

WEEK 2: PRINCIPLES FOR LASTING CHANGE
What It Takes to Really Change

1. _____
“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer YOUR BODIES as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.” Romans 12:1 (NIV)

2. _____
“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be **TRANSFORMED** by the renewing of your mind.” Romans 12:2 (NIV)

3. _____
“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.” Romans 12:3 (NIV)
“... Be honest in your estimate of yourselves.” (NLT)

4. _____
“Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of his one body, and each of us has different work to do. And since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others.” Romans 12:4-5 (NLT)

5. _____
“Don't just pretend that you love others. Really love them. Hate what is evil. Stand on the side of the good. Love each other with genuine affection and take delight in honoring each other.” Romans 12:9-10 (NLT)

6. _____
“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.” Romans 12:11-12 (NIV)

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We're looking at what does it really take to change.

You're going to either look at your life with eyes of faith or the eyes of fear. We looked at the passage where Moses leads the children of Israel up to the Promised Land and what kept them out of the Promised Land because they were looking with eyes of fear and couldn't go in at that point.

This week we're going to look at some more issues of what does it take to really change.

One of the universal desires of human beings is this desire to improve. It's universal. We all want to grow. We all want to get better. We all want to improve. We all want to make something of our lives if we're healthy. One of the proofs of that is we spend billions of dollars every year on projects and products and gizmos and gadgets that we think will improve our lives or make our lives better. There's an entire industry built around the idea of, if you'll just buy our product or eat our product or whatever, then your life will be better.

But sadly, the results don't really last. Some of them don't even work at all. Is there anything out there that can get guaranteed permanent change? Is there anything that can ever really transform my life that can actually make the changes in the deepest part of me? Not superficial changes, but in the deepest part of me. Yes, but you've got to go back to the owner's manual. When in doubt read the instructions and check with the Creator.

The classic text in Scriptures on how to change is in the book of Romans. In the book of Romans in the New Testament is the sixth book – Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans. In chapter 12, the first 12 verses, it gives us the classic text on what it really takes to change.

Romans 12. We're going to go through it verse by verse. These are the six principles for lasting change.

The first principle is in verse 1. I call this the Principle of Dedication.

1. The principle of dedication is this: Commit my body to God.

That's the starting point. For change to happen in any area of your life, whether you want it financial, vocational, educational, mental, relational – it actually works best to begin with the physical. I commit my body to God. This is what the Bible says.

Why is this true, to start with the physical? Because your body affects your behavior. Your muscles affect your moods. Your muscles affect your motivation. Any teacher knows this. If a kid comes into class slouching or slumping, that kid's got a bad attitude. You already know

they're not going to be in a good mood for education. Your body can actually influence your moods. You can read any book on body language, posture, things like this – your physiology can actually affect your psychology.

Let me prove this to you. Everybody just sit up straight right now. Roll your shoulders just a little bit. Take a deep breath and hold it for a minute. Now let it out slowly. I don't know if you feel any better, but you sure look better! I want to guarantee you that you are far more alert than you were five seconds ago. I guarantee you you're far more alert. Why? Because your body sent messages to your brain saying, Sit up and listen.

So God says you offer your bodies. Start there. Physiology affects psychology.

Romans 12:1, *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship."*

This verse is so packed with material we could spend a whole day on it. Let me just tear it apart word by word.

First, it starts off, "Therefore I urge you brothers." Let me give you a little tip on Bible study. Anytime you see a "therefore" in the Bible you need to stop and find out what it's *there for*. Because a "therefore" means "in light of everything I just said." Paul has just talked for 11 chapters in Romans. I don't have time to go back over the first 11 chapters. I once taught through this book and it took me two and a half years. It's so packed.

But I will summarize the first 11 chapters. He's saying in light of everything I just said, in the first 11 chapters of Romans, Paul talks about all the cool things God has done for you. He says God has done this and God has done this and God has done this and God has done this and by the way, God has done this and this and this and this. And let me add this, God has done this and this and this for you.

Then he comes to chapter 12 and says, *"Therefore, in light of all these mercies that God has shown you, in light of all God's grace to you, offer your bodies."* He's saying because of everything God has done for you, and you can go back and read all of Romans 1-11, he says offer your bodies.

Notice it doesn't say, "Offer your heart to Jesus." You hear that all the time: Give your heart to Jesus. He doesn't say, "Offer your spirit to Jesus." He doesn't say, "Offer your soul to Jesus." He says offer your body. Why? Because that's all you've got. As long as you're on this planet everything you do for God, with God, in God, you're going to do in your *bod* for *God*.

Have you ever heard anybody say to you, "I can't be with you tonight at that party, but I'll be with you there in spirit." You know what that means? Nothing! You can't be with anybody in spirit. If you're not there in body, you're not there. Because as long as you're here on earth, you

can only be in one place at one time. It's wherever your body is. You are limited to your physical body. To say, "I'll be there in spirit," is what you get when you cross a crocodile and abalone – it's a crock of baloney. You can't be in spirit anywhere. You can only be there in body.

So it says, "offer your body." Why? Because the Bible teaches both the Old Testament and the New Testament that the body is a good thing, not a bad thing.

There was a group of people around the time of Jesus called Gnostics. They were a cult. They taught the body is bad, the body is evil, the body is no good. Therefore, sex is bad, evil, and no good and all these other things. In fact, they denied that Jesus had a real body because God would not have a real body because bodies are bad.

The Bible teaches the exact opposite of that. The Bible says sex is not bad, it's holy. It's good, not bad. The Bible teaches very clearly that God created my body, Jesus paid for my body, the Holy Spirit lives in my body, my body's connected to God's family, the body of Christ. One day my body's going to be resurrected. The bottom line is it's a good thing.

He says "offer your bodies." Question: the word "offer." When you offer something, is that forced or is that voluntary? It's voluntary. It's not forced, it's voluntary. This is an important thing. Nobody can force you to offer your body. Nobody can force you to change. No matter what changes in life, nobody can force you to change.

A lot of times people don't realize this before they get married. When people get married there's always a certain order to the marriage – the bride walks down the aisle then she stands at the altar and then they sing the hymn. She gets it in her mind that's the order after the marriage too – I'll alter him. It isn't going to happen, friends! You can't change your husband. You can't change your wife. You can't change your parents. And friends, you can't change your kids. The only person you can change is you.

This is the first law of change. We're going to look at the laws of change from God's Word. The first law of change is this: Change is my choice.

It is always my choice. Nobody can force you to change. Nobody can make you change. I can't talk you into change. You will not change until you good and well decide to change. That's true. That's the first law – change is my choice.

Then he says, "Therefore offer your body as a living sacrifice to God." The problem with a living sacrifice is that it can choose to crawl off the altar. We do this all the time. We offer ourselves to God and then we take ourselves back. We do it all the time. So this is not like a once for all offer. Like, in 1992 I gave my life to God... No, you've got to do it four, five, maybe 10 times a day. Or every time you are tempted to do something wrong in your body, your mind, your spirit or whatever. You offer your body to God.

“Offer as a living sacrifice.” What happens is we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice on Sunday and then we crawl off the altar on Monday morning. We come to church and we sing, “Onward Christian Soldiers” and on Monday we go AWOL. Offer your body as a living sacrifice.

“It is your spiritual act of worship.” You say, wait a minute! There is actually something I can do with my body that would be an act of worship? Oh yeah! Absolutely. In fact, let me give you three specific things you can do with your body that are acts of worship. Three things you can do with your body that the Bible says, the Bible clearly says, are acts of worship.

1) I can cleanse it.

I’m talking about detox. I’m talking about not putting poison in my body. By cleansing my body, that can be an act of worship. There may be some stuff that you’re putting in your body that you need to stop putting in your body. You need to cleanse your body of those toxins, those poisons, that bad stuff.

Where is that? In 2 Corinthians 7:1, *“Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates the body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.”* Notice the motivation: I want to be holy before God. I’m doing this as an act of worship, as an act of reverence to God. God made my body; I better take care of it.

That verse says, “Perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.” In that verse, it says everything that contaminates the body, or the spirit. What contaminates the body is stuff that goes in through the mouth – you eat it or you drink it. What contaminates the spirit goes in through the eyes and the ears. Does that make sense? You contaminate your spirit by what you watch and what you listen to. You contaminate your body by what you eat and what you drink.

So the first thing you can do, the Bible says, out of reverence for God, is you can cleanse your body of the contaminants. That’s an act of worship.

The second way...

2) By caring for my body.

I can care for my body. That’s an act of worship. I can care for my body. Caring for your body is an act of stewardship because remember, what you think you own is really on loan. You don’t really own anything. It’s all God’s. God just loaned it to you. You didn’t own anything before you were born. You’re not going to own anything after you die. It’s just yours while he lets you live here on earth.

The Bible says this in Ephesians 5:29, *“No one hates his own body [at least in his right mind] but lovingly cares for it, just as Christ cares for his body which is the church [the family of God].”*

So he says we care for our bodies just like Christ cares for his body the church. Caring for your body can be an act of worship.

How do care for your body? Keeping it in shape would be a good way to do that. That can be an act of worship to God.

Let me give you a third way:

3) By controlling my body.

Cleansing it, caring for it, and controlling it. Controlling my body is an act of worship to God when I do it out of motivation...

Some of the people cleanse their body, care for their body, control their body simply out of pride. That's not an act of worship. I can take you down to the gym and people do it out of worship of themselves. The self-made man usually worships his own maker. So we're not talking about everybody doing this. But if you're doing this because you want to please God then it becomes an act of worship. It's not an act of worship automatically. It's an act of worship if you're doing it out of reverence for God.

1 Thessalonians 4:4 says this: *"Each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable."* In other words, I control my body, it doesn't control me. In other words, I don't say, "I couldn't help myself."

1 Corinthians 9:27, *"I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should."* That's what the Bible says. That's what God says.

If we do that, don't you think we'd have a whole lot fewer health problems. I read an article on health. I want to just read you one sentence: "Seventy-five percent of the \$2.5 trillion of U.S. healthcare costs, 75 percent of all the money spent on healthcare, which is \$2.5 trillion, stems from chronic diseases which can be prevented by lifestyle choices."

You know what that means? It's up to us. All that expense stuff, Obamacare and all that stuff, we wouldn't need it if we were more responsible. Seventy-five percent of all that healthcare is due to the things that we're not cleansing, controlling and caring for our bodies.

Why are we starting with the physical? Number one, it says offer your body. Any change, you start with the body. Why? Because no matter what kind of change you want to make in your life – mental, physical, financial, spiritual, social, whatever – every change requires, any change requires, energy. The reason why you don't change is you don't have the energy. You're just too tired to change. You don't have the energy to change. You get home and you want to lie down and turn on *Dancing with the Stars* instead of dancing under the stars. We're going to start there.

Let's go to the second principle. The first principle is I commit my body to God. That's dedication.

2. The second principle is verse 2, the Principle of Concentration: that is I must refocus my mind.

That's what the Bible says. It's the second step. I must refocus my mind. Verse 2. The Bible says in Romans 12:2, *"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, [he's talking about the way the world thinks.] but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."*

The reason why he starts here with the mind is because whatever gets your attention gets you. What he's talking about is you've got to stop thinking about what you don't want and start thinking about what you do want. You've got to stop focusing on what's bad for you and start focusing on what's good for you. You've got to stop focusing on your plan and start focusing on God's plan. You've got to stop focusing on what everybody else wants you to do and start focusing on what God wants you to do. You've got to stop focusing on the negative and start focusing on the positive. You've got to transform by the renewing of your mind.

Again, this is a very powerful verse. I could spend literally hours unpacking this verse. Let me just hit the high points.

First, it says, do not conform. You know what conform means. It means to copy everybody else. Too often we let everybody else shape our lives. Have you ever done anything stupid, dumb, risky or unhealthy because everybody else did it? Oh, yeah. Because it was popular. Because it was the cool thing to do. Nobody ever actually smoked a cigarette because they liked the smell of it. They started because they saw somebody else do it and then they got addicted to it.

I could give you a hundred other things where you start because of somebody else. Do not copy. Don't conform.

Notice it says, "any longer." Circle "any longer." When you do something for a long time, it's called a habit. What starts off as copying other people becomes a habit in your life. It becomes habitual. When you've done it for a long time, all of a sudden, you're no longer copying, it's your habit. It's your habit, your hurt, your hang up, your addiction, your compulsion. It's now yours. You own it now because you've been doing it for a long time.

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world." The point is this, everything you've learned in life you've learned from a pattern. You learned from a model. That's how we learn. That's how little ducks are patterned, by the momma duck. You learn by a model. The problem is, there are no perfect models in the world. Every human being is imperfect.

So you have, for instance, some models for conflict resolution growing up that weren't very good. You may have had some models for anger management growing up that weren't very

good. You may have learned some models for eating that weren't very good. You may have learned some models for how you use your mouth that weren't very good. You learned some models and some patterns growing up about procrastinating that weren't very good. A lot of the models and a lot of the patterns that you grew up with were defective. You're going to have to learn some new patterns. You're going to have to not conform to those old patterns any more. You're going to have to change the way you think. You're going to have to learn some new models and some new patterns.

This is the second law of change from God's Word: To change my life I must change my model.

I've got to get a picture of a new way of doing it. I've got to see a new way. I've got to stop conforming to that old habitual pattern and the way I thought I was supposed to do it and I've got to get a new way of doing it.

The Bible says, *"Bad company corrupts good character."*

There's only one perfect model; God sent him to earth. His name is Jesus. Twenty times Jesus says, "Follow me." Why? Because he's the perfect model – follow my example. Paul, six times says, "Follow me as I follow Christ. Imitate me." You're going to have a model. That's like when kids are growing up, they're going to be in a group. The only question is whether they're going to be part of a negative one or a positive one. They're going to have peer influences. It is impossible to not have models in your life. So you need to choose them carefully.

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." That word "transformed" in the Greek is the word, we get the word "metamorphosis" from it. What is metamorphosis? It's what happens when a caterpillar changes into a butterfly. That is that word, metamorphosis.

When a caterpillar wraps itself in a cocoon, when it comes out, it's not a better version of a caterpillar. When it comes out of the cocoon, it's a totally different animal. That's not reformation. That's not renewal. That's not improvement. That's transformation. That's radical transformation.

And only God can do that. Positive thinking can't do that. Only God can turn a caterpillar into a butterfly. We can turn over a new leaf. Lots of people can turn over a new leaf. That's easy to do. Only God can give you a new life. The Bible calls it being born again. It's like getting a whole new life. Not turning over a new leaf – a whole new life. Being transformed, metamorphosis. From ugly caterpillar to beautiful free butterfly. Be transformed. Totally new life. How? By the renewing of your mind.

Look at this verse on renewing your mind. The Bible says, *"Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by deceitful desires; [That's those impulses and compulsions that pull you the wrong direction.] and be made new in the attitude of your minds; [Attitudes are kind of like diapers.*

You've got to change them, every once in a while, or they start stinking. You put off your old self, be made new in the attitude of your mind] *and put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*"

Here's the point you need to understand. In the renewal of your mind, you've got to put off before you can put on.

Let's say you go over to Nordstrom and you're looking for a new coat and you get a new coat and you take it in to one of those little changing rooms. You don't go in there and you're wearing a coat already and you don't put the coat on over your old coat. That'd be stupid. Because, first, it's going to be hot. Second, you're not going to know if it fits. It's a little bulky. No, you've got to take off the old before you can put on the new. Does that make sense?

That's true spiritually and emotionally and mentally. You've got to take off. You've got to put off before you put on. We're going to talk about this in detail in the days ahead. This is the part of renewing your mind.

The third principle. If I were to call you up and I were to say to you, I'm going to come over to your house this afternoon. Tell me how to get to your house. What would be the first question you would ask me? Where are you? Because you know the principle: You don't know how to get to where you need to go until first you know where you are. That's a principle of life. That's the principle of change. You don't know where you need to be until first you know where you are.

If I said, "I'm coming over to your house" and you said, "Where are you?" And I said, "I don't know." Then I can't tell you how to get here. Because I may be in Hawaii. I may be in Madrid, Spain. I may be in Baton Rouge! You can't give me directions if I don't know where I am. So I've got to figure out where I am before I can know where I want to be and that's the third principle of change.

3. This is third principle that I call the Principle of Evaluation. I must humbly assess my current state.

I must humbly – because it takes humility – assess my current state. The first and the greatest barrier to your change, the number one barrier to change in your life, in any area of your life is pride. – "I don't have any problems! What, me worry? I don't see a pink elephant in the living room. What are you talking about?" I don't want to admit I need to change.

The fact is, nobody has it all together. I don't have it all together. You don't have it all together. The Pope doesn't have it all together. Nobody's got it all together. The Bible says there's nothing perfect on earth except God's Word. Everything on this planet is broken because of sin. Have you noticed your body doesn't work perfectly? Your relationships don't work perfectly. The weather doesn't work perfectly. Nothing works perfectly on this planet. That's because we live on a broken planet because of sin.

So nothing's perfect. But we pretend like we've got it all together. We walk around trying to impress people that we've got it all together. You know you don't have it all together. God knows you don't have it all together. We know you don't have it all together. So why do you try to pretend you have it all together? I would rather admit I don't have it all together in order to get it all together, than to pretend that I have it all together.

Did I understand myself just then? Did that make sense? In other words, honesty is the best policy and I must humbly assess my current state. I have to admit it when I don't have it all together. I have to admit I have a problem with my finances, I have a problem with my health, I have a problem with whatever!

Verse 3, *"Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, [that's humility] but rather think of yourself [in other words evaluate yourself] with sober judgment, [in other words be realistic about the situation you're in] in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."*

First, he says, *"Don't think of yourself more highly."* In other words, be humble. I always say be humble or you'll stumble. Remember the lesson of the whale: When you get to the top and you're ready to blow, that's when they harpoon you. And the man who gets too big for his britches will inevitably be exposed in the end. Don't think more highly of yourself it says. Don't think, "I don't have any problems. My family's perfect!" Oh, really? My kids are perfect! Oh really? My health is perfect! Oh, really? My job is perfect. Oh really? Stop trying to think more highly of yourself. Just be honest, be authentic. Be real. Be humble.

Then he says, *"think of your life with sober judgment."* Be realistic. The New Living Translation says, *"be honest in your estimate of yourself."* So let me just ask you some honest questions: What are you pretending isn't a problem in your life? What are you pretending isn't a problem in your marriage? What are you pretending isn't a problem in your finances? What are you pretending isn't a problem in your health? Do you have enough courage to confront yourself? That's what this verse is all about.

Do you have the courage to ask those closest to you to tell you honestly what you need to change in 2011? Do you have that kind of courage? Are you that kind of a man? Or woman? To ask the people closest to you, be honest with me, tell me the truth, I'm doing self-intervention on me. You don't have to do intervention on me; I'm doing intervention on me. Where do I need to change? Lay it all out. Do you have the courage to be honest about you? Do you have the courage to ask other people to be honest about you? That's step three in change. Evaluation. Humbly access my current state.

It says, *"Do not think of yourself more highly... [Be humble.] Evaluate your life with sober judgment, [Be honest.] in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."* Circle the phrase "measure of faith." The word "measure" here in Greek is the word we get "metric system" from. That's what it is. The metron of faith, the measure of faith.

The Bible says, *“Without faith it is impossible to please God.”* So you’re going to need what is the measure of faith I’ve got, and what is the measure of faith I’m going to need in order to change. Do I have enough faith to believe I can change? How much faith am I going to need to believe I’m going to change? Do I really believe I can change? Do I really believe I can be different? In all the different areas we’re going to look at how much faith am I going to need in order to grow, in order to change in these seven key areas of my life? You’re going to need to increase the measure of your faith.

How do you get more faith? The Bible says, *“Faith comes from hearing the Word of God.”* The more you hear the Word of God, the more your faith grows. This is soul food. It feeds your soul. It stretches your faith.

Why is this important? Because limited faith means a limited future. And unlimited faith means an unlimited future. *“According to your faith it will be done unto you,”* is what Jesus said. He says you need to know the measure of your faith. You need to take a measurement of this.

Why is measurement so important? The third law of change from the Word of God, the Bible: I can only manage what I measure.

If you don’t measure it, you don’t manage it. If I don’t know the measure of my faith, I can’t manage my faith. I can’t grow in faith. If I don’t know the measure of my health, I can’t develop and grow in health. If I don’t know the measure of where I am financially, I can’t set goals financially. If I don’t know the measure of where I am spiritually or vocationally or relationally, then I can’t grow in those areas. I have to evaluate humbly and assess my current state. I can only manage what I measure.

Let me give you two very practical applications

The first thing you can do is record your progress. Record your progress in any goal. I don’t care if you keep a journal or a record or whatever you do. If you’re going to set some health goals, some financial goals, any other kind of goal, record your progress through the year so you can measure your faith and you measure your growth and you measure your progress.

The second thing you need to do is what this principle teaches: You need to know your starting numbers. There are five of them you need to know for sure. Your weight and your height, your waistband and your blood pressure. These kinds of things that you’re going to need to know because that’s the starting part.

Evaluation – humbly assess my current state. I can’t know where I need to go unless I know where I am right now.

Principle number four, the next verse, verse four, the fourth principle for lasting change is the Principle of Cooperation. I must get group support.

4. Principle of Cooperation. I must get group support.

You will not make all the changes you need to make, you want to make, you'd love to make, you plan to make, you desire to make by yourself. If you could, you would, but you can't, so you won't. You need a group. The Bible says God wired the universe in such a way that we need each other. We get well in community. I need you; you need me.

Fifty-eight times in the New Testament the phrase "one another" is used. Love one another, care for one another, encourage one another, support one another, pray for one another, greet one another, share with one another – 58 times. It is the mutual ministry and support of each other through life. God never meant for you to go through life as a lone ranger. Even the Lone Ranger had Tonto. You're not meant to go through life by yourself. Whether you ever marry or not is irrelevant. But you need a family, you need a spiritual family and you need to be specifically in a small group.

The Bible says this in the next verse, verse 4, *"Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of his one body, and each of us has different work to do. And since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others."* I didn't say this; God says this. Circle "we belong to each other" and "we need each other." You need me, I need you, you need the other people around you, they need you. We belong to each other.

I don't have to go into this principle very much because we've taught on this so much – the importance of community. So let me just say this. Here's the fourth law of change: change requires community.

It is not a solo issue. You change faster, you change better, you change longer, you change more completely, you change permanently through community. The areas that you say, "I can never stop that. I can never break that habit in life." It will break if you get in community. Because of the two things you need. There are a lot of good self-help books that will tell you the right thing to do, but they don't provide the two things the Bible says you must have: God's power and community. That's what you need to really change – God's power and community. Lots of good books will tell you what to do, but they don't provide God's power and they don't provide community.

The Bible says this: *"In Christ there is no difference or division between Jews and Gentiles, free people and slaves, male or female. We are all one in Christ Jesus. It is our love in Christ, it is our love for each other that brings us together which is greater than any kind of ethnic or any other kind of difference."*

5. Principle number five is the Principle of Affirmation. I must fill my life with love.

If you want to have lasting change, if I want lasting change in my life, I must fill my life with love. If I want lasting change, permanent change in my life I must fill my life with love.

Why is this? Because love can change the unchangeable. It is the only thing that can. It is the most powerful force in the world. Love invigorates. Love revitalizes. Love renews. Love refreshes. Love is the most powerful force in the universe because God is love. It doesn't say he has love; it says he is love. Love heals what cannot be healed otherwise. Love uplifts. Love strengthens. Love energizes. It gives you energy when you don't have energy. Love will give you energy. Love empowers when you don't have the power.

The Bible says in Songs of Solomon, *"Love is stronger than death."* Think about that. If love is stronger than death it means that love is stronger than debt. Love is stronger than divorce. Love is stronger than discouragement. Love is stronger than depression. Love is stronger than disease. Love is stronger than doubt. Love is stronger than anything else. You must fill your life with love because it is the strongest power in the universe.

Verse 9 says this: *"Don't just pretend you love others. Really love them. Hate what is evil. [sometimes that means you've got to confront it. You've got to do an intervention.] Stand on the side of the good. [You've got to love enough sometimes to confront.] Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other."*

I love that – take delight in honoring each other. You know what that means? It means in your small group when people in your small group have a small win in health, in finances, in any area of goal they've set, you need to celebrate with them. Celebrate their small wins. Give them anatta boy. You did good! You lost two more pounds? Congratulations! You got a little bit out of debt? Fantastic! You had a breakthrough in your marriage? Terrific! The Bible says outdo each other and take delight in honoring each other. Show genuine affection.

Here's the amazing thing. God has wired the universe that when you help other people, God takes care of your problems. God is looking down to say not, are you helping yourself? But are you helping others? God says, when I look down and I see you helping other people, like in your small group, I'm going to help you. So you want help with your goals? Start helping other people with their goals. Show love. Give yourself away. There is healing in giving back.

We've got to give back. How do you know when you're recovered? When you're helping somebody else. You've got to give back.

You know the story of Job where Job lost everything. He lost his health, he lost his family, he lost his wealth. He lost it all. At the end of the book Job got it all back. God gave it all back, double. Why? When Job prayed for himself? No. It says, *"After Job prayed for his friends, the*

Lord gave him success again and the Lord gave Job twice as much as before.” Not when he prayed for himself, but when he prayed for his friends.

Why do you need to be in a small group? Not just so other people can help you, but so you can help them. So you can pray for those people and then God can help you. When you go to a group you pray for the other people and you watch God work in your life. You give yourself away. You give yourself in love.

There's one last principle. The last principle is just as important as all the others.

6. Principle number six is the Principle of Motivation. I must nurture my enthusiasm.

That is, you've got to figure out how to nurture your enthusiasm. I must nurture my enthusiasm. In other words, I've got to figure out how to maintain my enthusiasm over the long haul in order to reach my goals.

I want to talk about this very frankly with you as we close. How do I nurture my enthusiasm? Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “Nothing great is ever accomplished without enthusiasm.” I believe that with all of my heart. I have found it to be true in my life. Nothing great is ever accomplished without passion, without enthusiasm. You've got to have passion, you've got to have enthusiasm, or you're never going to make it to the finish line. Not, I kind of want to get out of debt. You're never going to get out of debt. I really want to get in shape... Pass me some potato chips. It isn't going to happen. If you're just kind of ho-hum, half-hearted, no energy, no enthusiasm for this goal, you're never going to do it. You've got to be passionate. You've got to have enthusiasm or you're never going to do it.

I've noticed it's very easy for people to be enthusiastic at the start of anything. The first day when we're going into something. The first day of a seminar, a conference. For a lot of people, it's very easy for people to get excited at the beginning of anything. But would you agree that it's pretty easy to lose your enthusiasm? Everybody agree with that? It's pretty easy to lose enthusiasm after a few days or a few weeks. We get distracted by other things.

So what I want to talk to you about is how do you maintain your enthusiasm not for weeks, not for months, but for the rest of your life. How do you maintain enthusiasm so you can set goals that are not just one year goals, 10 year, 20 year, 30 or 40 years. But lifetime goals and reach them. I told you last week most people set their goals too low and try to accomplish them too soon. How do you set goals for your lifetime and then maintain the enthusiasm to actually reach them? They're so big that they keep pulling you and you don't give up on them? How do you do that?

How do you do that? How do you stay enthusiastic day in and day out in spite of delays and difficulties and dead ends and problems and pressures and criticisms? How do you stay enthusiastic for over 30 years?

Friends, it takes more than positive thinking. I'm not against positive thinking. It's certainly better than the alternative. Negative thinking, I'm definitely not in favor of negative thinking. But positive thinking is not enough. Pulling yourself up by your own psychological bootstraps is not enough. Psyching yourself up with psycho cybernetics and talking yourself into optimism is not enough.

Because the truth is there are a lot of things in the world you can't be positive about. Rape is not positive. If your wife gets leukemia, that's not positive. If your son gets shot and dies in Afghanistan, that's not positive. And all the positive thinking in the world won't get you through that. You need God to get you through those tough times.

The way you stay enthusiastic for a lifetime is found in the word "enthusiasm." The word "enthusiasm" comes from the Greek word *en Theos*. *En* is the Greek word for the English word "in." *Theos* is the Greek word for "God." Theology is the word for the study of God. *Theos* is the word for God. Theodore means lover of God, that's what Theodore means and the same thing with Dorothy. Dorothy means lover of God. So *en Theos* means to be "in God."

When you get in God you will be enthusiastic. And it's the kind of gut level enthusiasm that fills your heart with such enthusiasm that it doesn't matter whether the economy is tanking or it is soaring. Or whether it's raining or it's shining. Or whether things are going good or bad. Or whether you feel healthy or sick. Or whether things are bad or good. Your enthusiasm is not dependent upon your circumstances. It is not dependent upon your circumstances because you are tied to the Rock of Ages. You are tied to the Eternal God. You are in Christ. You are in God and you are eternally enthusiastic.

And you need to do that. Paul tells us how to do this in the last verse. Verses 11-12. He says, "*Never be lacking in zeal, [that's enthusiasm] Never, never, never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor; [That means nurture your enthusiasm. Then he tells you the three ways to do it...] in serving the Lord. [He says...] Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.*"

That's how you keep your spiritual fervor. You be joyful in hope so that even when things are going wrong, I can still be joyful in hope because I know God's plan. He wins in the end. God's plan is good. I win in the end.

Be patient in affliction. Because I know that even in pain God's going to bring good out of it. And I can be patient even in the pain.

I can be faithful in prayer. Why? Because in every problem I'm either going to pray or I'm going to panic. I'm going to worry or I'm going to worship. I'm either going to get on my knees or I'm going to fall over and faint. Those are the options. Those are my choices.

THE **DANIEL** PLAN

GOD'S PRESCRIPTION FOR YOUR HEALTH

When you are joyful in hope, when you are patient in affliction, when you are faithful in prayer then you get what I call God's GPS. GPS is God's Power System. How many of you have a GPS in your car? I love GPS. GPS corrects all my mistakes. If I've got to go to UCLA and I type in UCLA and I make a wrong turn it just says "You made a wrong turn. Make a U-turn. Go this way." And it corrects it. It's no big deal. It just gets me back on the path real quickly.

This next year you're going to set some goals in your life. And you're going to screw up and so am I. Why? Because we're human. I am a sinner and so are you. You're going to screw up. You're going to mess up. And you're going to get off track and you're going to fall off the wagon and do this or that. But with God's GPS, he says okay, make a U-turn and get right back on. It's not a big deal. You get God's power by being joyful in hope, being patient in affliction and being faithful in prayer.

Friends, what you need above all else is you need to get *in God* right now.

Prayer:

Dear God, I don't want to go another day without you in my life controlling every room and every part of my heart. So I want to take these initial steps for change. I offer you my body. I dedicate myself to you. In light of all you've done for me, I give myself as a living sacrifice to you, as a spiritual act of worship. I don't want to think the old patterns any more. I want you to help renew my mind. I want to be transformed. I don't want to be a caterpillar any more. I want that metamorphosis. I want to be that butterfly – set free. I don't want to be conformed to all the pressures of what other people want me to be. I want to be what you want me to be.

Over this year I want you to change my mind. Help me to think the way you want me to think. I ask you to forgive me for my pride and I humbly want to admit that I need help and I need to change in a lot of areas. I don't want to think more highly of myself than I should. I admit that the measure of my faith needs to grow. Help me to set goals that can be measured so I can manage them. Forgive me for trying to do the changes on my own. Help me to get group support. I want to fill my life with love. I want to fill my life with you. Help me to take delight in honoring other people, to focus on giving my life away so that you can take care of my needs. I want to nurture my enthusiasm by being *in you*. Help me to be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer. I give myself to you. In your name I pray. Amen.