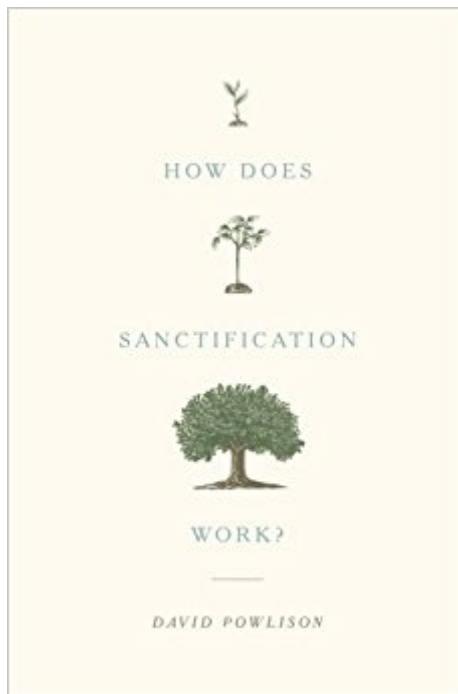


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# How Does Sanctification Work?



## Synopsis

The process of sanctification is personal and organicâ "not a one-size-fits-all formula. Many popular views try to reduce the process of Christian growth to a single template. For example, remember past grace. Rehearse your identity in Christ. Avail yourself of the means of grace. Discipline yourself. But Scripture portrays the dynamics of sanctification in a rich variety of ways. No single factor, truth, or protocol can capture why and how a person is changed into the image of Christ. Weaving together personal stories, biblical exposition, and theological reflection, David Powlison shows the personal and particular ways that God meets you where you are to produce change. He highlights the variety of factors that work together, helping us to avoid sweeping generalizations and pat answers in the search for a key to sanctification. This book is a go-to resource for understanding the multifaceted, lifelong, personal journey of sanctification.

## Book Information

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â œThereâ "s nothing more invigorating in your walk with Jesus than getting up every morning and getting actively engaged in your own sanctification. To partner with the Spirit of Christ in your own change, growth, and maturity is a wonderful way of â ^making it your ambition to be pleasing to him.â " And Iâ "m so excited that David Powlison shows the reader how to do just this in his remarkable new book How Does Sanctification Work? I give it a hearty thumbs-up!â •â "Joni Eareckson Tada,Â founder and CEO, Joni and Friends International Disability Center; author, A Spectacle of Glory and Beside BethesdaÂ â œEvery Christian leader or writer or pastor should have David Powlison whispering in his ear, â ^Godâ "s Word is deep and rich . . . donâ "t just sit on

one paradigmâ "teach the full counsel of God.â™ This book will do that for you.â •â "Paul E. Miller,Â executive director, seeJesus; author, *A Praying Life*Â andÂ *A Loving Life*âœTo know David Powlison is to know a man who is growing in the sweet fruit of sanctifying grace. To witness his ministry is to see one whom the Lord is using to sanctify many. That is why I am so grateful for *How Does Sanctification Work?* One of the most crucial areas of debate among Christians today concerns the doctrine of sanctification. Davidâ™s is a voice of sound, biblical wisdom in the midst of much confusion. If you are looking for a book on sanctification that is profoundly personal, biblically balanced, and deeply relevant, then this is it.â •â "Heath Lambert, associate pastor, First Baptist Church of Jacksonville; executive director, Association of Certified Biblical Counselors; author, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling and Finally Free*âœWhen I think about wise men who have shaped my life and thinking, David Powlison consistently rises to the top. His thoughtful and incisive insight into the human heart and what makes sanctification work is something each of us desperately needs. David recognizes that for all the conversation and writing which have taken place on the topic of sanctification, what seems to be left out is you! David helps bring his personal story and othersâ™ narratives into the discussion surrounding sanctification, and in so doing reminds us of the multifaceted way God works in peopleâ™s lives. Grab this book today, read it and soak it in, and join David and many others in the process of becoming more like our Savior.â •â "Jonathan Holmes,Â pastor of counseling, Parkside Church; author, *The Company We Keep: In Search of Biblical Friendship*âœSanctification is a very long word. Though many Christians would be able to give a simple definition such as â^growing in holinessâ™ or â^becoming like Jesus,â™ few have given much thought to the dynamics of how it happensâ "how it works. In *How Does Sanctification Work?*, Powlison helpfully identifies five ways our growth in holiness happens. The principles are grounded in Scripture and illustrated by a transparent look at how it has â^workedâ™ in his own life. And this is an encouragement for us to see how itâ "no, how Godâ™s Spiritâ "is at work in our lives, too.â •â "Timothy Z. Witmer, professor of practical theology, Westminster Theological Seminary; pastor, St. Stephen Reformed Church, New Holland, Pennsylvania; author, *The Shepherd Leader* and *The Shepherd Leader at Home*âœIn this book, David Powlison sets out a case against simplistic statements that sanctification can be reduced to a â^just do thisâ™ or â^just believe thatâ™ kind of process. Doing what he always does so brilliantly, he shows us how the riches of Scripture get applied to the details of life. Personal, practical, and bursting with fresh and important insights, here is a book to help Godâ™s people become more like Christ.â •â "Steve Midgley,Â executive director, Biblical Counselling UK; Senior Pastor, Christ Church CambridgeâœSanctification is essential to fulfilling our greatest calling in life:

namely, to love God with all our hearts and love our neighbors as ourselves. David has not only set forth the essential themes of this process but also described many of the spiritual nuances that guide our steps through this blessed transformation. "Ken Sande, president, Relational Wisdom 360; author, *The Peacemaker* & *Sanctification* is a life-and-death matter. What David Powlison offers in this book is no mere how-to manual on having your quiet time. Instead, behind this straightforward title lies an explosively powerful and practical theology of human transformation. This book is deep enough to instruct those who have spent their lives agonizing over how sanctification really works, and accessible enough to guide those who have never had the question cross their minds. In short, this book will leave you fundamentally changed for the better." Alasdair Groves, director of counseling, CCEF New England & *How Does Sanctification Work?* will refresh the souls of all who desire to grow in authentic holiness. The reader will find no "one-size-fits-all" formulas here, but rather the wise, biblical counsel of a refined theological mind as to how sanctification takes place through our relationship with God and the people that God has placed in our lives "to variably and uniquely shape our souls for our ultimate home with Christ. This is a wise and beautiful book." R. Kent Hughes, visiting professor of practical theology, Westminster Theological Seminary

David Powlison (MDiv, Westminster Theological Seminary) is a teacher, a counselor, and the executive director of the Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation. He is also the senior editor of the *Journal of Biblical Counseling* and the author of *Seeing with New Eyes*, *Good & Angry*, and *Speaking Truth in Love*.

This is an excellent discussion of how we ourselves change/mature and how we can love others well on their unique journey. And unique is stressed here - he's a counselor and well knows that people are unique and deserve and require unique counsel. We all receive love differently, in the specific moment and in the specific stage of life and circumstance. His theology is sound and his writing is oh so very clear and beautiful. I almost weep with joy at some of his deep reflections. His "own story" chapters are very insightful as samples of how he and we move from a place we don't want to be (unloving and selfish) to where we can be (loving other well). It's less of a checklist of how to do this than an observation of what's happened in his life and others. It can give a teachable heart a boost of self-compassion and compassion for others.

The whole counsel of God is our toolbox, according to Powlison. As we grow in the image of Christ,

we become more other-centered. This is a concise, refreshing, practical, and pastoral treatment.

I loved the first 8 chapters - the last three fizzled out for me. It makes me wonder if even the first eight chapters could've been abridged and the whole thing reduced to a pithy booklet. That being said, the first eight chapters contain some excellent material that I will be incorporating not only into my own life, but into my toolbox of material to use in helping others. The best material for me was in:> Ch. 6, "What Changes You?" - He has a simple, practical grid of the basic "Five Factors of Sanctification." - Foundationally, God changes you. - Secondly, The Word of Truth changes you. - Third, Wise People change you. - Fourth, Suffering and Struggling changes you. - Finally, You change."Constructive change occurs through the interplay of these five factors: God, Scripture, other People, Life Circumstances, and the Human Heart." "Foolishness either overcomplicates or oversimplifies."> Ch. 2, "Is there One Key to Sanctification?" This is his great critique of the idea that there's a master-key to the Christian life, some fool-proof, secret principle that changes everything for everyone. We tend to think that the thing that revolutionizes everything for me, must be "the key" for everyone. But we're too complex and the Word and life is too diverse for there to be one master key solution. "Theological fads and fashions come and go" - but part of the counsel of God was never intended to give us the benefits of "the whole counsel of God." New days come and new challenges arise, and we have to keep on pressing on. Our variety of needs and the varieties of helps necessarily defy "reductionism." There is no single key."Progressive sanctification is about how we live in between God's laying the cornerstone and setting the capstone."> Ch. 3, "Truth Unbalanced and Rebalancing" - If I might reword David's principle, slightly, In ministry, we over-emphasize one aspect of truth for the sake of application. In David's words, "Ministry unbalances truth for the sake of relevance; theology rebalances truth for the sake of comprehensiveness." We can only say one thing at a time and a person, practically, can only work on one thing at a time. So we make much of a single thing, and then always try to bring it back into alignment with the whole of life and the whole counsel of God."You do not build a house with only one tool in your toolbox when God gives you a truckload of tools. But you use your tools one at a time, the right tool for the right job." "In the long run, a single truth harped on will disappoint even its devotees."> 5. "We Are Sanctified By Remembering Our Justification." Throughout the book, David Powlison has been coming back to the concrete, recent example of a sanctification key, advocated by many: Remember the past grace of justification; Repreach the gospel to yourself every day; Realize that you are accepted by God because of the merits of Christ, not your own. In this chapter he highlights that this is certainly one of the tools in our toolbox - sometimes this is the very thing we

need for progress in sanctification. But it is but one part of a larger whole. A greater point to always have in mind is that God is for us: He was, is, still is, and always will be for us. Don't just look to past grace, but also to present grace and future grace, as well as many other useful motivations. David's personal testimonies in chapters 7 and 8 are rich. He weaves in the interplay of the five agents of change. Very good. "There is a reason that 'Don't be afraid' (in all its variants) is the most common command in all of Scripture." There is also a beautiful section in the last chapter describing the contrast between the peace of the believer exemplified in a text like Psalm 23, and the "anti-psalm" emptiness of the unbeliever whose life ends at the end of the valley of the shadow of death. Very good, but a bit disappointing to me. Powlison is true physician of the soul. When he speaks I want to listen. I would recommend Kevin DeYoung's, "The Hole in Our Holiness: Filling the Gap between Gospel Passion and the Pursuit of Godliness" as an additional and very satisfying book on this subject.

This little book on sanctification fails to deliver a helpful answer to the question of how sanctification works. Throughout the book, I was frustrated in my hopes of having some clear writing on sanctification. The author seems to write around the subject rather than taking it head on. In a short book like this, there isn't any room to waste words or get caught up on the semantic nuances but that is what occurs. The writing and organization of the book seemed haphazard and poorly planned. Unfortunately, this is not a book that I could give to someone or use in a discussion group, because it lacks coherency. Several times I had to go back and reread texts to figure out what the author was saying or what a list of phrases or bullet point items was meant to convey. The author gets around to presenting a five-dimensional concept of sanctification that consists of the following: God changes you, Truth changes you, Suffering and struggle change you, Wise people change you, and You change. That is sanctification. What he does emphasize through the book is the significance of Scripture and the fact that God works with each of us in a particular way that becomes our story with God. For the author, sanctification is not a process that can be directed in a pattern that is the same or repeatable for everyone. In expressing his idea of sanctification the author seems to have some misgivings about even writing about it to readers. He uses three brief and vague anecdotal stories to illustrate some points. I didn't find these very enlightening or clearly written. They were less stories than cryptic quotes and snippets. I don't necessarily disagree with the message that I could infer from the book; however, there is not a good, clear message to take away from the book. I was reading an Advance Reader's Copy of the book; in my opinion, this book needs some more precision and reflection before going forward in order to make it more impactful.

For now, I believe it would leave readers confused and uninterested. It is not well-written enough for me to even put in the church library -- unfortunately.

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