, but own the anger and deal with it without holding love from Him.
- h) Your **limits**: You can’t meet all needs. Don’t over-extend yourself and don’t let others over-extend you. It’s OK to say, “No, I don’t think God would have me do that.” Separate from other’s destructive behavior.
- i) Your **desires**: The fulfillment of your desires is your responsibility. Two people with two different desires need to negotiate their differences. When people don’t see their desires as their own responsibility, they often blame others for their deprivation. You need to own your desires and any shortfall is your responsibility. Give your desires to God - He may meet them, delay them, or ask you to give it up. Your desires need to align with the Bible.

☞ *In which of these previously listed areas have you seen something you could encourage or exhort a brother/sister in Christ to trust God to develop in their life? In which of these previously listed areas have you had boundary problems and seen a need for you to trust God and work with God to develop in your life to be more like Christ?*

2. Boundary problems often involve the distinction between **functional** and **relational** boundaries. Functional boundaries refer to a person’s ability to complete a task or project (Martha in Luke 10:38-42). It has to do with performance, discipline, initiative, and planning. Relational boundaries refer to the ability to speak truth to others with whom we are in relationship (Mary). Some have good functional boundaries and poor relational boundaries, and visa versa.

☞ *In which of these two areas are you strongest? What are some things you can do to develop the weaker area?*

3. How does this relate to ministry?
 - a. A sign of emotional immaturity is the inability to take responsibility to make one's own wise decisions. Somehow, we need to free up others to say "No." If you've tried to meet with someone to share the gospel but only experience "no-shows," then say something like, *"If you want to meet with me to hear about how you can know God personally, I'd be glad to meet with you. But if this is something you're just not interested in, please feel free to say 'No.'"* If one is afraid to say "no," their "yes" has no meaning.

Symptoms of lack of boundaries often include the inability to choose what you want to do apart from what others want you to do, and the inability to say "no" because you feel obliged and compelled.

☞ *Have you seen any of these symptoms in people you work with or disciple? Have you seen them in your own life?*

- b. We don't want disciples to feel obligated to us and our programs through heavy doses of truth or virtual truth (i.e. "Come on. All these other programs you're in won't have eternal significance like this Christian conference."). We need to recognize that without choice, there can be no growth. Yes, we still need to recruit others and challenge others to be committed to the Lordship of Christ and the Great Commission (truth), but the decision needs to be theirs, not ours. God allows us to choose Him (Joshua 24:15). When Jesus' disciples left Him en masse (John 6:66-69), He didn't beg the twelve to stay, but rather gave them the option of leaving. For growth to be genuine and lasting, the "want-to" must come from the heart.
4. Galatians 6:2-5 defines the balance between being bonded with others and establishing boundaries with them. *"Carry each other's **burdens**, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ...each one should carry his own **load**."* We carry one another's burdens when the burden is overwhelming and cannot be carried on their own. However, we don't need to carry their "load" (their "knapsack") which is their responsibility. Every person needs to bear the consequences of their own decisions. When you fail to allow others to reap the consequences of what they have sown, you are dishonoring their boundaries. Rescuing others from their own consequences is not honoring their adulthood.

5. In ministry, disciples need to own their own growth and development. They, not you, are responsible for growing as disciples. As a discipler, you identify needs and bring resources to bear but you cannot do it for them! You are responsible **to** your disciple but you are not responsible **for** them. When an assignment is undone **because of poor planning**, you blur the boundaries and pass sloppiness off for grace when you say, “Well, that’s OK, we’ll do it together when we meet.”
6. **Boundary Problems**
For those who may need to develop boundaries, there must **first** be internal **bonding**. Attachment gives the safety and strength to separate. One can’t develop boundaries apart from supportive relationships with God and with others who will love us no matter what. Since the fall, we have all had difficulty owning what is ours. We disown what’s ours and try to own what’s not ours. Many people remain stuck wanting others to change. They want others to make it better, and often those people will not. This puts one in bondage to others.

Failing to develop boundaries results in things like: depression, panic, resentment, blaming, guilt, disorganization & lack of direction, feelings of obligation, feelings of being let down, isolation, etc.

Barriers to creating boundaries could come from past injuries (abuse, control, etc.) and distorted thinking about ourselves, others, and God. Some may feel bad for setting boundaries, and for not giving what the controlling person wants. Setting **appropriate** boundaries actually increases our ability to care for others. It helps us be good stewards of our lives to God. Some fear rejection or loneliness if they set boundaries.

For those who need to start setting boundaries, it will take work, discipline, desire, prayer, and the body of Christ. These people will **need to define who they are and who they aren’t**. *They can develop the “no” muscle by practicing saying small “no’s” in safe relationships such as in God’s family. They need to stop blaming others and stop playing the victim. They need to persevere, become active and not reactive. This means responding to difficult people, not reacting (1Corinthians 13:5). Set limits, communicate your boundaries, be honest, challenge distorted thinking, forgive, and respect other’s boundaries as you would have them respect yours.* As you set boundaries, expect resistance from others and maybe from yourself. This is why **a Christian support group is very important**.

7. **Boundary Problems at Work.**
 - a. Working too much overtime. **Solution:** 1) Set boundaries on your work. 2) Review your job description. 3) Make a list of tasks you need to complete in the next month. 4) Make an appointment to see your supervisor to discuss the overload.
 - b. Getting saddled with another person’s responsibilities.
 - c. Misplaced Priorities.
 - d. Difficult Co-workers.
 - e. Critical Attitudes.

☞ *How would you respond to the work problems in 7b-e?*

8. Reason for Boundaries

The essence of boundaries is knowing what you own and what you don't own. You must be a good steward and protect, nurture, and develop the life God has given you. This leads to responsibility and real love. Under God, you decide your limits as others do theirs. You then help meet other's desires and needs because you want to and not because you have to. Any shortfall is the other person's responsibility. Establishing limits is essential in every relationship and is the basis for mutual respect and love. It does not mean you won't forgive or love, but you will require responsible behavior. You can't change others, so accept them as they are. Respect their choice to be that way, and let them experience appropriate consequences.

☞ *Do you often cross other's boundaries or do you allow others to often cross into your boundaries? If this is a frequent problem, what do you plan to do about it? Are there some people that you need to forgive? Or maybe, there are some people that you need to ask to forgive you for crossing their boundaries. Have you set up boundaries in your life that God may want you to re-negotiate (or get rid of)? When interacting with difficult people, do you react to them (which means they are in control and provoking you [1 Corinthians 13:5]) or do you respond (which means you are demonstrating self-control [Galatians 5:22, 23])?*