

New Beginnings – Is It Working?

We are now several weeks into the New Year. Many of us set goals – called resolutions – of changes we want to make at this time of year. Hopefully, we are still on track, staying loyal to make a new beginning in parts of our lives. Our degree of success is dependent on our commitment. Emotional changes are often just wishful thinking, especially if they don't include an action plan. Achieving long-term success requires a lifestyle change and a plan on how you are going to accomplish it.

A lifestyle change involves being a new person. You may remember the familiar passage: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!* (2 Corinthians 5:17). God can be the catalyst if you seek His power to help you. He has helped others. Here are a few examples of biblical and historic characters that made life changing transformations and made a difference in our world.



- After their original sin, Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden to begin a different life.
- After the flood, Noah left the ark to begin again, buoyed by God's promise not to repeat this disaster.
- David, marked by an adulterous relationship with Bathsheba and numerous other sinful acts, became a great King.
- Peter denied Jesus three times but began anew by preaching to thousands on Pentecost Day.
- Paul, once a radical persecutor of Christians, had an experience on the road to Damascus and became Christianity's greatest missionary.
- John Wesley, considered the father of the Methodist Church, knew intellectually that Christ died for all, but only after a heart-warming experience did he fully realize that Christ had died specifically for him. It was a new beginning in Wesley's spiritual life.

All of these people changed the course of history because of their transformation. You can, too. Giving up bad habits can improve family life or make you a healthier person. It can make you the different person you want to be and lead you closer to God.

Resolutions are an acknowledgement that change is necessary in order to live a more fulfilling life. We are God's creation, so let God take control. *Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand* (Isiah 64:8). Allow God to mold you into the person He created you to be.

Make your commitment to be acceptable to God and not just to yourself. I have personally found that whenever I have success at a lifestyle change it goes far beyond just pleasing myself. If I am only accountable to myself I know I have weaknesses, as all of us do. I have let myself "off the hook" many times, making excuses and then slipping back to old habits. Be accountable to God through prayer and commitment.

Develop and follow an action plan that involves God as an accountability partner. Make your commitment to God and then diligently seek to serve Him.

Questions: What are your goals (resolutions) for 2019? Are you still on track? If not, is your commitment only to yourself or is it to God?

Prayer: Dear Lord. Change is difficult, Lord. We ask for your help in keeping us on track. Let us seek goals that improve our life, be the person You designed us to be, and increase our ability to serve You. Amen.

The examples of transformative people are from a Winston-Salem Journal article by Earl Crow, published Saturday, December 29, 2018.

Appendix to Life Transformations

Rather than take Earl Crow's words at face value I decided to do my own research of the individuals mentioned in his article. We all know about the difficulties they faced. I wanted to know what happened to them since their transformative moment.

Adam & Eve:

- We all know about "the fall" as a result of Adam & Eve disobeying God.
- The Lord was merciful to Adam & Eve (Genesis 3:21).
- After being banished from the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve experienced hunger, sorrow, pain and disappointment, as we do today. The hard life they lived is a foreshadowing of difficulties we face today.
- Yet, they realized their error and remained faithful, worshipful and repentant.
- During their long lifetime the world had become morally and spiritually corrupt.
- They realized that Satan was deceitful and a liar.
- On Judgement Day before the Lord Adam's sorrow will be converted to joy.

Noah:

- Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God (Genesis 6:9).
- After the conclusion of the flood, the Lord told Noah to be fruitful and fill the earth.
- God restored the earth with dry land and plentiful wildlife and vegetation. *Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything (Genesis 9:3).*
- The Lord trusted Noah and his descendants to rebuild life on earth.

David:

- David was a great warrior, empire builder and statesman.
- He was a talented musician and poet, and is the author of the Book of Psalms.
- Earlier in life he showed great courage and liberated Israel from the Philistines, defeating the giant Goliath.
- His placement of the Ark of the Covenant in Jerusalem made it the spiritual center of Israel.
- His time as King is generally considered the golden age of Israel.
- He is noted for his relationship to God as a forgiven worshipper. As all humans do, he sinned often. But, he sincerely repented.

Peter:

- After the resurrection Peter is the only disciple who ran to the empty tomb to see with his own eyes that Jesus had risen.
- Peter was also the first disciple that the resurrected Jesus appeared to.
- In one of the times he met with Jesus following the resurrection Peter affirmed his love for Jesus three times – matching the three times he denied even knowing Jesus before the crucifixion.
- In a listing of the disciples in the gospels and the book of Acts Peter is always named first and he is generally considered the spokesperson of the apostles.
- Peter is noted for open-air preaching that attracted large crowds.
- Legend has it that Peter was crucified on a cross, upside down, because he felt unworthy to be crucified in the same way as Jesus.

Paul:

- 13 of the 27 books of the Christian Bible are attributed to Paul, each written to a specific audience and for a specific purpose.
- Four of the books were written while he was imprisoned.
- According to Acts 9:20-22, *"Immediately following his conversion on the road of Damascus he said, "At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah."*
- Paul traveled far and wide. His missionary trips cover an extremely large geographic area.
- His writings in Timothy and Titus are guidelines for those carrying on the ministry after him, including us today..
- The epistles (letters from Paul) extend the richness of Holy Scripture, and they remind us once again that the word of God is truth in relationship.

John Wesley:

- Pastor John Wesley reached a low point of despair when he didn't have the faith to continue to preach and was planning on giving up the ministry.
- A Moravian friend counseled him to "Preach the faith until you have it."
- John acted on the advice leading a prisoner to Christ by "preaching faith in Christ alone for the forgiveness of sins."
- Much to Wesley's surprise the prisoner immediately converted – that very same day.
- Wesley researched in the New Testament how long salvation was delayed. The longest delay was the apostle Paul, who waited for three days for his eyes to open.
- Wesley prayed to the Lord, saying, "Help my unbelief." Wesley wrote, later that day (May 24, 1738 at about 8:45 p.m.) "while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."
- As time went on, John Wesley was mightily used of the Lord to reform England.
- The Methodist denomination became a national force in England and around the world.
- John Wesley rode thousands of miles (as many as 20,000 a year) preaching as only a man filled with the Holy Spirit can preach, telling the gospel to all who would listen. He acted "as though he were out of breath in pursuit of souls."
- Wherever he preached, lives changed and manners and morals altered for the better. It is often conjectured that his preaching helped spare England the kind of revolution that occurred in France. (Source: Christianity.com)