

# Fostering Change

*Discuss these questions before beginning this week's unit.*

- Think of a time when you took actions to effect positive change in your life. What caused you to take those actions?
- Think of an individual(s) who has had a significant, positive impact on your life. How did they do this? What did you appreciate about their approach?

## **Time for Change**

"Thanks so much, Jerry! I don't know what I would have done without you. I am sure this will be the last time." As Tony left his office, Jerry thought, No, it won't be the last time. You will be here again next month, and again the month after that ... It will never end.

Jerry put his head in his hands and thought about quitting his job ... again. For the past eight years Jerry had been serving as the Mercy Coordinator for Parkview Fellowship, a thriving congregation located on one of the main thoroughfares of a mid-size, American city. For years, Parkview's senior pastor had been trying to move the congregation away from an unhealthy inward focus, urging the congregation to show the love of Christ in "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Jerry bought into the pastor's vision for outreach, but he was growing increasingly disillusioned. His life seemed to be an endless cycle of people like Tony, people who for a variety of reasons, consistently struggled to pay their electric bills, consistently needed help buying their groceries, and never seemed to change. Jerry had begun to wonder if he was just enabling people like Tony, actually hurting them in the very process of trying to help them. We've got to change what we are doing, he thought. But how? Where do we begin?

There are countless churches across North America that, like Parkview, want to engage in ministry with materially poor individuals and communities. But their efforts aren't resulting in lasting change. Something isn't working.

## **WATCH VIDEO SESSION 5**

[www.helpingwithouthurting.org/smallgroup-5](http://www.helpingwithouthurting.org/smallgroup-5) or Rightnow Media session 5

1. Look back at your answer to the first preliminary question: what triggered you to pursue these changes?
  - Had you ever attempted these changes before, but failed? If so, what was different about the attempt that finally succeeded?
2. Review the list of triggers for change below:

## **TRIGGERS FOR CHANGE**

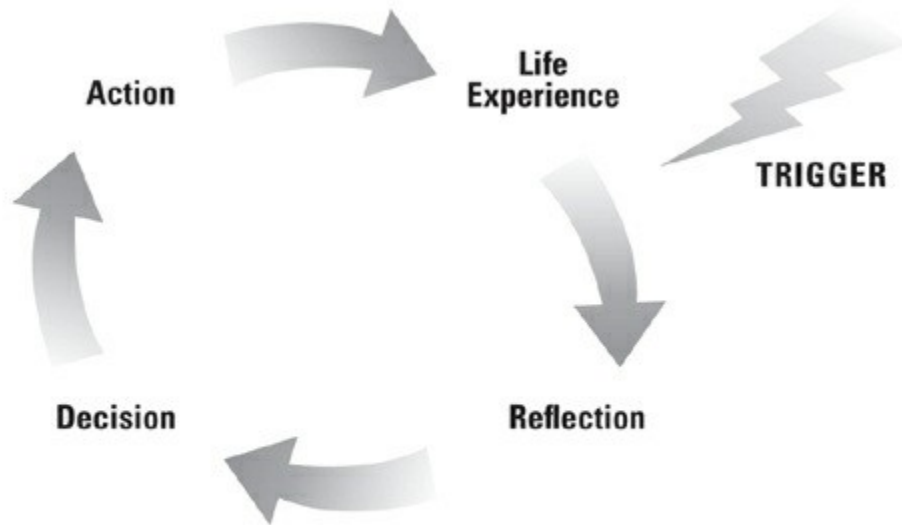
- A recent crisis
- The burden of the status quo becoming so overwhelming that people want to pursue change
- The introduction of a new way of doing or seeing things that could improve people's lives

- What potential triggers for change do you see in the lives of the materially poor people around you?
  - Are any of your actions fostering or undermining these triggers?
  - What types of obstacles are preventing these triggers from leading to successful change? In other words, where and why does the process of change fall apart?
  - Are there any ways you can better support the change process in these people's lives?
3. Given that the Holy Spirit is the one with the power to soften all of our hearts, in what specific ways can you pray for the people in your life who are currently unreceptive to change? In what areas of your own heart are you hardened to change?

### Going Deeper

*"Remember: development is a process of ongoing change, of walking with people in a way that both they and you are brought into closer relationship with God, self, others, and the rest of creation."*

Change—and thus development—doesn't happen overnight, and the end result is never guaranteed. The basic process of change can be summarized by the following diagram:



Adapted from David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1983).

Once a trigger for change causes some reflection, it is not at all automatic that the rest of the cycle will continue—major decisions, actions, or permanent changes may not occur. Indeed, a host of obstacles can get in the way of significant change. A major part of the development process is coming alongside of materially poor individuals or groups to help them remove obstacles to change that they are incapable of removing on their own, and supporting them as they remove those they can remove.

Change is a spiraling cycle of action and reflection, a learning as you go process: walk with people, trying something together; reflect on the experience, together; decide to try something additional, together; reflect again; try again.

Use the following questions to continue your conversation from Apply question 2, discussing examples of triggers for change in materially poor people around you.

1. Are the people you discussed in question two capable of overcoming their obstacles to change but choosing not to do so, or are they genuinely incapable of overcoming them?
2. In what intentional and practical ways are/could you and your ministry:
  - Encourage people as they address the obstacles to change they can overcome?
  - Help remove systemic obstacles to change that the poor cannot address on their own?