

## Sermon Notes for July 31<sup>st</sup>

The Paths to Happiness, as God's children we are all called to change, this change must come from the inside, changing as God commands will lead to real happiness.

Happiness is an inside job. Before you change anything else in your life, have a look at yourself. If you don't change who you are, any external changes you make will feel nice temporarily, but then you'll go back to feeling the way you did before.

Here are the five points that will help you change your life:

1. Get ready for change.
2. Identify what you need to change.
3. Let go of old habits to make room for change.
4. Learn new coping skills.
5. Incorporate the changes into your life.

**Matthew 18:3** □ And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you **change** and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

**Romans 12:2** Do not conform 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.

**Jeremiah 15:7** □ I will winnow them with a winnowing fork at the city gates of the land. I will bring bereavement and destruction on my people, for they have not **changed** their ways.

### **Ephesians 4:23-25**

**23** to be made new in the attitude of your minds; **24** and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. **25** Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

### **Colossians 3:9-11**

**9** Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with

its practices **10** and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. **11** Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

**Romans 6:4** □ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a **new** life.

**Galatians 6:15** □ Neither circumcision nor un-circumcision means anything; what counts is the **new** creation.

### **Mark 2:21-22**

**21** “No one sews a patch of un-shrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. **22** And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.”

### **Get ready for change**

Don't be afraid to look at yourself. You may be worried that you will find something you don't like. Everyone has a few dark corners in their character. That's normal, and shouldn't be an obstacle to change. Start with your easiest issues and you will gradually make changes in the rest. Everything is connected. Look at your deepest issues only when you are ready. Small changes lead to big, lasting, differences.

Take small steps. Don't take an all-or-nothing approach to change and sabotage yourself before you start. Decide ahead of time to make small changes, and you will make progress. I may not be able to do this for a lifetime but I may be able to do it today...

When you take an all-or-nothing approach, you don't have the energy to make big changes, and you don't see the significance of small changes, so you will feel stuck. There are only a few things you probably need to change in order to make a big improvement in your life.

## **Identify what you need to change**

Stress and negative thinking are the most common things people need to change. Examples of stress include fears, resentments, dwelling on the past, or worrying about the future. Examples of negative thinking include all-or-nothing thinking and disqualifying the positives.

Do you think that things have to be perfect, and anything less is a failure? Do you focus on the few negatives in your life and ignore the many positives? These factors lead to most unhappiness. In severe cases they can lead to anxiety, depression, and addiction.

How all-or-nothing thinking leads to problems: “I have to do things perfectly because anything less is a failure.” This is the most common type of negative thinking, and the main cause of anxiety, depression, and addiction.

All-or-nothing thinking leads to anxiety because you’re worried that any mistake can expose you to criticism. You’re always second-guessing yourself, and you don’t give yourself permission to let your guard down.

It can lead to depression because when you think you have to be perfect, you feel trapped by your own high standards. That can be so exhausting that it depletes your mental and emotional resources leading to depression. All-or-nothing thinking can also lead to addiction because anxiety or depression feels so uncomfortable that you may turn to drugs, food, or alcohol to escape.

## **Make room for change**

The most overlooked part of change is making room for change. This is the missing piece in most self-help plans, and the reason why most people fail. They focus on why they are unhappy, thinking that alone will lead to change. They spend most of their effort trying to understand their issues. But this is just one part of change.

You also have to let go of old habits so that you don’t repeat the same mistakes. Have you ever asked yourself, “How could I be so

smart but do such dumb things?” That’s what happens when you try to change without making room for change.

When you’re tense, you tend to do what’s familiar and wrong instead of what’s new and right. Stress is an obstacle to change because when you are tense, your ego and fears get in the way. Change isn’t just about what you learn, it’s also about what you let go.

Think of it this way. There are many coping skills you need to be happy. If you learn them all but don’t learn how to relax, you will still find it hard to change, because when you’re tense you will continue to repeat what’s familiar and wrong.

On the other hand, if you learn only one new coping skill—how to relax—you’ll still be happier, because everything is easier when you’re relaxed. If there is anything else you need to change, you’ll see it more easily and deal with it more effectively when you’re more relaxed.

### **Learn new coping skills**

The three coping skills most people need to learn are these:

- How to reduce stress and relax
- How to stop dwelling on the negatives and disqualifying the positives
- How to take better care of oneself

Stress management is important because it helps you reduce the anxieties, fears, and resentments that lead to unhappiness and are obstacles to change. It helps you live in the moment instead of dwelling on the past or worrying about the future.

In the moment is where you feel happiest and content. It’s hard to feel happy when you’re dwelling on the past. You replay events from the past and dwell on what happened and how it upset you. Stress management helps you let go of the past so that you can enjoy the moment.

Relaxation is more than just a way to relax. It is a way to change your

life. You relax by letting go of the stress and negative thinking that lead to unhappiness, and in doing so you improve your life. This is what makes relaxation a coping skill for change.

There are a variety of relaxation techniques to choose from. They range from breathing techniques to yoga and meditation. For a child of God we can also include, prayer, Bible study, and fellowship with Christians. They all help you let go of tension and be in the moment. Cognitive therapy is the most commonly used technique for changing your thinking. The main idea behind cognitive therapy is that your thinking determines your mood. Your mood is not determined by external factors, but how you interpret external factors.

If, for example, you interpret your experiences in a negative way, you will feel negative. The opposite is also true. If you take time to appreciate the positives in your life and don't disqualify them, you can improve your mood. If you change your thinking, you will change your life. It's all about whether you see the glass as half-full or half-empty.

Stress management also teaches you how to take better care of yourself. You practice putting time aside to relax, which is an act of self-care. You are saying that you are worth taking time for, which improves your self-esteem.

### **Incorporate the changes into your life**

All change is difficult, even good change. You have repeated your old habits thousands of times. You will have to repeat your new habits a few hundred times before they start to feel comfortable.

Both stress management and cognitive therapy can help here. You practice being relaxed and happy in stress management so that you can incorporate these qualities into your life. You practice a healthier way of thinking in cognitive therapy so that it can become your new automatic response. Consider how prayer and Bible study can have a major influence on our thinking and stress levels. Let me share with you a prayer and a philosophy that has changed my life, the Serenity prayer:

The serenity Prayer: *God grant me the serenity □to accept the things*

*I cannot change; □ courage to change the things I can; □ and wisdom to know the difference.*

**James 4:8** Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. **9** Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. **10** Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

**2 Corinthians 5:17** □ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the **new** creation has come: The old has gone, the **new** is here!