

Why Am I Not Changing?

Rev. Derek Geldart

Change; Sanctification / Philippians 2:13

This sermon describes why change is so difficult for a believer and how we can embrace God's will in our lives.

When I was growing up, I always wanted to learn to play a musical instrument. In high school I tried both the trumpet and the clarinet. I enjoyed the idea of playing, but with one teacher trying to teach so many students, there was very little individual instruction. Before long I became discouraged, lost interest, and eventually quit. It wasn't until I was in my mid-fifties that I decided to try again—this time with the guitar. I had learned an important lesson from my earlier experience: if I was going to succeed, I needed more than a desire to learn; I needed the right teacher. I wasn't looking for just anyone who could play the guitar. I wanted someone who had mastered the instrument—someone who could play at a level far beyond anything I could ever imagine. My reasoning was simple: if they truly understood the instrument, they would be able to teach me whatever I needed to know. But I also wanted someone with another equally important gift—the ability to teach. I had seen incredibly gifted musicians who could perform with astonishing skill yet struggled to explain even the basics to a beginner. I needed someone who not only knew how to play but knew how to patiently teach someone in his fifties who had very little understanding of either music theory or the instrument itself. Finding someone with both abilities was not easy. But when I finally found a teacher who possessed both exceptional skill and the gift of teaching, I was thrilled. Looking back, I realize that finding the right teacher made all the difference.

The Christian life is much the same. If we desire to grow spiritually and walk more closely with God, we need the right Teacher. The moment we place our faith in Jesus Christ, God begins a wonderful work within us. The apostle Paul

writes, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#), KJV). What an incredible promise! At the moment of salvation, we receive the Holy Spirit, our sins are forgiven, and God begins transforming us from the inside out. Yet this new life does not mean our spiritual struggles immediately disappear. Although our "old man is crucified with Him" so that we are no longer slaves under sin's dominion ([Romans 6:6-7](#)), sin still seeks to entangle us as we run the race that Christ has set before us ([Hebrews 12:1-2](#)). If we are no longer to "be conformed to this world" but instead "be transformed by the renewing of [our] mind" ([Romans 12:2](#)), then we need divine help to accomplish what we could never achieve on our own.

Praise God, He has not left us to struggle alone. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit—the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth—to dwell within every believer ([John 14:16-17](#)). Who could be a greater Teacher than the One who is God Himself? The Holy Spirit knows the depths of God because He is God, and He also knows our hearts completely ([1 Corinthians 2:10-11](#)). He is perfectly qualified to teach us, guide us, convict us, encourage us, and transform us into the likeness of Christ. This is the same God who created the universe, parted the Red Sea, caused the sun to stand still, calmed the raging sea, healed the sick, and raised the dead. If He possesses the power to accomplish all these mighty works, then surely He possesses the power to transform the human heart. As I have reflected on [Philippians 2:13](#), I have often found myself asking an important question. Paul declares, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." If God Himself is working within every believer, giving us both the desire and the ability to accomplish His purposes, then why do so many Christians seem spiritually stagnant? Why do so many live with little awareness of God's presence? Why do some remain spiritual infants for years, while others seem to grow continually in Christ?

This morning we will seek to answer those questions from God's Word. First, we will see that the problem is never God's power. Second, we will examine how God gives believers both the desire and the ability to obey Him, yet we can still

resist His gracious work. Third, we will consider some of the reasons Christians become spiritually lukewarm. Fourth, we will discover how God rekindles our love for Him and renews our desire to seek His presence. Finally, we will conclude by looking at the encouraging evidence that God is still at work in every believer who truly belongs to Him.

The Problem is not God's Power

The first truth we must establish is this: the problem is never God's power. The God who knit us together in our mother's womb ([Psalm 139:13](#)) is more than able to transform the hardest heart. Throughout Scripture, we repeatedly see Him doing what no human being could ever accomplish. Saul of Tarsus was a violent persecutor of the church until he encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. In a single moment, the man who had sought to destroy Christianity became one of its greatest missionaries ([Acts 9:1-22](#)). A demon-possessed man who lived among the tombs, uncontrollable by chains or human restraint, was instantly restored to his right mind by the authority of Jesus ([Mark 5:1-20](#)). Zacchaeus, a greedy tax collector whose life had been consumed by wealth, encountered Christ and immediately pledged to give half of his possessions to the poor and repay those he had defrauded fourfold ([Luke 19:1-10](#)). A hardened Philippian jailer, who only moments earlier had been prepared to take his own life, believed in Christ and was baptized with his entire household before the night had ended ([Acts 16:25-34](#)). A man born blind received both physical and spiritual sight ([John 9](#)), and a woman known throughout the city for her sinful life found forgiveness, peace, and a new beginning at the feet of Jesus ([Luke 7:36-50](#)).

These accounts remind us that there is no heart too hard, no life too broken, and no sinner too far gone for the grace of God. Yet when I think about God's power to transform a life, one man stands above them all—King Manasseh. Manasseh was the son of one of Judah's greatest kings, Hezekiah ([2 Kings 18-](#)

[20](#)). He grew up with every opportunity to know the Lord, yet deliberately chose a path of extraordinary wickedness. He rebuilt the pagan high places his father had destroyed, erected an Asherah pole, worshiped the stars, built pagan altars within the temple of the Lord, sacrificed his own sons in the fire, practiced witchcraft and divination, sought omens, and consulted mediums and spiritists ([2 Kings 21:3-6](#)). Scripture gives this sobering assessment of his reign:

"Manasseh led them astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites." ([2 Kings 21:9](#))

As though that were not enough, the Bible tells us that he "shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem from end to end" ([2 Kings 21:16](#)). Humanly speaking, his life appeared beyond hope. Surely, we think, if anyone deserved God's judgment without mercy, it was Manasseh.

But this is where the story of God's grace begins. The Lord allowed the Assyrian army to invade Judah. Manasseh was captured, a hook was placed in his nose, he was bound with bronze shackles, and he was carried away to Babylon ([2 Chronicles 33:11](#)). There, stripped of his throne, his power, and his pride, something remarkable happened. The king who had spent decades rebelling against God finally humbled himself. He cried out to the Lord in sincere repentance, and instead of receiving the judgment he deserved, he received mercy he could never deserve. Scripture tells us that "the LORD was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea" ([2 Chronicles 33:13](#)). God restored him to Jerusalem, and from that moment forward the evidence of genuine repentance became unmistakable. Manasseh removed the foreign gods and idols, restored the altar of the Lord, offered fellowship and thank offerings, and commanded Judah to worship the Lord, the God of Israel ([2 Chronicles 33:14-16](#)). Although the consequences of his earlier sins remained, the direction of his life had completely changed. The man who had once promoted idolatry now promoted the worship of the living God. Such a transformation could only be explained by the grace and power of God.

Manasseh's story reminds us that no one is beyond the reach of God's grace. We, too, have "all sinned, and come short of the glory of God" ([Romans 3:23](#)). Left to ourselves, "the wages of sin is death" ([Romans 6:23](#)). Satan, the great deceiver, delights in whispering that we are too sinful, too broken, too far gone, and too useless for God to redeem. But the Gospel proclaims a far greater truth. Through Jesus Christ, the Father invites us to "come boldly unto the throne of grace" where we receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need ([Hebrews 4:16](#)). Nor does God simply forgive us and leave us unchanged. Through His divine power He has given us "all things that pertain unto life and godliness," making us "partakers of the divine nature" ([2 Peter 1:3-4](#)). He has given us the Holy Spirit—the Comforter—who guides us into all truth ([John 16:13](#)). He is the Good Shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to seek the one sheep that has wandered away ([Luke 15:4-7](#)). He patiently teaches even those who are still babes in Christ ([1 Corinthians 3:1-3](#)), and like the Potter shaping clay, He continues molding us into the image of His Son ([Jeremiah 18:1-6](#)). If God could transform a man like Manasseh, then the problem is certainly not God's power. The question we must now answer is this: If God is able to change anyone, why do so many believers remain spiritually stagnant?

God Gives us the Desire, but we Can Resist It

When I was learning to play the guitar, I often resisted my teacher's instructions. He repeatedly told me that if I wanted to become a better guitarist, I had to master the fundamentals. That meant practicing scales, developing finger strength, and repeating the same exercises until they became second nature. To be honest, none of that appealed to me. I wanted to skip the hard work and jump straight to playing my favorite songs. I dreamed of playing like Jimi Hendrix, but I didn't want to spend hours doing what seemed like mind-numbing exercises. Looking back, I realize my teacher wasn't trying to keep me from enjoying the guitar—he was trying to make me into the musician I wanted

to become. The problem wasn't that my teacher lacked the knowledge or the ability to teach me. The problem was that I often resisted the very instruction that would have helped me grow. Eventually, after one too many occasions of ignoring his advice, he jokingly told me, "Perhaps you should find another patsy!"

The Christian life can be remarkably similar. God never lacks the wisdom, power, or ability to transform His children. The question is not whether God is willing to work in us, but whether we are willing to cooperate with His work. Paul declares, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" ([Philippians 2:13](#)). God creates holy desires within His children, but He does not treat us like robots. Having created us in His image ([Genesis 1:26-27](#)), He calls us to willingly trust, obey, and walk with Him. Although we can never frustrate His sovereign purposes ([Isaiah 46:10](#)), we can resist His gracious leading in our own lives. Scripture repeatedly illustrates this truth. Jonah resisted God's call and fled toward Tarshish rather than preach to Nineveh ([Jonah 1:1-3](#)). Moses argued so persistently at the burning bush that "the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses" ([Exodus 4:14](#)). Jeremiah protested that he was too young and inexperienced to serve as God's prophet ([Jeremiah 1:4-8](#)). Gideon questioned God's presence and doubted that someone as insignificant as he could ever deliver Israel ([Judges 6:11-17](#)). Abraham, struggling to trust God's timing, fathered Ishmael instead of patiently waiting for the promised son ([Genesis 16:1-6](#)). Even Ananias hesitated when God commanded him to visit Saul, fearing the man who had persecuted Christians ([Acts 9:10-14](#)). In every one of these cases, God patiently continued His work until His servants finally yielded to His will.

The same struggle continues in our lives today. Every time the Holy Spirit convicts us to forgive someone, to confess a hidden sin, to spend time in prayer, to open God's Word, to share our faith, or to step out in obedience, we face a choice. We can either yield to His leading or resist it. The tragedy is that many believers ask God to transform them while resisting the very means He uses to accomplish that transformation. Resistance always carries consequences. Paul

warns believers not to "grieve the holy Spirit of God" ([Ephesians 4:30](#)). We grieve Him whenever our attitudes and actions contradict His holy character—through bitterness, anger, unforgiveness, slander, or any other sin ([Ephesians 4:25–32](#)). Instead, we are called to "walk in the Spirit" and "keep in step with the Spirit" so that we do not gratify the desires of the flesh ([Galatians 5:16–25](#)). Nor does our heavenly Father ignore our persistent disobedience. Because He loves us, He disciplines us for our good, "that we might be partakers of his holiness" ([Hebrews 12:6–11](#)). His discipline is never an expression of rejection but of love. Like a wise father correcting his child, God lovingly redirects His children whenever they wander from His path.

Disobedience also leaves its mark. While God graciously forgives every confessed sin, some consequences remain long after forgiveness has been received. Sin often leaves broken relationships, damaged reputations, painful memories, and lost opportunities that cannot simply be erased. It robs us of joy, hinders our fellowship with God, and weakens our witness before others. Scripture even teaches that cherished sin can hinder our prayers ([Psalm 66:18](#); [Proverbs 28:9](#)). By contrast, a life of obedience produces peace, joy, confidence, and a growing intimacy with the Lord. The difference between a stagnant Christian and a growing Christian is often not found in God's willingness to work, but in the believer's willingness to surrender.

What Causes Believers to Become Lukewarm?

While exiled on the Isle of Patmos, the apostle John received a revelation from the risen Christ and was instructed to write His messages to seven churches in Asia Minor ([Revelation 1:9–11](#)). Perhaps none of those churches speaks more directly to the modern church than Laodicea. Christ described them as neither "hot nor cold," but spiritually lukewarm ([Revelation 3:15](#)). Although they proudly claimed, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," Christ exposed their true condition: they were "wretched, and miserable, and poor,

and blind, and naked" ([Revelation 3:17](#)). Their material prosperity had deceived them into believing they were spiritually healthy. Christ therefore offered them true riches—gold refined by fire, white garments, and eye salve so they might truly see ([Revelation 3:18](#)). His words carried powerful local significance. Laodicea was famous for its wealth, its textile industry, and its medical school that produced a renowned eye salve. The city also relied on aqueducts that carried both hot and cold water over long distances, arriving lukewarm by the time it reached the city [5]. Just as their water had become lukewarm, so had their devotion to Christ. They had become so comfortable, self-sufficient, and conformed to the values of their culture that the light of the gospel no longer shone brightly through them [6].

The same danger confronts believers today. Lukewarmness rarely appears overnight; it develops gradually as we neglect our relationship with God. When we fail to intentionally cultivate His presence through prayer, worship, Scripture, and fellowship, our love for Christ slowly cools until He becomes ordinary to us, just as a marriage grows cold through neglect [7][8]. Overwork, constant distraction, and spiritual complacency crowd out living communion with Christ, while affection for Him quietly fades, just as the love between an engaged couple diminishes when they stop communicating [9]. Material prosperity and self-sufficiency can further deepen this spiritual decline by convincing us that we no longer need God's daily help. The result is the very condition Christ rebuked in Laodicea: outward religious activity without inward love, zeal, or dependence upon the Holy Spirit. Yet Christ did not write to Laodicea to condemn them without hope. He called them to return. As we return to Him through confession, worship, service, and faithful meditation on His Word, the Holy Spirit rekindles our love for Christ and restores the spiritual passion that has grown cold [10].

How Does God Rekindle Desire?

The message to Laodicea did not end with rebuke. It ended with hope. Although Christ exposed their lukewarm condition, His purpose was never to destroy them but to restore them. He lovingly declared, "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent" ([Revelation 3:19](#)). Then He extended one of the most beautiful invitations in all of Scripture:

Revelation 3:20 NIV

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with Me.

What an incredible picture of God's grace! The very Christ whom the church had pushed to the outside was still seeking fellowship with them. He had not abandoned them. He was patiently knocking, calling them to repentance, promising that anyone who opened the door would once again enjoy close communion with Him.

Rekindling spiritual desire is therefore both God's work and our response. The Holy Spirit awakens within every believer a hunger for holiness because His great purpose is to magnify Christ by making us more like Him [11]. He produces both the desire and the power for the spiritual disciplines that lead to godliness, yet He never forces us to obey. While we cannot manufacture spiritual desire by our own strength, we can choose to respond to His gracious prompting [12]. This is why Scripture continually calls believers to draw near to God ([James 4:8](#)). Even when our hearts feel cold, faithfully opening God's Word, praying, worshiping, and serving Him often awakens desires that seemed long forgotten. Right thinking and faithful obedience frequently precede renewed feelings of affection, for many times our spiritual desires are not dead—they are simply dormant and waiting to be stirred again by God's truth [13]. Reading Scripture and the testimonies of godly men and women throughout history further fans these desires into flame because what occupies our minds inevitably shapes the longings of our hearts. Spiritual disciplines do not earn God's favor; they simply

place us where His transforming grace can do its greatest work [14]. As we pray for the Spirit's help, listen for His voice through Scripture, respond to the convictions of our conscience, and follow wise, godly counsel, He faithfully continues the work He began in us ([Philippians 1:6](#)). Though the mystery of God's sovereignty and our responsibility remains beyond our full understanding, two truths are unmistakably clear: God is always faithful to supply the grace needed for spiritual growth, and we are called to respond with willing, obedient hearts rather than hardening ourselves against His loving voice [11][12]. Our thirst for God is not sustained by willpower alone, but by continually placing ourselves where His grace can awaken our hearts afresh.

The Evidence That God is Still Working in You

Perhaps as we've studied this passage today you've been thinking, "Pastor, I see some of these things in my own life. I've become distracted. I've neglected time with God. My love for Christ isn't what it once was. Maybe God has given up on me." Paul says exactly the opposite. The very fact that you are convicted by God's Word is evidence that He is still working in your heart. Dead hearts do not long for Christ. Hardened hearts do not grieve over sin. If you still desire to know Him, if you still feel the Spirit's conviction when you wander, if you still long to become more like Christ, those desires did not originate with you. They are evidence that God is continuing the work He began when He saved you ([Philippians 2:13](#)) [15]. Remember Paul's confidence in [Philippians 1:6](#):

Philippians 1:6 NIV

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.

God has not stopped working. He is still shaping your desires, strengthening your obedience, and conforming you to the image of His Son. Even your perseverance through failure is evidence of His grace. The Christian life is not the

story of people who never stumble; it is the story of a faithful Savior who never abandons His people [16].

Perhaps the greatest evidence of God's work is not found in your perfection but in your transformation. There was a time when sin scarcely troubled you. Now it grieves you. There was a time when prayer seemed unnecessary. Now you long to draw near to God. There was a time when Christ held little place in your thoughts. Now you desire Him above all else. Those changes are not the product of human determination—they are the fingerprints of the Holy Spirit upon your life [17]. So, if your heart has grown cold, do not despair. Christ is still knocking. Draw near to Him, and He will draw near to you ([James 4:8](#)). Open His Word. Spend time in prayer. Worship Him. Walk in obedience to the Spirit's leading. The God who began His work in you is faithful to complete it. One day, when Christ returns, the work He has been doing throughout your life will finally be complete. Until that day, He continues to work in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure ([Philippians 2:13](#)).

Footnotes

[1] Got Questions Ministries, *Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2014–2021).

[2] James Bruckner, *Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 23–25.

[3] Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Called to Be God's Leader Workbook: How God Prepares His Servants for Spiritual Leadership* (Nashville, TN: HarperChristian Resources, 2004).

[4] Charles F. Stanley, *Life Principles for the Graduate: Nine Truths for Living God's Way* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009).

- [5] Steve Sjogren, *Conspiracy of Kindness: A Unique Approach to Sharing the Love of Jesus* (Bethany House, 2008), 222–224.
- [6] Buist M. Fanning, *Revelation*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 187.
- [7] James B. Gould, *Practicing Prayer for the Dead: Its Theological Meaning and Spiritual Value* (New York, NY: Cascade Books, 2016).
- [8] Tony Evans, “Assurance and Apostasy,” in *Tony Evans Sermon Archive* (Tony Evans, 2015).
- [9] Joseph S. Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator: Revelation* (London: James Nisbet & Co., n.d.), 238–239.
- [10] Neil S. Wilson, in *The Handbook of Bible Application* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2000), 100.
- [11] Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 237, 239.
- [12] Randy Valimont et al., *Leadership 1: Loving God & People (Student Manual)*, ed. Quentin McGhee, Faith & Action Series (Chestnutridge, MO: Faith & Action, 2018), 111.
- [13] Ibid.
- [14] Charles E. Lawless Jr., “Living in Victory through Disciplined Living,” in *Victory over the Enemy: Defeating the World, the Flesh, and the Devil* (Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic, 2023), 185–186.
- [15] Elizabeth McQuoid, *Confident: Food for the Journey - Themes* (Oxford, England: IVP, 2021).
- [16] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 257.

[17] Tony Merida and Francis Chan, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 109.