



DEAN WELCH – TEACHER

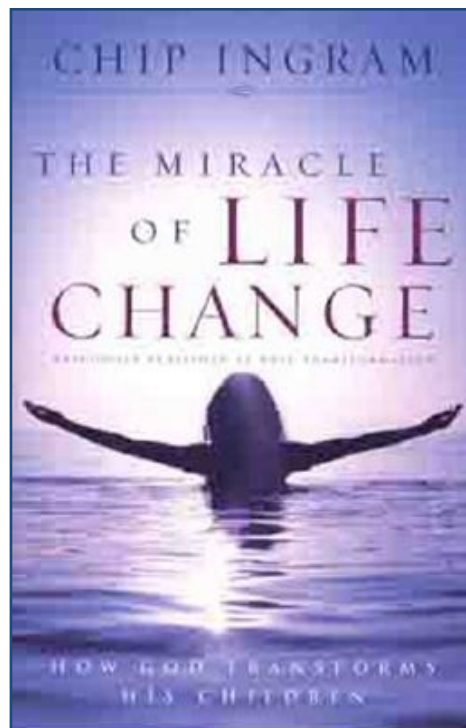
WHY TRYING HARDER DOESN'T WORK

[GOD'S SPIRITUAL TRAINING PROGRAM—EPHESIANS 4:25-32]

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

JANUARY 4, 2009

LESSON #6 FROM THE *MASTERWORK* SERIES STUDY OF:



WHY TRYING HARDER DOESN'T WORK

[GOD'S SPIRITUAL TRAINING PROGRAM—EPHESIANS 4:25-32]

A few years ago a cosmetic company sponsored a promotion in which people were asked to submit pictures and letters about the most beautiful women they knew. Thousands of letters and pictures poured in. But one particular letter from a young boy captured a lot of attention and it was shown to the president of the company. From what he wrote, it was obvious that the boy was from a broken home, staying with his father, and living in an old and run-down neighborhood.

Writing about the woman, he said, "A beautiful woman lives down the street from me. I visit her every day. She makes me feel like the most important kid in the world. We play checkers and she listens to my problems. She understands me, and when I leave she yells out the door that she's proud of me." He enclosed her picture and wrote, "This picture shows you that she is the most beautiful woman."

Intrigued, the president asked to see her picture. His secretary handed him a photograph of a smiling, toothless woman, well-advanced in years, sitting in a wheelchair. Her sparse gray hair was pulled back in a bun and the wrinkles on her face seemed to fade away beneath the twinkle in her eyes. Smiling, the president said, "We can't use this entry. It would show the world that our products aren't necessary to be beautiful."

Today as we complete our 6-week study of Chip Ingram's book, *The Miracle of Life Change*, or being transformed, I think the President of the company was right. There's a beauty, an attractiveness that's completely unrelated to physical appearance. There's a kindness, a gentleness, a concern, a love that can be seen and experienced in the lives of those around us. We've spent weeks talking and studying about the foundational tools of *being transformed*, so today we want to end with Paul's practical and specific instructions about **HOW TO** live a holy life. So, as we start, will someone volunteer to say our foundational memory verse for

this study from **ROMANS 12: 2 (NIV)**? *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Recall last week we ended our lesson with the basic principles of transformation: **put off, be renewed, and put on**. But, today, as we wrap up our last session, I hope you realize that these verses today from the end of Ephesians 4 are pure application. That is, in the sense of putting everything else we have talked about into action in your life, this lesson is probably the most important, because what we're going to end with is the role of spiritual training. And if we've learned anything from this Bible study, I pray that now all know that it's NOT ABOUT TRYING HARDER, but it's about **TRAINING**.

I read recently about a missionary returning to the United States after serving many years in the jungles of New Guinea who was asked, "What was it like? Tell us what you found there." "Found? I found a mission field that looked more hopeless than if I had been sent into a jungle of tigers." "What do you mean?" "The people there were so fierce and degraded that they seemed utterly devoid of moral sense. If a mother was carrying her little baby and the child was crying and wouldn't stop, she would throw it into the ditch and let it die.

"If a man saw his own father break his leg, he would just leave him to suffer by himself. They had no compassion whatever. They didn't even know what the word meant." "Well, what were you able to do? Did you preach to them?" "No, not at first. I thought it better to **SHOW THEM** my faith by my works! When I saw a baby crying, I picked it up and consoled it. When I saw a man with a broken leg, I sought to mend it. When I found people distressed and hungry, I took them in, comforted and fed them. "Finally they began to ask, 'What does this mean? Why are you doing this for us?' Then I had my chance. I told them about Jesus, and many of them came to know and love Jesus, too."

Talk about a transformed life—that's the way it looks. Let's get practical here at home for just a moment. One of our own members had extensive ankle surgery this past week and will be at home on bed-rest for three months. Three months! So, how does the *body of Christ* respond? Sure, we put Debi and Dennis on our prayer list last week and this week. Some of you probably called to check on them. Some may have visited Debi in the hospital. Some took meals one night. But ... is that enough? Is that an example of a *transformed* life? It's just a question. Wonder what the missionary from New Guinea would've done if he were in our class this week?

Before we look at our focal verses, let's turn to **JAMES 2:14-18 (NLT)** and answer the question we just asked: *¹⁴What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? ¹⁵Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, ¹⁶and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? ¹⁷So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless. ¹⁸Now someone may argue, "Some people have faith; others have good deeds." But I say, "How can you show me your faith if you don't have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds."*

Remember, it's not about trying harder—it's a matter of **SPIRITUAL TRAINING**. I don't know how many of you participate in the Myrtle Beach marathon every year. It's a qualifier for the Boston marathon and is a big, big deal for many. Let's suppose our class decides to ALL enter this year's event. This year it will be February 12-15th—only about four weeks away. But, I've got bad news if you haven't signed up yet because the marathon and the half-marathon are now sold out. Anyway, continuing my example about our class participating, just so you'll know, I've never run in a marathon in my life. Picture this, if you will, a person who has decided he wants to run 26.2 miles without stopping. But he has never trained nor run more than say, one or two miles at the time. That may sound insane to you, or at least painful, but suppose I

was bound and determined to set that as a goal on the day of the marathon simply said, *"I'm going to try really, really hard to run 26.2 miles without stopping even though I have never run before."* How would I do? Duh! I would have surely failed. No one in this class would be surprised if after less than a mile, or maybe two or three, exhaustion, severe blisters, and shortness of breath caused me to stop—to quit! This would not mean I was a bad person. Nor would it mean that my body was incapable of running a marathon distance. It wouldn't even mean I hadn't tried as hard as I could. But it would mean that I hadn't **TRAINED**. Probably, my body had in itself the capability of accomplishing the goal, but trying hard wouldn't get me there. I would have to cooperate with what my body already possesses and take my muscles, my lungs, and my mind into training to prepare them for the task ahead. By training, I could (hopefully) **TRANSFORM** potential into reality. The capacity to run a marathon is within almost everyone; but most of us have never gone into training to bring our bodies to the point of doing that which is already in them.

The same principle applies to changing, or being transformed, into what God has in store for each one of us. Some changes in our lives will **NEVER** be achieved by increasing our efforts (trying harder), but only by going into *spiritual training*. So, turn to **EPHESIANS 4: 25-32 (NIV)** and let's look at God's spiritual training program for you and me, paying careful attention to the things we are to **PUT OFF**, **BE RENEWED**, and **PUT ON**: *²⁵Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. ²⁹Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³²Be kind and*

compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

There are **FIVE THINGS** in God's spiritual training program in these verses that we are to work on. As we look at each of these clear and emphatic commands from God, please remember what **2 CORINTHIANS 5:17 (NLT)** tells us about being a believer: *This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!*

Looking at verse 25, what's the **FIRST** point of our spiritual training exercise? **HONESTY (PERSONAL INTEGRITY)**. What are some ways people lie? [LYING INCLUDES MORE THAN SIMPLY TELLING DIRECT FALSEHOODS. IT ALSO INCLUDES EXAGGERATION, ADDING FALSEHOOD TO THAT WHICH BEGINS AS TRUE.] Did you hear about the recent Oprah book scandal? After a similar event happened in 2005 when Oprah recommended a memoir book by James Frey, apparently it's happened again. In November 2007, Oprah introduced Herman Rosenblat and his wife, Roma, on her popular talk show, and they told their amazing story. At the time, Oprah called it *"the single greatest love story, in 22 years of doing this show, we've ever told on the air."* It was a fantastical story about Herman being a 12-year-old in a Nazi concentration camp, and how a young girl brought apples to the barbed wire fence every day, helping sustain him in the inhuman conditions. Herman is eventually liberated by the Russian army, and years later, by some twist of fate, is matched up with Roma on a blind date. Oprah ate it up, and so did America, so much so that a book was commissioned. *"An Angel at the Fence: The True Story of a Love That Survived"* was set to be released this February. Of course, it wasn't a 'true story.' The book has been pulled, as is a children's book to be based on the story, as well. And now the Rosenblats are facing scrutiny for their fabricated story.

In the book, "The Day America Told the Truth," by James Patterson, the author reports the following survey results: 91% of Americans lie routinely about matters they consider trivial ; 1 out of 3 lie about important matters; 86% lie on a regular basis to their parents; 75% lie to their friends; 7 out of 10 married people

lie to their spouses. In verse 25, God tells us to put off what? **FALSEHOOD**. And put on what? **TRUTHFUL SPEECH**. And what about renewal? **RECOGNITION OF SHARED MEMBERSHIP IN THE BODY**. It's not easy to tell the truth—especially when it might hurt someone. But, if we value good relationships, and take seriously what God says, it's essential to develop this first skill. There are no little white lies—only lies!

Moving to the **SECOND** training exercise in verses 26 and 27, what are we told? ²⁶*"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,* ²⁷*and do not give the devil a foothold.* **Is anger good?** It might be surprising to you to know that God says anger is OK—after all, it's an emotion that He created. When you're angry, don't deny it. I'm often guilty of this. When Beverly asks me if I'm angry about something, it's so tempting to say, "No, I'm not angry. I'm just frustrated." I'm learning to tell the truth by letting my anger out. When I'm angry I try to communicate it—whether it's to Beverly or in the context of my relationships with other people.

How big of a problem is anger in our world? Is it getting better or worse? Why? America is becoming a nation of angry, short-tempered people. From road rage to airplane rage, grocery store rage, and violence at youth sports events, the media has been reporting these emotional outbursts with unprecedented frequency. **What damage comes from anger? What examples have you seen?** Last Sunday, right here at the beach, we read in The Sun News about a young, recently married couple—30 years old—who got into a fight which ended up with one shooting the other and then killing themselves. Why? Anger certainly played a part. That's why it's on God's spiritual training program. Remember, we don't get into shape by trying harder—but training.

A woman tried to defend her bad temper by saying, "I explode and then it's all over with." "Yes," replied a friend, "just like a shotgun—but look at the damage that's left behind." "Anyone can become angry," wrote Aristotle. "But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the

right way--this is not easy." Solomon has a good solution: *"A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger"* (**Proverbs 15:1**)

There is a type of anger that leads to sin and there's good anger. So, how do you express anger appropriately? God gives us the answer in the second half of verse 26: *"Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry."* What the Bible is teaching here is that you need to deal with anger in a timely fashion. Don't let it simmer or fester. If anger is not expressed appropriately, it will wipe out relationships like a raging tidal wave. There's a lot of wisdom in what God says here. If you are angry, you are responsible to take care of that anger before the day is through.

Let's move to the **THIRD** training exercise of being transformed, looking at verse 28: *²⁸He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.* Let's talk about stealing. **How would you respond to this person?** *"I was hungry and I ate a chocolate bar off of your shelf, it was only 68 cents so I did not think that it would make a big difference to a store that makes billions a year. As I was leaving the store I was stopped by security and arrested for shoplifting, over a small chocolate bar. You guys make millions a year and you get uptight when someone takes a chocolate bar from your stores. I am banned from your stores for a year, well I do not care, if you are going to get stingy over a chocolate bar then I will not want to come back anyway. I am going to the press to tell about how stingy and selfish you are. For **** sake, it was just one chocolate bar."*

What do you think? Here, we are to put off what? [STEALING] And put on what? [WORK]. We are to think differently about the value of work, aren't we? **What are the benefits of work?** Remember the words of Paul in **COLOSSIANS 3:23-24 (NIV)**, *²³Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, ²⁴since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.*

Three down, two more spiritual training exercises to go. The **FOURTH** exercise for us to work on is seen in verses 29-30: *²⁹Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

So, what are we to put off based on these verses? [NEGATIVE TALK—UNWHOLESOME TALK]. What are some examples of *unwholesome talk*? Off-color jokes, profanity, dirty stories, vulgarity, double entendre, and every other form of corrupt talk should never cross our lips. Listen to what Paul says along this same line in **COLOSSIANS 3:8 (NIV)**, *"But now you also put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth."* So, we are to put off negative talk, according to the NASB, but what are we to put on? [WHAT IS HELPFUL FOR BUILDING OTHERS UP ACCORDING TO THEIR NEEDS].

In a 20-year study of 2,000 married couples, researchers have uncovered one important predictive factor in determining which couples will stay married for the long haul. If you want to have a Marathon Marriage then you need to work at maintaining a 5-to-1 ratio of positive to negative comments. Positive interactions like complimenting, smiling, and touching must outnumber negative comments like sarcasm or put-downs by a ratio of 5-to-1. Is that you? We all know the power of words. We are to build others up.

Verse 30 talks about not grieving the Holy Spirit, or as Phillips puts it in his translation: *"Never hurt the Holy Spirit. He is ... the personal pledge of your eventual redemption."* Allow me to read the lyrics from a song I recently came across: *I wonder if God cries, When we do the things we do. Do love drops fill His eyes? Cause He loves us oh so true? I oft' wish to see Him For the world apologize. For even though He's God, I wonder if God cries.* (Gary S. Paxton). **Do you think God cries?** Yes, verse 30 tells us clearly that the way we talk to others can grieve the Holy Spirit. God isn't like *"the Force"*. He is personal. He has feelings. It

breaks God's heart when something comes out of our mouth that reduces another person.

Chip Ingram told us this week that the way to get control over our speech, and tongue, is to learn to practice **SILENCE** and **SOLITUDE**. Try talking less. **PROVERBS 10:19 (NASB)** says, "*When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable.*" A good scripture verse to memorize to help you here is **JAMES 1:19b-20 (NASB)**. Follow along as I read: ¹⁹*...But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; ²⁰for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.* Bite your tongue and keep your mouth shut when you are tempted to speak inappropriately.

Finally, our **FIFTH** training exercise is seen in verses 31-32. Earlier I handed out verse 32 to you as this week's memory verse, since it sums it all up about living out this transformed life—being more *Christlike*. Compare the two lists in verses 31 and 32. **Which life do you prefer—a verse 31 life or a verse 32 life?** **What can bitterness cost us?** Josh Hunt, a pastor, tells this story about bitterness: *A handsome elderly man stopped at my study one day and asked me if I would perform a wedding for him. I suggested that he bring the bride in so that we might chat together and get better acquainted, since I hesitate to marry strangers. "Before she comes in," he said, "let me explain this wedding to you. Both of us have been married before--to each other! Over thirty years ago, we got into an argument, I got mad, and we separated. Then we did a stupid thing and got a divorce. I guess we were both too proud to apologize. Well, all these years we've lived alone, and now we see how foolish we've been. Our bitterness has robbed us of the joys of life, and now we want to remarry and see if the Lord won't give us a few years of happiness before we die."* Bitterness and anger, usually over trivial things, make havoc of homes, churches, and friendships.

In these verses, we are to put off **HATE** and put on **LOVE**. Be the first to say, "*I'm sorry, I was wrong.*" Practice what we've talked about in here before, the **Matthew 5:24 Principle**. It's where Jesus said (paraphrased), "*When you come to worship God and*

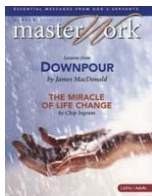
you suddenly remember that your brother has something against you—not that you have something against him—leave your offering there until you take care of something even more important.” In other words, don’t miss this, put your act of worship on hold until you go to your brother and become reconciled.

The wife of a Zulu chief happened to attend a meeting of Christians and heard for the very first time in her life about Jesus. The message of a God who loves us and forgives our sins was something new and wonderful for her to consider. She had never heard of such a God before. And it wasn’t long until she became a Christian, too. When her husband learned of this he angrily forbade her, on pain of death, ever to attend a Christian meeting again. However, eager to hear more about Jesus, she dared to go, and when her husband found out what she had done he met her on the trail and beat her so savagely that he left her for dead.

But it wasn’t long until curiosity got the better of him and he went back to look for her. She was not on the trail where he had left her. But he did see broken twigs and other signs to indicate where she had crawled away. Following them he finally found her lying under a bush. Cruelly, he asked, “And just what is your Jesus Christ doing for you now?” She opened her eyes, and looking at him, said gently, “He is helping me to forgive you!”

I wonder if we can behave like that today? Don’t you think it’s time to begin God’s spiritual training program? It’s not about trying harder, remember, it’s about leaning upon His power and using His training program to *be transformed*.

Let’s Pray.



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