

TAKING OUT THE GARBAGE—WHY DO I DO WHAT I DON'T WANT TO DO?

[I REALLY WANT TO CHANGE...SO, HELP ME GOD]

Tomorrow is January 1st—the first day of a brand new year—and I'd be on safe ground to say that there are things that each of you want to do differently next year! Right? Sure, this is the time of the year when people finalize their "New Year" resolutions and get "*psyched up*" to achieve new goals and resolutions. Climb new mountains. But to do that we must be willing and ready to accept **change**—something we really aren't too excited about usually.

I read an old *Peanuts* cartoon strip this week about in which *Charlie Brown says to Linus: "Perhaps you can give me an answer, Linus. What would you do if you felt that no one liked you?" Linus replies, "I'd try to look at myself objectively, and see what I could do to improve. That's my answer, Charlie Brown."* To which Charlie replies, "I hate that answer!"

We can identify with Charlie Brown's response, can't we? There are a number of reasons why many of us, like Charlie Brown, resist change. What are some of them? (Routine is disrupted, it creates fear of the unknown, the purpose of the change is unclear at times, it creates a fear of failure, or the rewards for changing don't match the effort it requires to change. Or people are too satisfied with the way things are.)

Change is not easy. It is always difficult and sometimes painful. The results of change are phenomenally rewarding and fulfilling, but the process can be excruciating. So, how do **YOU** react when you hear the word change? Do you think change is necessary? Why? When? How different are you today that on this same day one year ago (2005)? Remember our memory verse from our last study from **PHILIPPIANS 2:5**? ("*YOUR ATTITUDE SHOULD BE THE SAME AS THAT OF CHRIST JESUS.*") In other words, we are to have the MIND of Christ. But how can we change?

Well, today we start what most likely will be a tough nine-week journey in Dr. James MacDonald's book from a few years' ago, *I Really Want to Change...So, Help Me God*. I hope you did the first week's lessons and understand why this study will be different. This is a study to actually help people change. It's not about whether to change or what to change or how to do it best. It's for people who desperately want to change. In other words, as Dr. MacDonald says on Page 55 of the introduction to our lessons, this is a practical "how to" manual, not a philosophical discussion of how people change.

Today, we need to begin with a good foundational scripture verse. Turn to **ROMANS 12:2 (NLT)**: *²"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."* These first few weeks we'll be looking at the **PREPARATION STAGE** and getting to know the basics—like choosing the right method, the right partner and where to start.

Although this week's lesson talks about taking out the garbage in our lives, the bottom-line point of this week's Bible study is this: ***TRUE LIFE CHANGE COMES ONLY THROUGH PARTNERSHIP WITH GOD AND BEGINS BY REJECTING ALL SELF-CENTERED CHANGE METHODS.***

Let me ask you, "How was 2006 for you?" (GOOD; BAD; JUST ANOTHER YEAR) Well, the reality is, whatever 2006 was for you, you can't undo it, redo it, or not do it. It is a done deal. So, the more important question perhaps for all of us today is: "How will we fare in 2007?" Will we find ourselves six months from now wondering what happened to January? What will we do with the 365 days allotted to 2007—how will we fill the 8,760 hours that make up the next year? When 2007 draws to a close will we look back with joy or regret? Will we look forward with anticipation or fear?

I need for you to focus for a moment and remember the only time we have to live is the present. Just as we cannot go back

and relive the mistakes of yesterday, we cannot jump forward into the future to see what tomorrow holds. THIS IS THE TIME! What will we do with the time given to us day by day in 2007? Just thinking about having the MIND OF CHRIST or as we saw in Romans 12:2, being TRANSFORMED to God's ways, will hopefully echo the title of this study: I REALLY WANT TO CHANGE...SO, HELP ME GOD!

Dr. MacDonald starts with planting a picture in our mind about the *garbage* in our lives and getting rid of it. How many of you dislike "taking out the garbage at home?" Why? (BECAUSE THERE'S NOTHING IN THE BAG THAT I WANT TO SAVE—JUST GROSS FOOD REMAINS AND WRAPPERS AND THINGS THAT...WELL, GARBAGE.) If you did your Bible study this week, then you know that there are likewise several **faulty change methods** that we too need to throw out. Let me ask you, "What do you think is the number one reason we don't change?" Dr. MacDonald gives us the answer when he says that it's because at some time in the past we have tried to change, then failed, and in the process have been hurt. And, after trying a few times, we give up. It's easier just to not even try to change since we know we'll fail.

But, let's remember that there is a better way—if we follow God's plan for change. It always works! If you've tried to change and failed, it's because you've tried to change using an unbiblical method. What does God tell us about His plans for us in **JEREMIAH 29:11**? ¹¹*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* So, it's the faulty change methods that are the garbage and we need to throw it out.

I think it was C.S. Lewis that once said, *"If I keep doing what I've always done, I'm going to keep getting what I've always gotten."* That's right, isn't it? So, let's recap the three faulty psychological or worldly methods and also the three faulty spiritual methods from our Bible study this week. The first one we saw in DAY ONE this week—ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE or what we've come to know today as BEHAVIORISM. That simply means that we

respond the way we do due to our environment. Therefore, if you change your environment, you too will change! WRONG!

Turn to **LUKE 15:11-19 (NIV)** and recall with me the story of the prodigal son: *¹¹Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. ¹⁷"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.'*

How would you imagine the young son's environment at home before he left? What did he do about his environment? How did he think his life was going to be better? What happened instead? What was the real problem with this boy's life? Now, here's the point: He thought the problem was his environment: his family, the way he had been brought up, the lifestyle that he'd been given. So he took off and got a new environment. The Bible says in verse **17**, "when he came to his senses" he figured out that **HE WAS THE PROBLEM**, not his environment.

Today, how do many try to change themselves by changing their environment? (NEW JOB; NEW CITY; NEW SPOUSE—OUT WITH THE OLD AND IN WITH THE NEW) Does it work? Why? (THE PROBLEM IS INSIDE US—NOT AROUND US. WE ARE THE ONES WHO NEED TO CHANGE, NOT OUR ENVIRONMENT.)

On DAY TWO we looked at the 2nd faulty method—DIGGING UP THE PAST. The psychological theory that remedies our problems from the past is Freud's psychoanalysis. The idea here is that there's something back there. You're not aware of it, but it's back there and it's very dark. You may not remember it but it's

controlling you. It's your past. Your parents. Some painful experience. It's making you angry, depressed, fearful. But let's look at God's message about this.

Think back to the life of JOSEPH in Genesis 37-50. What do you remember about him and his past? How could he have possibly forgotten all the negative things that happened to him? Turn to **GENESIS 45:8 (NIV)** and follow along as I read: *⁸"So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.* Just to make sure the point is made, the Scripture quotes Joseph affirming that message once more in **GENESIS 50:20 (NLT)**: *²⁰You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.*

Did they sin against him? Yes! Was it evil? Yes! But did God use it for Joseph's good? Yes! God did. As a confirmation that Joseph found healing by forgetting his past, he named his first son MANASSEH, which means *"the Lord made me forget."* WOW! What a lesson—asking God for the grace to forget the past.

The THIRD FAULTY METHOD we looked at in DAY THREE (PAGE 60)—SELF-HELP or what's known today as *humanistic psychology*. This is the old Maslow/Rogers theories that people are controlled by their values and choices, so here the goal is to discover and then achieve their own potential. How many of you ever watch the *infomercials* on TV? This is THE MAIN ONE in America today, I imagine. This one says: *"The answer is within you. Find yourself. Love yourself. You have the answer. Pump it up, baby! Find it inside. You're OK. Be all that you can."* And on and on.

As I was looking for a book last week in Barnes & Noble, I wondered how many books there were dealing with self-help? Any idea? I did a quick search on their website and saw there were 82,895 books that could be accessed with just this word: SELF-HELP. As I thought about that, I wondered why there are so

many books telling people they have the power to change themselves—even people who believe in an Almighty God? What about our memory verse from **PHILIPPIANS 4:13**? Remember what it says about that? ¹³*"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

We need to be reminded of the opening words from our recent church-wide study from Rick Warren's *The Purpose-Driven Life*. What is the first sentence of Chapter 1? **IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU!** So many Christians work on their self-esteem today—but at the core of this, as Dr. MacDonald suggests, for the Christian is blasphemy. It's got nothing to do with you and me, does it? The fact that God loves us and is committed to us does not reveal anything about us; it reveals something extraordinary about God. It's called grace.

The Bible says that we are not to think too highly of ourselves. Listen to these words by Paul from **ROMANS 12:3 (NKJV)**: ³*"For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith."* **MATTHEW 10:39 (NKJV)** says it like this: ³⁹*He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.*

We need to move now to the fourth faulty method, which is spiritual: LEGALISTIC CHANGE. What is legalism? Rules, Rules, Rules! This bad method is to change by the power of rules. But, as Dr. MacDonald states, *"Rules don't change the heart!"* In fact, rules themselves just make you want to sin more. How many times have we told a child not to touch the stove because the eye is hot. What happens? Or, how many of you see a sign that says, Wet Paint, and then touches it? Or, better yet, how many of you see a speed limit sign that says 55 and drive 60 or 65? This is biblical. Look at Paul's words in **ROMANS 7:5 (NLT)**: ⁵*When we were controlled by our old nature, sinful desires were at work within us, and the law aroused these evil desires that produced a harvest of sinful deeds, resulting in death.*

I remember years ago when I was a child, our Baptist church had a rule that said we couldn't dance? Remember rules like that? Or today, even churches that have a dress code, where every single male from 3 to 99 has a suit on. Of course, God is not for or against suits. Dressing up for church when motivated by reverence and not religion can be good. The key here is to remember that *"the Lord looks at the heart."* (1 Samuel 16:7)

Legalism is a faulty approach to change that has been prescribed within the church of Jesus Christ by sincere people who want to take the Bible very seriously. But remember, there has to be a change of heart, not just an external change.

NUMBER 5: MONASTIC CHANGE. This is the concept that grows out of the concept that was identified with monks, that is, being **alone**. The goal here is true holiness by complete suppression of the will. Very popular during the Middle Ages. A vow of poverty: I will own nothing. A vow of chastity: I will abstain from all sexuality. And a vow of obedience: I will be in full submission to all authority.

Now, as Dr. MacDonald said, you may be thinking *"I'm not a monk and I've never been to a monastery,"* but how often do we try to live like monks? We try to change by suppressing our will. We try to change without the power of God, using just our own human strength. We hear about people that quit smoking or drinking or some other vice *"cold turkey"* all by themselves. Just sheer will power! Remember what Jesus said in **MATTHEW 26:41**: *"The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

The person striving to be a better person without Jesus Christ has the same answer for their moral failure as my children do when they are caught doing something they know is wrong. *When I ask them, "Why did you do this? Their usual response is "I don't know." And often that is the truth.*

On DAY FIVE (Page 64), we looked at our 6th faulty method → **INTELLECTUAL CHANGE.** Dr. MacDonald recalled the classic by

Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Remember Dr. Jekyll's thoughts as he drank the potion again and again—even though it meant he was hideous monster? *"I want to do right, but I don't."* How many times do we feel like Dr. Jekyll or say the same thing? The back-and-forth struggle of trying to change. We know in our head what's right and what we should do, but there's a big difference between knowing and having a heart change.

Look at Paul's words in **ROMANS 7:15 (NIV)**. *¹⁵I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.* Now, skip down to verses **22-23** and follow along: *²²For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. ²³But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.*

And look at the last sentence of verse **25**: *²⁵...So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.* See what he's saying? In effect, Paul says that I've come far enough to know what God wants me to do. In my mind, I'm phenomenal. Mentally, I get an A+. But when you look at my actual resume, there's a lot of failure in my life. There is a big gap in what I should be doing and what I am actually doing. Note here that **CHANGE CANNOT BEGIN UNTIL WE KNOW THAT KNOWING IS NOT ENOUGH!**

BOTTOM LINE → WE CAN'T DO IT OURSELVES! So how do we begin to change?

#1: **ADMIT THAT I AM THE PROBLEM.** To take total responsibility is to admit like Paul did in **ROMANS 7:24**—*"O wretched man that I am."* Change begins with genuine, humble, contrite admission. **It's me; I am the problem.**

#2: **TURN: ONLY GOD CAN CHANGE THE HEART.** Turn to God. Realize only He can change your heart. That's what the words of verse **25** say at the beginning: *"I thank God—through Jesus Christ our*

Lord." It's so simple, we often miss it. We must admit that we are broken and that we cannot fix ourselves. In our hearts we each now that we have done things that are wrong, but we must not rely on ourselves to fix it.

If you hired a plumber to come in and rework the plumbing in your house, and when he was done none of the plumbing worked right and all the joints leaked, would you hire that same plumber back to fix what he messed up? Or would you call someone more qualified to repair the damage, and send the other guy the bill? When we convince ourselves that we can fix our lives we are simply hiring the same person who messed things up to begin with. Personally, I want someone more experienced than me to fix things in my life, and that person is Jesus Christ.

We must submit our lives to God and release our will to him. And when we fail, notice I didn't say if, we have to return to the arms of God. There's no more—that's it. The answer is Jesus Christ.

He wants to do a work of change in our hearts. We need to come desperately before Him and ask Him to do what only He can do for us. If you really want to change—great because that's what God wants to do in your life. Remember he wants us to have the MIND OF CHRIST. And the way we do that is to do what it says in **PROVERBS 3:5-6**. *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.*

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