

GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Returning to Our Roots

STUDY NINE

Changing Lives Is Jesus' Business

John 4:7–34, 39–42; 9:1–38; 20:24–28

God is in the process of shaping us, remaking us, and molding us like a potter with clay.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE work begins with a formless lump of clay. The potter kneads the clay like dough, washing it with water and removing hard bits as he or she pushes and stretches it. When the lump is pliable and smooth, the potter drops the lump on a wheel and sets it spinning.

From the clay's perspective, the work must seem pointless. Why all the pressing and pulling, cleaning and spinning? The potter, however, sees what the clay cannot imagine. As the wheel turns, the potter applies the pressure that experienced hands know, and the lump rises into a shape. A cup, jar, pitcher, pot, or vase—whatever vessel the potter wills. A marvelous transformation occurs as what was once formless becomes a beautiful, functional work of art.

Like a potter, God is shaping us according to His will. He sees the potential in our raw form. He presses and kneads us, cuts out the sharp stones and washes us until we are soft and malleable.

Unlike clay, however, we have wills of our own. We can push back against the Potter. Even so, He does not give up on us. His firm and patient hands press and shape us until we finally trust Him and let Him form us into masterpieces that bring glory to His name. Such is the nature of God's skillful artistry of changing lives—which was beautifully expressed in the ministry of Jesus.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Begin this *Searching the Scriptures* study in prayer.

Father, I want to be pliable, but sometimes I resist Your hand—perhaps because I am afraid of change or because I struggle to trust Your intentions. Through this study, reveal Your heart and give me a glimpse of Your plan so that I can relax in Your will. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In this study, we'll observe and interpret passages about God's transformational work. And then we'll look at examples of how Jesus as God-in-the-flesh did that *same kind of work* during His ministry. If you need help with interpretation, consult a study Bible or commentary. For an online resource, we recommend netbible.org. Simply select the book and chapter of the Bible passage and click on the tab, "Constable's Notes," for the commentary.

The key to life is change. When I meet people who have walked through valleys of hardship, I search for the reason they hang on and keep growing. The reason is the hope of change, the inner conviction that God is at work changing them. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll





Observation and Interpretation: God's Work of Transformation

In the charts following, write down in the left column what you see in each set of verses, and in the right column, record the meaning.



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God's Work of Transformation Old Testament	
Scripture opens with God sculpting what was "formless and empty" into a radiant paradise (<i>Genesis 1</i>). His transformative work continued in the lives of people and nations, which we read about in the following Old Testament passages.	
 Observation:	 Interpretation:
1a. Read <i>1 Samuel 10:1-9</i> . After Samuel anointed Saul as king, what change did God perform in Saul? What phrases stand out?	1b. What is the Spirit's role in transformation during the era in which Saul lived?
2a. Read <i>Proverbs 21:1</i> . What does this verse say?	2b. What principle does this verse teach?
3a. Read <i>Isaiah 64:8</i> . Who is God to His people and what does He do?	3b. What does this verse teach about God's character, His work, and our response?
4a. Read <i>Jeremiah 18:1-6</i> . What do these verses say about God's role and work?	4b. What prerogatives does God have as the potter?

You may be on the potter's wheel, and it's painful. It's no fun. You feel like a shapeless mass, and you can't understand the purpose. Trust the Father. He's changing you. He knows what He's doing. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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God's Work of Transformation New Testament	
Take a look at how the New Testament authors described God's transformational work.	
 Observation:	 Interpretation:
1a. Read <i>Romans 8:26-31</i> . What does the Spirit do? What is the goal? What phrases stand out?	1b. Summarize what this passage teaches regarding God's desire for us, the Spirit's work in us, and our identity?
2a. Read <i>1 Corinthians 15:51-52</i> . What do you observe? What words are repeated?	2b. What does this passage communicate about the future? What hope does it reveal?
3a. Read <i>Ephesians 2:10</i> . What does this passage say about who we are and our purpose?	3b. What does it mean to be created "anew in Christ Jesus"?
4a. Read <i>Philippians 1:6</i> . What progression do you see in this verse? What key words?	4b. What principles do you glean about God and about His work?

God is working. We are His craft. He is shaping and molding and making us like He wants us to become. He's never been known to walk away from an individual and say, "He or she is too stubborn." He will complete the job of changing us. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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 **Correlation: Jesus' Ministry of Transformation**

Turning to the gospels, we recognize the Potter's skill in the hands of Jesus as Jesus lovingly sculpted masterpieces out of the raw material of humanity. In the following chart, summarize three accounts of Jesus changing lives. *Look at the previous charts for inspiration on the principles Jesus illustrates.*

Changing a Wayward Woman <i>John 4:1-42</i>	
Summary of the Account	Key Principles


Changing a Blind Beggar <i>John 9:1-38</i>	
Summary of the Account	Key Principles

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Changing a Discouraged Disciple <i>John 20:19-28</i>	
Summary of the Account	Key Principles

The One who changes people is committed to you as much as He was committed to the woman at the well, the blind beggar, and the disciple who doubted. He will not give up. He will change you. Won't you let Him? —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

 **Application: Life on the Potter's Wheel**

What have we discovered about life on the Potter's wheel from God's transformational ministry through Jesus? At least five applications emerge.

1. *It's Christ's job to bring change.* People can't change people. Our job is to love, encourage, be truthful, and support people through the transformational process.
2. *Change can come quickly, but usually change takes time.* Don't get discouraged if change comes slowly.
3. *Life on the wheel can be disorienting.* Like Thomas, we may struggle to make sense of what Jesus is doing. Stay near Him until your eyes are opened.
4. *Jesus stays at the work.* The Potter's hands never lose touch as they gently shape our hearts. Be encouraged.
5. *The goal is to be conformed to the image of Christ.* We are God's masterwork, created as image-bearers of Christ to do the good He designed for us before we were born. Stay focused on Christ.

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What other applications from this study did you discover?

Which of these scriptural truths soaks into your soul the deepest? Why does it mean so much to you?

What new perspective or encouragement can you take with you into your week? What action might you take?

Malleable, pliable, and submissive. These are the qualities the Potter looks for in His clay. For us, it means patience, obedience, and trust. Let your spirit yield to His hands as He molds the raw substance of your life into His masterpiece, wonderfully crafted for work in His kingdom.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for never giving up on me. You continue to do Your work, even when I resist. When I slump in despair or tear away in rebellion, You patiently reshape me and try again. Thank You for Your gentle yet firm touch. I yield today to Your hand. In Jesus' name, amen.

