



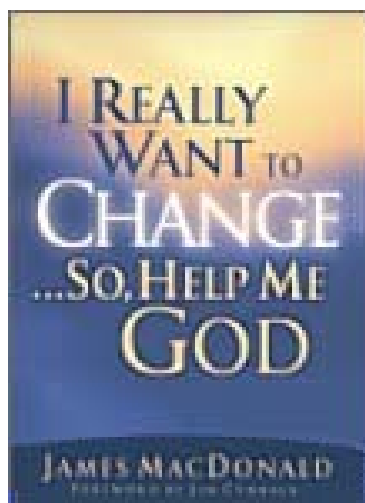
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IN A RUT LIVING THE EXHAUSTED CHRISTIAN LIFE!
[ROMANS 7-8 – “THE POWER SOURCE-THE HOLY SPIRIT”]

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

FEBRUARY 11, 2007

FROM THE *MASTER WORKS* SERIES STUDY OF:



IN A RUT LIVING THE EXHAUSTED CHRISTIAN LIFE?

[ROMANS 7-8 –“THE POWER SOURCE-THE HOLY SPIRIT”]

[HAND OUT WORDS TO “I WANNA TALK ABOUT ME” BY TOBY KEITH & PLAY SONG]

As we begin this morning, I want you to follow along with the words of a former hit country song by Toby Keith, “*I Wanna Talk About Me.*” (PLAY) What’d you think about the concept of what Toby Keith was singing about? Can you identify? So often we Christians seem to saying the same thing. It should be more about ME.

As we continue our Bible study from James MacDonald’s classic, *I Really Want To Change...So, Help Me God*, let me ask you a question. “*How many of you are tired?*” Does exhaustion seem to be a temporary or permanent state for most people you know? Why? Think for a moment with me about how the pursuit of personal transformation might leave a Christian exhausted.

Many Christians I meet are tired; many of them very tired. They don’t have the passion for God they once had and feel a kind of vague guilt about it. The sequence is always the same: countless seasons of (1) renewed expectations, (2) energetic pursuit, (3) encroaching disappointment, and finally, (4) exhaustion.

Over the last six weeks we’ve been talking about a tough subject, **CHANGE!** Many of you have diligently been pursuing change and being transformed, just like it says in **Romans 12:2** (NIV), but you too may be tired and dissatisfied with your results. Listen as I read Romans 12:2 again. ***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.***

The problem with being transformed for most of us is we haven’t been able to figure out the HOW part. We somehow think it’s got

to be done by me, me, me, don't we? Just like the Toby Keith song we heard. Like most Christians, many of us have always assumed the how-part was to be done by **me**. *"Get to work, Dean. If you really love God, you will make it happen."* *Do this, do that. If I put my mind to it, I can do it.* See. Me, Me, Me. Then, we try and try but keep failing and falling and wonder what's wrong with me. Why don't I learn? Why don't I change? Will things ever be different? Am I in a rut and living the exhausted Christian life? Are we spending so much time focusing on heaven yet feel like we're no earthly good? So what's the answer?

Dr. MacDonald gave us the answer in his *"Say It In A Sentence"* summary back on Day One (page 130): **"FOR LIFE CHANGE TO HAPPEN, WE MUST ACCESS THE POWER OF GOD FOR CHANGE, ADMITTING THAT WE DON'T HAVE THE STRENGTH WITHIN US."**

That sounds easy, doesn't it? It's not about me—it's about the power from God. Remember another memory verse we learned from **Philippians 4:13**? *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* So, what's wrong with us? Why can't we change?

Paul described something very similar in his life, a desire to change and be good, but an inability to get it done. Just like us. Turn to **Romans 7:15(-18) (NLT)** and follow along as I read verses 15-16: *¹⁵I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. ¹⁶But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good.*

In other words, Paul wanted to DO SOMETHING. The fact that he wanted to do it proved that the law is good. *"I'm just not getting it done,"* Paul explained. Then he indicated why—sin. Look at verses 17-18: *¹⁷So I am not the one doing wrong; it is **SIN** living in me that does it. ¹⁸And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't.* Did you catch what he was saying? He's describing **THE EXHAUSTED CHRISTIAN LIFE**. The victorious Christian life was eluding Paul, and

amazingly, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul admitted it. He acknowledged that at a certain point in time, his Christian life was not working for him. Fortunately, Paul's situation was only temporary. Unfortunately, for many a Christian, it's all they ever experience. Precept without power. Rules without resources. Laws without life. Initially exhausting and ultimately excruciating, it is the powerless Christian life. It causes many people to slip into what Paul calls the "THE CARNAL-MINEDED LIFE" or the "FLESHLY CHRISTIAN LIFE." Sure, they're forgiven. But failing and falling into a **lukewarm mediocrity**, believers begin to view the dynamic, spirit-filled, victorious Christian life that God promises like a carrot on the end of a stick. Ever felt that way?

Thinking about believers falling into a lukewarm mediocrity, I'm reminded of what Jesus said about the Church at Laodicea and that same spiritual condition. Turn to **Revelation 3:15-19 (NLT)** as we read about the Church at Laodicea. ¹⁵*"I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other!"* ¹⁶*But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!* ¹⁷*You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.* ¹⁸*So I advise you to buy gold from me—gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. Also buy white garments from me so you will not be shamed by your nakedness, and ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see.* ¹⁹*I correct and discipline everyone I love. So be diligent and turn from your indifference.*

How do we get to this low level of exhaustion? Think for a moment of some things that believers THINK they are supposed to do and be. Do you ever feel like you're juggling all these godly virtues and actions, trying to keep your Christian act together and going? What always results from this juggling act? [IT ALL COMES CRASHING DOWN; WE GET EXHAUSTED AND GIVE UP] Look again at **Romans 7:18**, especially the last three words: ¹⁸*And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't.* Those last three words of Paul, *but I*

can't," can you imagine why Paul would make that statement? Maybe he knew something many of us don't. I can't, but HE can!

Again, just like the Toby Keith song, we Christians continue to think that change comes about by ME. Only what I do or don't do. We appear not to have a clue about how to "POWER" the Christian life. Simply put, *"WITHOUT THE POWER OF GOD FLOWING THROUGH US, PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION WILL ALWAYS REMAIN A MIRAGE."*

Listen to the typical Sunday morning dilemma for many a believer and see if you can identify. *This dilemma plays out in most churches every Sunday morning. You come to church already exhausted, having failed at living the Christian life in your own strength the past week. The pastor stands up and says, "Be more dedicated. Be more committed. Sell out to God! Obey the Lord on this or that important matter. If He's not Lord of all, He's not Lord at all. Obedience. Obedience. Obedience! The whole service builds to an emotional song or prayer at the end where we "surrender all" for the ten thousandth time. Eventually, according to Dr. MacDonald's book, most Christians tune out the challenge to change, concluding that they just don't have what it takes and settle into a sort of numb, passionless, pseudoChristian experience. We sit and listen to preaching like this week in and week out and we feel guilty about our disobedience. We promise God we will try harder, and some weeks, if we are really serious, our promises will last all the way to Tuesday or Wednesday before we fall flat on our faces, exhausted and frustrated.*

This kind of living is a knife in the heart of Jesus Christ who not only died for our forgiveness but rose again that He might live His life through us. Let me ask you something: WHY IS JESUS CHRIST ALIVE **TODAY**? Payment for sin is complete—that's PAST accomplishment. Someday Christ will rule the earth—that's FUTURE promise. But what about TODAY? Turn to **HEBREWS 7:25 (NLT)** and listen to the last sentence of that verse for one reason: *He lives forever to **intercede** with God on their behalf.* He lives today to make intercession for us. He comes before the throne of heaven as our mediator, to make requests before the

Father for our moment-by-moment needs. WOW! But, also He wants to live His life through us. Right?

As I prepared the lesson this week, I was convicted about that statement. He wants to live His life through me. *Uh-oh! I'm afraid sometimes the Lord Jesus has looked down at my Christian experience and possibly at yours and said, "This is it? This is what I rose for? This is the degree to which you are going to draw upon My resurrection power? This is the degree to which you're going to let Me live My life through you? This is the sum total? This is as good as it gets?*

What a powerful thought that He wants to live His life through me. CHRIST IN YOU! WOW! Today, each of us needs to make a personal decision and come to the turning point of being done once-and-for-all with the exhausting Christian life and instead to pick up the true exchanged Christian life. But as Dr. MacDonald tells us over and over this week, you cannot experience the kind of power we're talking about UNTIL YOU COME TO THE END OF YOURSELF. Discard the words from Toby Keith's song, *I Wanna Talk About Me*, and focus on Christ in you. Look at Paul's words in **Romans 7:24-25 (NLT)** as he reaches that point in his walk and finally let's go and confesses. *²⁴Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? ²⁵Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.*

See, until you and I fully recognize that WE are the problem—WE are the reason that Christ is not seen in us—until we stop trying to live the Christian life and let Christ live His life through us, we will always be exhausted. Look again at verse 25. *²⁵Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.* That's the answer right there. It's Christ. He's the only one who ever lived the Christian life successfully! Our only hope is to get out of the way and let Him live His life through us.

Let me ask you if you know how much actual power or strength Christ has given us personally to live for Him? ZERO! NOTHING! There is absolutely nothing in you—not an ounce of strength...not

a smidgen of anything...not a thimbleful. And until we recognize and embrace that truth, we will inevitably fail in the process of change. We all need to remember the saying we learned several weeks ago about the HOW of change: *"Lord, there are two ways we can do this, yours and mine. Mine is not working. Let's do it your way."*

Look at **Galatians 2:20 (NLT)**. This is a classic passage on this truth about the exchanged life. ²⁰***My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*** When you received Jesus Christ as your Savior, He came to live within you, and that is the LIFE of the Christian life. Jesus will not wrestle or fight with us; as long as our flesh wants to be on top and in control, it will be.

This whole process of change is another way of seeing God's plan for SANCTIFICATION in our lives—the life-long process of changing and being transformed into the image of Christ. I think this process can be summarized in four words: **NOT I, BUT CHRIST**. That's the message of Galatians 2:20. There's the power for change. See, we really are to experience the EMPOWERED LIFE. But again where do we get this POWER? Turn to **ROMANS 8** and follow along as I read, starting in verse **2 (-13)**, but listen for clues about this power: ²*And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving **Spirit** has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death...* ⁴*He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the **Spirit**.* ⁵*Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the **Holy Spirit** think about things that please the **Spirit**...* ⁸*That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God.* ⁹*But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the **Spirit** if you have the **Spirit** of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the **Spirit** of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all.)* ¹⁰*And Christ*

*lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the **Spirit** gives you life because you have been made right with God. ¹¹The **Spirit** of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same **Spirit** living within you...¹³For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the **Spirit** you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live.*

See that? Spirit...Spirit...Spirit...Spirit. If you want to get precise about exactly what it is—Christ in me—it's the Holy Spirit. We cannot change ourselves. On our own, we cannot be like Jesus. Until we let Jesus do it by His Spirit, we are going to be exhausted. Get it? Look at the words of Christ in **ACTS 1:8**. *⁸But you will receive **power** when the **Holy Spirit** comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses,*

Being filled with the Spirit, then, is the answer we've been searching for. **Ephesians 5:18** puts it like this: *¹⁸Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit...*The Greek word for *filled* means *controlled, intoxicated, permeated, thoroughly influenced*. That's what this verse is saying, and isn't it amazing that the most common biblical illustration for the filling of the Holy Spirit is drunkenness? When someone is drunk, they don't act like themselves anymore. They say things that amuse or amaze or anger others because they have no control over their tongue. And they have little control over their actions. They also lose control of their emotions. So, the point of Ephesians 5:18 is *DON'T BE CONTROLLED BY WINE BECAUSE WINE CAN BE EXCESSIVE. INSTEAD BE CONTROLLED BY THE SPIRIT, BECAUSE YOU CAN'T GET TOO MUCH OF THAT. YOU CAN'T BE TOO FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT.*

I pray that you studied about the hindrances to the filling of the Holy Spirit during Day Four this week. They provided great insight to some of our problems in the Christian life not being exhausting. The Holy Spirit is not a force or an influence but a

coequal person in the Trinity—the triune God. As such, the Holy Spirit is influenced by our actions. Specifically, when our actions are not pleasing to the Holy Spirit, they greatly limit His work in our lives. Without the power of the Holy Spirit, we cannot experience the life changes we seek. We looked at three hindrances this week and they are:

First, [GRIEVING THE HOLY SPIRIT](#) → **Ephesians 4:30** says, *“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”* Simply put, Paul is saying that we are not to cause pain or sorrow. This is a love word. We anger or frustrate our enemies, but we can only grieve loved ones. Jesus loves us so much and when we do things that he does not want us to do, it grieves His Holy Spirit within us. It makes Him sad. It’s as though He’s asking us, *“Why are you doing this?” “Why are we going to this place or watching this? Why did you say that?”* When we take control of our lives and break God’s standard of holiness, we grieve the Holy Spirit and forfeit His transforming power.

Second, [QUENCHING THE HOLY SPIRIT](#) → Paul, in **1 THES 5:19**, warns us, *“Quench not the Spirit.”* Grieving the Holy Spirit is doing things we should have left undone. Quenching the Spirit is refusing to do things that He DOES WANT US TO DO. Every time the Holy Spirit convicts you to pursue certain behavior and we say no, we forfeit the Spirit’s filling and transformation stops. So, when you refuse to do something that the Holy Spirit tells you to do, you are quenching the Spirit in your life. If that goes on for a long time, you fall into the third thing, which is very serious.

Third, [REJECTING THE HOLY SPIRIT](#) → **1 Thes 4:3** says, *“For this is the will of God, your sanctification.”* Then the passage lists all the things God wants to change about us. If there have been things that God has been trying to change in you and you have been saying, *“No. I don’t want that for my life.”* This is serious. When we grieve and quench the Holy Spirit so long that we’ve essentially rejected the ministry of God’s Spirit in our life by

refusing to change, or be sanctified, we have rejected God Himself. That blocks all the transforming power of the Spirit in us.

Trying To Be A Better Person Without the Holy Spirit Is Futile And Frustrating. So, the ways we are to be FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT were outlined in Day Five this week. There are three ways we studied. ¹CONFESS ALL KNOWN SIN, ²ASK THE HOLY SPIRIT TO FILL YOU, and ³BELIEVE YOU HAVE RECEIVED THE SPIRIT'S FILLING.

If you're living the exhausted Christian life, today is the day to die to self and be alive to Christ in you. Confess your known sins and then simply ASK for the power to fill you. Then believe and it will happen. The words of Jesus confirm this in **Luke 11:9-10 (NIV)**, *⁹"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.*

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