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## If You Could Change One Thing, What Would It Be?

**Isaiah 40:31: (KJV) But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.**



Happy New Year! Happy new beginning! Happy new opportunity to resolve to make changes in your life once and for all, only to be shot down later by the steady force of habit, life and expectations later...wait a minute...that's not happy! The truth is, for most of us a new year and a new beginning spells disaster and defeat. How can we approach change in a way that offers different results? Well, stay with us - we have a few ideas and a textbook (the Bible!) to back them up!

*Christian Questions received an inspiring letter from a listener that influenced today's content. We will call her "Rebecca," who responded to our August 31, 2014 program entitled, "What Happens When Life Gets Broken?" She shared with us a letter she wrote to God, laying her eating disorder issues in front of Him with sincerity and the desire for change. Our personal response to her included what would become the theme for this program. Thank you, Rebecca, for sharing your story!*

Today we will make six observations regarding the pathway and obstacles of change. We hope this will create a better basis for understanding how to make lasting changes in life.

**KNOW THE FOCUS OF WHAT YOU ARE LOOKING TO CHANGE. IS IT AN EXTERNAL BEHAVIOR OR AN INTERNAL ATTITUDE OR PERSPECTIVE? IF OUR CHANGE IS FOCUSED FROM THE INSIDE OUT, THEN OUR EFFORTS WILL BE FROM A DEEPER SOURCE AND THEREFORE INHERENTLY MORE FRUITFUL THAN THOSE SPURRED BY ATTEMPTS TO CHANGE THOSE THINGS PLAINLY SEEN ON THE SURFACE.**

Most of us look to change something on the outside, and most of us fail in that attempt because we are treating a symptom and not the problem. If you treat a symptom without removing the source, it eventually comes back. We want to look at change from the inside out rather than the outside in. External focus does NOT get the job done, though, this is where most of us start.

**An Old Testament example:** King Nebuchadnezzar was king at the time of Daniel. He learned over time where to focus his heart devotion. A lifelong idolater, would he simply make proclamations about God Almighty or would he learn to truly worship Him with his very being?

**The conclusion of the miraculous deliverance of the three Hebrews from the fiery furnace by God:** Daniel 3:28-30 **The King sums up the courageous and active faith he has just witnessed:** <sup>29</sup>*Therefore I make a decree: (could this be like us making resolutions?) Any people, nation, or language that utters blasphemy against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins; for there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way.* <sup>30</sup>*Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.*

Though astounded (again) by the power of the Almighty, *his astonishment is not a heart conversion!* Proclamations are dramatic and exciting but not necessary life-changing!

**A New Testament example:** Matthew 23:1-4: Lesson: Our words - our outward proclamations - often acknowledge that which is right and at the same time divert attention away from the core beliefs that we hold in our hearts. The King proclaimed that no one should blaspheme the Almighty, but he did NOT proclaim that the Almighty is ruler over ALL THINGS. **That which is on the surface has its roots in the heart!** If you want to change that which is on the surface, look at what is in the heart.

Internal focus DOES get the job done! Sometimes we let everything else divert us from this focus. When we finally settle on internal focus, amazing things can happen!

The next experience of King Nebuchadnezzar that we drop in on was many years later after he had allowed his pride to smother any potential true reverence for God. After ignoring clear warnings of the path he was on, he was punished by losing control of his faculties for seven years.

**The results of a truly humbled heart:** Daniel 4:34-37: Nebuchadnezzar does not proclaim, he simply *realizes* that God is Lord over all that we build - *His* kingdom is mighty and everlasting!



<sup>35</sup>All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and He does what He wills with the host of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. There is no one who can stay His hand or say to Him, What are you doing? <sup>36</sup>At that time my reason returned to me; and my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom. My counselors and my lords sought me out, I was re-established over my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me.

<sup>37</sup>Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are truth...Nebuchadnezzar does not proclaim, he simply *personally acknowledges* that God is the ultimate destination of all our praise and worship. and His ways are justice; and He is able to bring low those who walk in pride. Nebuchadnezzar does not proclaim, he simply *accepts* that God is Lord over who we are, from the inside out.

**Internal vs. external compared:** Romans 14:1-4: Sometimes the outward "proclamations" that we make can in fact be contradictory to those that others make. The most important thing is that we are spiritually focused internally to provoke our external actions and that we are not violating scriptural principle in any way.

We can have disagreements. In Romans, some did not want to eat meat that had been offered to idols. Others said it did not mean anything, so it was okay to do. This is about standing for scriptural principle, looking at the one who disagrees with you with compassion and understanding. **Our internal conviction should direct our outward actions to the glory of God!** Romans 12:1-2: Some people have issues with speaking without thinking. If you want to change that, you have to figure out what provokes those emotions. How can you look at those emotions from a scripturally-principled approach and create a filter to make it so you think first and do not just react? We need to realize change on the inside provokes change on the outside.

**BACKSLIDING HAPPENS. THE ROAD TO TRUE INSIDE OUT CHANGE IS FULL OF POTHoles AND DETOURS. IT IS LONG AND OFTEN PAINFUL BUT WELL WORTH THE JOURNEY!**

Proverbs 24:16: (NASB) *For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, but the wicked stumble in time of calamity.* Seems like being righteous is dangerous business since we keep falling down! We need protective gear! Ephesians 6:10-13: (NASB) <sup>10</sup>*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. To be strong in the Lord is to have our inner conviction clear and focused. Because our inner conviction is clear, arming ourselves is not only logical; it becomes a life and death choice, for our enemy, the one who would have us fall - Satan - is the mighty, dark and authoritative lord of this world.*

**Sometimes our backsliding and weakness is predictable and can be revealed even before it happens:** Luke 22:31-34: We can be blessed in spite of our weaknesses. We all know what Jesus said would happen actually did happen. We also know Jesus, after his resurrection, helped Peter to accept forgiveness and to then accept responsibility for the brotherhood. What we sometimes do not think about is that Peter was not beyond backsliding, even after all of this...

Galatians 2:11-14: The early church came from two very different worlds: The Jews had the Law Covenant and the Gentiles had only the spirit of the Law. Peter was eating previously forbidden food with the Gentiles because he knew it was now okay to do that. He had received a specific vision from God showing approval. But when visited by Christian Jews from Jerusalem, Peter withdrew from the Gentiles and acted how the Jews expected them to. He folded under pressure.

Peter was the spokesman at Pentecost when everything changed. He was given the keys for Gentiles to follow Christ, he was called to the conversion of the first Gentile, Cornelius, and now here he went back on all of that in a moment of weakness. Backsliding happens! If it can happen to the Apostle Peter, it can certainly happen to us.

To walk the road of real, true change is to accept the concept: backsliding is going to happen. This helps us not to give up. We have to move to something that will support us.

Matthew 12:20: (NASB) *A battered reed He will not break off, and a smoldering wick He will not put out, until He leads justice to victory.* Sometimes we are like that smoldering wick. The greatest relief of all is Jesus knows how easily we can trip, fall or backslide, and as long as we are still focused on him, his compassion can reign in our lives. Don't lose heart!



**FAITH IS POWERFUL AND WE MUST UNDERSTAND HOW IT WORKS. FAITH DOES NOT REDUCE THE BURDEN OF OUR BACKSLIDING OR THE PAIN OF OUR POTHOLES, RATHER FAITH INCREASES OUR FORTITUDE TO NAVIGATE THROUGH THEM. OUR FAITH DOES NOT MAGICALLY LIFT US TO SAFETY - INSTEAD IT IS A REAL BEACON OF LIGHT THAT SHOWS US THE PATH TO SAFETY! FAITH IN GOD SHOULD TRULY BE THE TRUE NORTH OF OUR LIFE COMPASS.**

We do not ask God to take away the difficulty; we ask Him for the strength to take us through the difficulty.

**Jesus makes having faith a very attractive proposition:** Matthew 11:28-30: He shows us how to rest *through* our experiences and difficulties. Even though it is attractive, it is a very sobering experience to LIVE our faith. We can only truly know how to live it by taking our humanity out of the way. 1 Corinthians 2:3-5: Paul could have simply impressed the Corinthians with his eloquence, knowledge and influence, but he chose to help them with their necessary changes through the power of God instead. **Walking the walk of unshakable faith:** 1 Corinthians 16:13-14: (NASB) <sup>13</sup>*Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.* <sup>14</sup>*Let all that you do be done in love.* Our own changes in life come more freely when we act out of love for others.

**A perspective of faith allows us to fight the fight of necessary change by granting us a source of strength beyond our own natural resources:** 1 Peter 5:8-9: (NASB) <sup>8</sup>*Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* <sup>9</sup>*But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.*

James 1:2-4: (NASB) <sup>2</sup>*Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,* <sup>3</sup>*knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.* <sup>4</sup>*And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

Don't be *defined* by your mistakes - learn from them!

**TO CHANGE, SOMETIMES WE NEED HELP. WHETHER IT IS FROM THOSE AROUND US WHO ARE ALSO ABOUT OUR FATHER'S BUSINESS OR FROM GOD THROUGH HIS SPIRIT, OUR WALK IS NOT AND SHOULD NOT BE A LONELY ONE.**

One of the dangers of Christianity can be the thought that it is "me and my Lord Jesus and we can do everything ourselves." While that personal one-on-one connection is important, we also need the fellowship of those around us.

Galatians 6:1-7: (NKJV) <sup>1</sup>*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.* <sup>2</sup>*Bear one another's **burdens** <922>, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

**Burden:** Strong's #922 *baros* (bar'-os); probably from the same as 939 (through the notion of going down); weight; in the New Testament only figuratively, a load, abundance, authority

We are to help one another bear the weight of the experience. Help for our difficulties is built into the body of Christ - we just need to be willing to get the help that we NEED, which may not be the help that we WANT! It takes humility to know that we need help. <sup>3</sup>*For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.* <sup>4</sup>*But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.*

The quality of "spiritual" doesn't mean smarter or older - contrarily, it means spiritually *mature* - living and doing for higher reasons with no thought of earthly gain but only the focus of Christ-likeness. Helping others could be a temptation of personal pride and ego: "I'm better off and can rescue you." <sup>5</sup>*For each one shall bear his own **load** <5413>.* <sup>6</sup>*Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.* <sup>7</sup>*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.*

**Burden/Load:** Strong's #5413 *phortion* (for-tee'-on); an invoice (as part of freight), i.e. (figuratively) a task or service

Each of us has the task of our own lives. I cannot bear your burden and you cannot bear mine. We can help with the weight of the experiences. We need support from those who have the same kind of faith and who can be compassionate on a spiritual level.





**Our theme Scripture:** Isaiah 40: 31: (NASB) *<sup>31</sup>Yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.* **Now let's look at its context:** Isaiah 40:26-31: (NASB) *<sup>26</sup>Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created these stars, the One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power, not one of them is missing.*

**First Point: PERSPECTIVE!** Look UP to Him who is truly mighty and acknowledge His power and wisdom!

**Second Point:** Realize that His understanding and His way TAKE NOTICE of all things! Sometimes we think God forgets us or that we are overlooked. It becomes very depressing. Here is a "Rick translation:" **NEWS FLASH!** *The Everlasting God does not get weary or tired. He does not forget you. His understanding is beyond your ability to comprehend anything! The one doing the forgetting is YOU.*

**Third Point:** Believe that He is an endless power source compared to those in the prime of their life and to those who are mighty in the eyes of men. The picture given is men who were trained for war, at the peak of their physical prowess - the strongest of the strong, the most disciplined of the disciplined. God NEVER gets weary.

**And now we come back to our theme Scripture:** Isaiah 40: 31

**Fourth Point:** Trade in your old source of strength and put on HIS strength - for it is only then that we can mount up with wings and not become weary! Philippians 4:13: *I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.*

**PRAYER REALLY CAN CHANGE THINGS. WE MUST ALWAYS ASK GOD FOR HIS STRENGTH AND HIS WILL. WHAT CHANGES WILL BE OUR PERSPECTIVE AND THEREFORE OUR ACTIONS. CIRCUMSTANCES NEED NOT CHANGE!**

**Jesus showed us he was the conduit through which we could be blessed:** John 16:24  
Matthew 7:7-11: This sounds like a way to receive everything we really want. But that is not what Jesus is saying. We have to always look at the whole context and not just the part that is most appealing. The end result here is so *your joy may be made full*. We are to go through Jesus to get to God - seems like a fool-proof plan for change...so, why doesn't it always work? What could get in the way? James 4:1-4: Here is where we need to seek the *right* help from the *right* kinds of sources. Our motivation must be godly. We are not just to fulfill our own desires. We are not to ask for change for the sake of appearance to others. We should not be commanding God or demanding of God in our prayers. We should plead for His will. The throne of grace is not where we are to place our demands. We are seeking blessings we do not deserve but that God's mercy will give us anyway. Our motivation must be in the right place for prayer.

**NEVER GIVE UP! THE HARDEST TRIALS, THE MOST PAINFUL EXPERIENCES REALLY DO PROVIDE US WITH THE GREATEST GROWTH AND MATURITY AS FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST. JESUS BORE THE BURDEN OF THE WORLDS' SIN. SURELY WE CAN BEAR THE BURDEN OF OUR OWN EXPERIENCES WITH JESUS AS OUR EXAMPLE AND GUIDE!**

**Find true deep spiritual inspiration to help in your battle for true inner change:**  
Hebrews 12:1-3 **Be prepared for the difficulties, even the tragedies in life, with an attitude toward and a focus on the big picture:** Habakkuk 3:17-19: Even if everything around us falls apart, we can still rejoice in God's blessing. It is not necessarily reflected to us in physical abundance; it is more often reflected to us in spiritual growth and maturity. True change in our lives needs to lead us down the road of spirituality. It has to start from the inside out. It has to be with the understanding that we are going to have backsliding - and that is okay. It is a beacon of light to navigate through circumstances and not to change them. We need help sometimes. We need to continue to pray without ceasing. Never, never, never give up! We want to put ourselves in a position so our lives can be more fruitful to the glory of God.

***So, if you could change one thing, what would it be?  
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...  
Think about it...!***