

Change

Jeremiah 17:5-10; June 9, 2019

Introduction:

As I prayed and thought through which OT text to share with you today, the Lord impressed on me that I was to share with you one of the most foundational frameworks that has shaped how I think about both 1) growing in Christ myself and 2) helping others grow in Christ. The people that I've disciplined probably know this framework well by now, because I use it so frequently in a one-on-one setting. But it struck me that I have never taught on this or shared it in a public setting. This framework is like a 30,000 (think helicopter view) of sanctification and how we change and grow to become like Jesus. Before we jump in, let me give a few caveats:

- 1) We're going to start Jeremiah 17 but we're also going to look at a few other passages.
- 2) This framework is not original with me. For the most part, I'm summarizing and building upon the work that Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp in a book called *How People Change*. I would strongly encourage you to grab the book and read it. You might even consider reading it with someone else over the summer.

Context:

Jeremiah was an OT prophet leading up to and during Jerusalem's fall to the Babylonians. The first few verses of Jeremiah 17 summarize one of his common themes (Read Jer. 17:1-4):

- Judah (the southern kingdom of Israel) had sinned against God by turning their hearts away from him to chase after idols.
- As a result of their sin, God's wrath is kindled against them and his wrath will be displayed through their destruction and exile, something he had already predicted would happen (cf. Deut. 28:64).

Next, Jeremiah shares some proverbial sayings and in particular highlights the pathway to human flourishing and the need to rely on God in all life's circumstances.

Read 17:5-10

The reason we're starting here is because this passage best summarizes the framework that I'm going to share with you today. Let me give you a few observations first:

- Two ways of living that have drastic results:
 - The person who trusts in man (5-6).
 - Heart turns away from the Lord
 - Compared to a shrub of the desert that has no access to rain or water ("parched places" = bone dry) therefore assuring that its growth will be stunted and starved.
 - Sadly, this is what describes the majority of Israel throughout the OT.
 - The person who trusts in the Lord (7-8).
 - Compared to a tree that has abundant access to water and therefore

- nourishment, growth and fruitfulness are assured.
 - This person doesn't fear or worry when heat comes.
 - This person never ceases to bear fruit.
- The centrality of the heart (5, 9-10)
 - One commentator asks: "If there is such blessing in trusting God, then why do people so generally depend on their fellow humans? Why is it that the blessed are not more numerous than the cursed?" (Charles Feinberg, EBC).
 - 17:9 gives us our answer: the depravity of the human heart. The heart is the source of all human difficulty.
 - Jesus reinforces this truth in the Gospels:

Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. (Matt. 12:33-34 ESV)

Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. (Matt. 15:17-20a ESV)

- One of the main messages of the OT is that we not only need a savior, someone who can pay the penalty for our sins. We need new hearts. We need heart transformation. True heart change results in real life change.

Introduce the framework: The "Three Tree Model" for biblical change: Heat, Thorns, Cross, Fruit (show the image).

I. Heat/Dew: What is your situation?

- This represents a person's current situation in life with all of its difficulties, temptations and blessings. Whether it is the scorching Heat of difficulty or the unexpected Rain of blessing, you always respond to whatever comes down on you.
- Heat can lead to significant growth at the heart level or it can lead to temptation and sin. In other words, heat can produce fruit or thorns. It all depends on what is happening inside a person.
- Text: James 1:2-4, 12-15
 - 2-4: you can respond with joy to trials.
 - 12-15: how does temptation and sin work: "You have inner desires that are evil, a product of your sinful nature. Temptation comes when a circumstance engages one of those desires. Here's the simple formula: Desire + circumstance = temptation" (Challies).
 - Sin is crafty, deceitful (it lies to you) and alluring:
 - "Your sinful desires give you a hunger, an appetite, for something forbidden, something you think you need, something you think you can't be satisfied without. Then a circumstance comes along and acts like bait,

like a lure. That circumstance dangles the opportunity before you, and you are tempted to take a bite. But what you never seem to see is that buried in that bait is a sharp, nasty hook. First it lures you, and then if you succumb to the temptation, it hooks you and drags you away” (Challies).

- Sin betrays (it kills and brings death).
 - Sin promises blessing but in the end delivers curse.
- Implication: we can't blame the heat in our lives.
 - I'm having marriage problems (reference *When Sinners Say I Do*, 50-51)
 - My kids are driving me crazy.
 - My boss is going to make me lose my mind.
- Application: where have you blamed the heat in your life instead of looking inward at the sin inside of yourself?

II. Thorns (the first tree): What sin entangles you?

- The thorn bush (the shrub of the desert) represents a person's ungodly responses to difficulties, temptations and blessings.
- You and I are never passive. We always respond to the Heat (or Dew) in our lives.
- Here are some examples:
 - Someone cuts you off in the rotary and you burst out in anger towards them.
 - Someone speaks unkindly to you, so we let our bitterness grow.
 - We are blessed with unexpected money and we think of all the ways we can spend it on ourselves.
 - We don't get the raise we thought we deserved, so we work halfheartedly.
 - My kids don't obey right away with a happy heart so I lash out and use my words to demand and get the obedience that I deserve.
- Scripture makes it clear that these responses are not forced upon us by the pressures of the situation. What I do comes from inside me. The things that happen to me will influence my responses but never determine them. Rather, these responses flow out of the thoughts and motives of my heart. This is why you can have five people in the same situation with five different responses!
- Text: James 4:1-2
- Implications (show the framework image):
 - When you see thorny responses and bad fruit in your life (cf. Gal. 5:16-26), you should always look deeper to the heart (cf. Prov. 4:23; Matt. 12:33-35; 15:17-20).
 - **Bad Root:** what do you want and believe?
 - All ungodly behavior grows out of a heart that has been captured by something other than Christ. You are believing lies!
 - **Bad Fruit:** how do you react?
- Application: developing into fruit trees always starts with recognizing and removing the sinful thorns from our lives.

III. Cross (the second tree): Christ brings new identity and new potential.

- This is the source of living water. This captures the redemptive activity of God on our behalf. Through Christ, he brings comfort, cleansing, and the power to change in the

midst of life's challenges.

- Do you remember the problem of Jeremiah 17:9: the heart is deceitful and desperately sick? One of the main observations that we should gain from reading the Old Testament is that apart from genuine heart transformation, it is impossible to please the Lord. The problem with Israel is that their hearts continually turned away from the Lord (cf. Deut. 29:18-19; 30:15-20). But God tells Jeremiah that a day of renewal is coming, saying:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jer. 31:31-33 ESV)

Another prophet, Ezekiel, describes the new covenant this way:

I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezek. 36:24-27 ESV)

- The promise of the Cross extends beyond renewed strength or enhanced wisdom. Christ gives us himself and in so doing remakes us from the inside out. If you are a believer, you are in the process of being remade to reflect the character of Jesus himself. And your Lord is employing every circumstance and relationship in your life to accomplish that goal. Our hearts can respond to life in brand new ways because we are no longer dominated by sin, but we are liberated by the gracious rule of Christ.
- Text: Ezekiel 36:24-28 (cf. Eph. 4:17-24; 2 Cor. 5:17)
- Application:
 - How do you need to apply who God is and what he says and does in Christ?
 - How will you renew your mind and embrace the truths of the gospel and apply them to how you think about your new identity in Christ and the deceitfulness of sin?

IV. Fruit (the third tree): The result of real heart change.

- This tree represents the person who trusts in the Lord, who learns to respond in a godly manner to all life's circumstances.
- Text: Eph. 4:17-5:2
- Because of what Christ has done for us, we can respond to the same old pressures in a brand-new way.
- Implications:

- **Good Root:** We need to seek God in repentance and faith
 - “When I begin my train of thought with the gospel, I realize that if God loved me enough to sacrifice His Son’s life for me, then He must be guided by that same love when He speaks His commandments to me. Viewing God’s commands and prohibitions in this light, I can see them for what they really are: friendly signposts from a heavenly Father who is seeking to love me through each directive, so that I might experience His very fullness forever” (Milton Vincent, *A Gospel Primer*, 20).
- **Good Fruit:** Respond with love
- Application:
 - Where has your lack of faith in God or the gospel been revealed?
 - Instead of just focusing on what thorns you need to put off, what fruit might you need to seek to put on as you seek to follow Jesus?

Conclusion

Main Point: Plant yourself near the streams of the Cross to produce a life of unceasing fruit.

Read Jeremiah 17:7-8

- This is my prayer for you. May you increasing change through the power of the Cross to produce a life of unceasing fruit.

"Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. 8 He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit." (Jer. 17:7-8 ESV)