

Self-Image Makeover

He was a short man and couldn't see over the crowd. So he ran on ahead and climbed up in a sycamore tree so he could see Jesus when he came by.

When Jesus got to the tree, he looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, hurry down. Today is my day to be a guest in your home."

Zacchaeus scrambled out of the tree, hardly believing his good luck, delighted to take Jesus home with him. Everyone who saw the incident was indignant and grumped, "What business does he have getting cozy with this crook?"

Zacchaeus just stood there, a little stunned. He stammered apologetically, "Master, I give away half my income to the poor—and if I'm caught cheating, I pay four times the damages."

Jesus said, "Today is salvation day in this home! Luke 19:3-10 MSG

Did you ever sing the song about Zacchaeus, “a wee little man”? He was very short and very rich. Zacchaeus worked for the Roman government as a chief tax collector, a job despised by the Jews because tax collectors were notorious for collecting more than people actually owed. But Jesus singled out Zacchaeus, called him by name, and invited himself to dinner. Jesus didn't act like other religious leaders. He loved the untouchables of society and gave everyone a chance to change. His acceptance and his teaching triggered an inner makeover in Zacchaeus and a change of outward behavior too.

Real change starts inwardly but needs to be confirmed by changed behavior. Some people might not believe the change and still talk about our old, bad ways, but Jesus will stand with us. We must go from inner convictions to outward commitment to improve. Each day we can examine our actions and words and ask if we need to change, and then choose to do so.

Do you know someone who has made many mistakes? Speak to her with kindness and acceptance. Your words could start an inner makeover just as Jesus' did for Zacchaeus.

Action Step: Make a choice to make one change for the better and work on it.

Let Go of Fear

Another of the disciples said to Him, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father."

But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead."

When He got into the boat, His disciples followed Him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being covered with the waves; but Jesus Himself was asleep.

And they came to Him and woke Him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing!"

He said to them, "Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?" Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm.

The men were amazed, and said, "What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" Matthew 8:21–27 NASB

We can make up excuses or choose to follow Jesus. But deciding to attend church, or or make a lifestyle change doesn't mean we won't react with fear or worry. We can't control our emotional response when we hear a strange noise in the night, strong winds shake our home, or friends tease us for our faith.

The storm in this passage took place on the Sea of Galilee, which is thirteen miles long, seven miles wide, and 150 feet deep. Storms can come up suddenly as winds rush down from the mountains that surround the sea; twenty-foot waves crashing against a boat cause even experienced sailors to panic. Jesus used this storm to show the disciples his miraculous power.

Our fears are opportunities to trust God and see his power at work. Jesus' question is something we can ask whenever we feel afraid—Why am I afraid, woman of little faith? Then remember Jesus is with you. Remember how he helped the disciples and others. Trust his power. Replace fear with trust. Instead of imagining all the things that can go wrong, which increases fear, imagine all the ways Jesus can help to build trust.

Action step: Ask God to help you replace a fear with trust in Him.

Pity Parties

He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. . . .

But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered.

When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die."

And the LORD said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow . . . And should not I pity Nineveh?" Jonah 4:5, 7–11 ESV

Jonah finally obeyed God and saved the people of Nineveh from destruction and God's wrath. However, Jonah didn't like the Ninevites and was mad that God forgave them! He was so upset that he asked God to take his life. When Jonah had been inside a fish for three days, he prayed and received God's mercy, but he didn't want God's mercy to go to these non-Jewish people even though they repented of their wickedness. Jonah sat alone and held a pity party.

God used a little plant and a worm to illustrate Jonah's heart condition. God wanted Jonah to have compassion for the people and realize God would have been sad if he had destroyed them, especially since he created them. He wants us to understand that his mercy extends to all people.

In a pity party we focus on our feelings, complaints, and not getting what we want. We can look like a child having a temper tantrum. We have no reason for pity parties or desires for God to destroy evil people.

Instead, God calls us to pray for sinners, love our enemies, share our faith to help save them, and trust in his mercy.

Action step: Make a list of reasons to be grateful. Focus on those rather than your complaints.

Against God's Will

But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. . . .

Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. . . .

They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. . . .

He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you." . . .

Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. . . .

But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights. Jonah 1:3a, 4,7b, 9, 12, 15, 17 NIV

When we deliberately turn from what we know God wants us to do, we will struggle and might cause hardships for many other people. This happens, for example, when a spouse or child turns from God and causes heartache and broken relationships.

In the Old Testament, God called Jonah to a mission, but Jonah ran the other way to hide from God. Jonah's choice led to problems for many people. When Jonah accepted the blame and the sailors tossed him into the sea, God calmed the waters and the ship and crew survived. When Jonah admitted his responsibility, he also chose to give his life to save the sailors. The sailors, amazed by God's power, worshipped him. God used Jonah's disobedience to change hearts. Jesus referred to Jonah's time in the fish to illustrate his coming time in the grave.

Jonah's time in the big fish gave him time to pray, think, and choose to obey God. Admitting our responsibility when we have turned away, and admitting our sins, restores our relationship with God and gives us another chance to obey God, accept his plans for our life, and do what he calls us to do.

Action: Ask yourself why you are unhappy. Did you go against God's will at some point. If so, ask for forgiveness and let go of the guilt. Resolve to obey God.

Opposition

I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 7:19–25 NLT

Struggling to make the right choice or just to try to figure out what is best can cause great anguish and inner turmoil. Our opposition is sometimes within us, especially when we try to overcome bad habits. Paul wrote to the Romans to give them a clear picture of faith. He also honestly shared his own shortcomings to show how faith helped him in his personal struggles.

Admitting our problems and weaknesses is the start of overcoming challenges. When we confess that we need help, we are then opened to receiving support from God and God's people. Loving God's law doesn't make us live it. We are by nature sinful and naturally choose to do wrong. We see this truth operating in young children, who must be taught to share, speak honestly, and be kind.

The struggle between evil and good is ever present. As Paul learned, we have help in our struggle, for Jesus is the answer. He gives us strength and showed us how to live. Each day we can remember that Jesus saved us and set us free from sin. We can make better choices one day at a time.

Action: Pray for God to show you any opposition within your heart or mind.

Restoring Lost Years

"Be glad, O children of Zion,
and rejoice in the LORD your God,
for he has given the early rain for your vindication;
he has poured down for you abundant rain,
the early and the latter rain, as before.
"The threshing floors shall be full of grain;
the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.
I will restore to you the years
that the swarming locust has eaten,
the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter,
my great army, which I sent among you.
"You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,
and praise the name of the LORD your God,
who has dealt wondrously with you.

And my people shall never again be put to shame. Joel 2:23-26 ESV

God sent Joel to prophecy coming disaster. The Israelites had become wealthy and relied on their money. They forgot God and turned to idolatry and sin. God planned to punish them for their sins. But God also gave Joel a message of future restoration

Terrorism, violence, and divorce destroy families and lives. Restoration takes a long time and hard work. We suffer the consequences of living in a world where evil often reigns, and we also suffer the consequences of our own actions, whether having an affair or going alone somewhere dangerous at night. We have seasons of brokenness and seasons of restoration. God forgives and restores us when we desire to follow him.

God can restore broken relationships and help us overcome fear. He also will restore loss due to devastation we suffered. He can refill our lives with love and joy and help us rebuild finances. He wants us to enjoy life once again.

When we struggle with great loss or ruin, we can cling to the promises of God for restoration. God wants to restore our hearts first, and that means we must open up and accept God's love as well as confess all sin.

Action: Confess any sins and ask God to forgive you.

Marital Strife

David, wearing only a linen cloth around his waist, danced with all his might to honor the Lord. And so he and all the Israelites took the Covenant Box up to Jerusalem with shouts of joy and the sound of trumpets. As the Box was being brought into the city, Michal, Saul's daughter, looked out of the window and saw King David dancing and jumping around in the sacred dance, and she was disgusted with him. . . .

Afterward, when David went home to greet his family, Michal came out to meet him. "The king of Israel made a big name for himself today!" she said. "He exposed himself like a fool in the sight of the servant women of his officials!"

David answered, "I was dancing to honor the Lord." . . .

Michal, Saul's daughter, never had any children. 2 Samuel 6:14–16, 20–21, 23 GNT

My husband always ruins the laundry." "My husband sits on the coach and gets fatter." "My husband is lazy and will never get a good job." Ridiculing our husband shows lack of faith in him and disrespect.

Michal, daughter of King Saul and wife of David, struggled with pride and hurt. Her disgust may have been tied to belief that a king should not dance with commoners or that David worshipped God more than her. She privately ridiculed her husband. David responded with remarks that reminded her that God chose him as king of the people, and he would honor God for all to see. He would set an example of sharing joy in the Lord. Releasing emotions can be done appropriately, but it's more important to communicate to resolve issues to lessen stress.

Michal had not joined David and the people in the street. She had remained alone in her room. She may have wanted him to come to her first and pay attention to her after waiting for his return. But he was the king and his people needed him, too. They needed to communicate better.

Michal's barrenness reflected on the strain her attitude put on her marriage. Men don't need a wife to ridicule them. She did it privately, but many women do it publicly. Listen to yourself. Are you too critical? Calling your spouse derogatory names, or berating him for his actions reveal a resentful heart.

Action: If you are having strife in marriage or another relationship, schedule time to really talk about it and stay focused on the one issue.

Not Your Battle

After King Josiah had done all this for the Temple, King Neco of Egypt led an army to fight at Carchemish on the Euphrates River. Josiah tried to stop him, but Neco sent Josiah this message: "This war I am fighting does not concern you, King of Judah. I have not come to fight you, but to fight my enemies, and God has told me to hurry. God is on my side, so don't oppose me, or he will destroy you."

But Josiah was determined to fight. He refused to listen to what God was saying through King Neco, so he disguised himself and went into battle on the plain of Megiddo.

During the battle King Josiah was struck by Egyptian arrows. . . .

There he died and was buried in the royal tombs. 2 Chronicles 35:20-24 GOD'S WORD

Parents try to tell grown children how to raise their children, women try to tell others how to dress, and sometimes we try to get between fighting friends to help settle the dispute. But we have enough battles of our own without getting into some where we don't belong.

King Josiah, the sixteenth king of Judah, became king when he was only eight. He was one of the southern kingdom's best kings. He wholeheartedly obeyed God's laws throughout his thirty-one-year reign.

Tragically, his end came when he stressed over going to battle against the Pharaoh of Egypt against God's message to stay out of the battle. He fought a battle that wasn't his and died doing it.

Josiah might have worried that the soldiers would march across his land, win their battle, and then fight his people. Josiah didn't pray and ask God to confirm King Neco's message but went into action himself.

Impulsiveness can be costly; stress causes us to leap when we should pray and think. When you start to worry and stress, decide to stop, look, and listen. Evaluate the situation and decide if it's your battle. Enter in only where you belong.

Action: Ask if what is stressing you out is even your battle. If not, let go and let people know you are not part of that problem. If it is your responsibility then be willing to make changes and resolve the problem.