

Last month, we talked about how our self-image and self-worth are shaped by our natural development and upbringing. We looked at Israel and saw that although God had delivered them out of Egypt, there was still a work that needed to take place to get Egypt out of them.

This month, I want to go directly into how we present ourselves to God so that these needed changes can take place. **Romans 8** tells us that to remain “carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (v. 6). This puts responsibility squarely in our corner, but it is not as though we are left alone in the process. Just a few verses later, Paul tells us in **Romans 8:26** “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”

God has not called us to transformation and then left us to accomplish it through our own strength. The Holy Spirit is present to help us in our weaknesses. So, let’s take a look at nine steps we can take, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, to make the needed changes in our lives.

1. Put on Truth.

- **Ephesians 6:14** Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth,
- **Ephesians 4:22–24** 22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

2. Get an understanding of how your mind is affected by being directly linked to the Word of God.

- **Romans 8:7** Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.
- **1 Corinthians 2:14** But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

3. Do not allow handicapped thinking to become a permanent barrier.

- In other words, don’t continue paying attention to things you know do not agree with the Word of God. **2 Corinthians 10:4–5 (NET)** 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not human weapons, but are made powerful by God for tearing down strongholds. We tear down arguments 5 and every arrogant obstacle that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to make it obey Christ.

4. Our old self-image must die in order for His image to be formed in us.

- **1 Corinthians 3:18** Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.

5. Realize that when you put your mind into the Word of God, you are putting all of your failures into proper perspective.

- **Romans 12:3** 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.

6. Take action to deliberately change your behavior, providing you are walking in Step 1.

- **2 Corinthians 3:18** But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

7. Choose a creative challenge.

- A personal achievement can boost your self-worth, so put some of your dreams and goals into action.

8. Stop being so easily offended; become comfortable with criticism.

- A person who is easily offended can receive 99 compliments, but one suggestion for improvement erases them all.
- Don't take a suggestion meant for your good as a personal affront. Don't assume the person is out to destroy you.
- Remember, the words others say are not personal until we choose to make them so.
- I find that almost 100% of the time, when people attack others in a negative or destructive manner, it is because those very things are at work within them.

9. Purpose not to live a negative lifestyle. Our faith is not designed for that lifestyle.

- We can live with good common sense, but our God-given faith should not be determined by common sense alone.
- Natural life is too unpredictable.
- To be led by the Spirit is predictable.

You see, we all have strongholds that must come down. Too many people make strongholds out to be a complex subject. At their core, strongholds are incorrect patterns of thinking—patterns in our minds that have become programmed to think contrary to the truth. So how do we tear down strongholds? ***Strongholds are built upon deception and lies that we have accepted into our thinking.*** How do you

counter a lie? How do you counter deception? With truth. And where do we find the truth? In the Word of God. **Ephesians 6:17** "...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

This is why transformation requires more than simply recognizing that our thinking is wrong. Truth must replace what we have believed. The Holy Spirit works with us, but we must be willing to recognize the strongholds, confront them with truth, and then **act upon what God has said**.

Let's take another look at an Old Testament example. Before the Exodus we mentioned last month, Moses had to deal with the things keeping him from responding to God's purpose for his life. Israel needed to get Egypt out of their hearts, but Moses had to get some things out of his thinking as well. He had strongholds of his own. When we look at his objections, we can see both the thinking that held Moses back and how God answered each one.

1. "Who am I?" - Exodus 3:11 Moses points to his inadequacy.

- God responds: "I will certainly be with you." **Exodus 3:12**
- God does not build up Moses' confidence by telling him how capable he is. He redirects Moses' confidence toward His presence. The answer to Moses' inadequacy is not greater self-confidence from the natural; it is confidence in the God who is with him.

2. "Who are You?" - Exodus 3:13 Moses points to God's authority.

- God responds: "I AM WHO I AM." **Exodus 3:14**
- Moses does not need to manufacture authority. His authority comes from the One who sent him. God establishes the foundation for Moses' obedience in who God is, not in who Moses thinks he is.

3. "What if they don't believe me?" - Exodus 4:1 Moses points to acceptance.

- God responds by giving him signs. **Exodus 4:2-9**
- God provides Moses with what he needs to validate the message. Moses does not have to control how people respond; his responsibility is to obey God and faithfully deliver what God has given him.

4. "I am not eloquent." - Exodus 4:10 Moses points to his ability.

- God responds: "I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say." **Exodus 4:11-12**
- Again, God does not deny Moses' perceived weakness; He answers it with His own sufficiency. Moses sees an inability. God sees an opportunity for dependence.

5. "Please send someone else." - Exodus 4:13 Moses points to his unwillingness.

- God responds by providing Aaron. **Exodus 4:14-17**
- God is angry with Moses' resistance, but He still provides help. Aaron will speak with Moses, but Moses is still the one God has called. God accommodates Moses' weakness without removing Moses' responsibility to obey.

6. "Why have You sent me?" - Exodus 5:22-23 Moses points to his discouragement.

- God responds: "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh." **Exodus 6:1**
- God does not change His promise because Moses' circumstances have changed. He brings Moses back to what He has said and what He is going to do. Moses is learning that obedience cannot be judged solely by immediate results. Sometimes the circumstances around us appear to contradict the promise before we ever see the fulfillment.

Look at the progression. Moses begins with "Who am I?" and eventually arrives at "Why have You sent me?" In between, he wrestles with authority, acceptance, ability, and willingness. **Each objection reveals something in Moses' thinking that has to come into submission to what God has said.**

We are no different. We can allow our inadequacies, fear of rejection, perceived limitations, unwillingness, or even discouraging circumstances to become strongholds that speak louder to us than the truth of God's Word. **But God did not call Moses to become a better version of the man who was hiding in Midian. He called Moses to trust Him, obey Him, and allow what God had spoken to become greater than what Moses believed about himself.** The same is true for us. Transformation does not come by pretending our weaknesses, failures, or past experiences do not exist. **It comes when we stop allowing those things to have the final word about who we are and what God can do through us.**

The Holy Spirit is present to help us in our weaknesses, the Word gives us the truth with which to tear down the strongholds, and we have the responsibility to set our minds on the things of the Spirit. We do not have to remain captive to an image formed by our past. We can put on the new man, renew our minds with truth, and increasingly reflect the image God intended for us all along.

Have a blessed month, everyone.

Love,

JANN T. BUTLER

