

Changing Lanes, Pt. 2

Take Out the Trash

“The Principle of Transformation”

Introduction:

Last week I started a new series called “Changing Lanes” which deals with how to bring about positive change in our lives. This series is based on the last chapter of the book “Good to Great in God’s Eyes” by Chip Ingram. The first message dealt with the principle of priority – “Put God First.” We looked at the reasons why God has to be at the center of any meaningful change in our lives.

Today we’re going to talk about taking out the trash, or the principle of transformation. How is it that we can be changed from the person that we’ve been into the person we want to be? Is change even possible? Many people would say that it’s not; you are who you are and you’re stuck with it.

What is it that makes us who we are, anyway? Is it genes? Is it our upbringing? Is it the experiences we’ve had; the trauma we’ve endured or the examples we’ve seen? The truth is that it’s all of these things and none of these things. All of them have a bearing on the kind of people we’ve become. But I can show you people who’ve been raised in the same home, been through the same things, had the same type of upbringing and yet are radically different. So, what is it?

I believe that much of who we are is based upon what we do with what we’ve experienced, and that is dictated by the way that we think. The *principle of transformation* comes straight out of 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.*” There’s a negative command in that verse that literally says to stop being conformed, or molded, to this world. Quit allowing the world system—its ideas, images, and values—to shape who you are. Get the trash out of your life.

Stop believing lies.

This world and its systems have a powerful affect on the way that we think. If we’re not careful, we just gradually absorb messages over time and begin to accept them without thinking about whether or not they’re true. We talked about some of those messages last year in a series called “Straight Talk for

Tough Times.” In that series we spoke about lies that men and women believe - lies that cause us to look at the world incorrectly. I probably had more feedback on that series than on any other I’ve ever preached.

What are the lies that we believe? Many women believe that they have to look like Barbie; that they will never be good enough for someone to love them; or that they’re stupid, or fat and ugly; or that they are worthless or a lousy mother or wife. Many men believe that they will never amount to anything; that they’re a failure; that money or work equal love; that no matter what they do they’re not good enough.

That message might have come from a bad experience, the media or from a family member, from our friends or from a misguided teacher. It probably came from someone who didn’t intend to give you that message, but it’s there just the same. No matter what you do, that message that is recorded in your mind just keeps cropping up, keeping you from moving forward.

It’s not just those personal messages either, there are also truth claims that people accept, without thinking, that have a way of cluttering up our minds and confusing us. These are cultural assumptions that go unchallenged, and often leave us believing a lie. A famous Canadian example is the unimpeachable value of tolerance. Now I’m all for tolerance, by the original definition. What it used to mean was that you tolerated people who were different from you and allowed them to practice their beliefs in freedom. But what it’s grown to mean in today’s culture is quite different. Today any questioning of the truth claims of another person or religion makes you intolerant. A fall-out from that is that a great many people have lost the ability to think critically; to use reason. One of the lies I hear repeated often is that all religions are basically the same. That is not even close to being a true statement, but many accept it as fact.

So what are we to do with the stuff up here that doesn’t belong? How do we change this? The first thing we need to do is to stop allowing the wrong sources to program our thinking. It’s the first rule of holes: when you’re in one – stop digging. There was an old song we used to sing when I was a child that is very appropriate: “Oh be careful little eyes what you see...” Psalm 101:3 says *“I will not look with approval on anything that is vile.”*

What are the values and behaviors that are being promoted in the music that you listen to or the programming that you watch, or the books that you read? If a change is necessary, that may be the place to start.

Replace lies with truth.

The second thing we need to do is to replace the lies with the truth. In 1 Corinthians 13:11 Paul says, “*When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.*” In the Greek, it’s far more expressive. It basically says that he abolished and did away with the childish thinking.

In a modern analogy, it’s like going through all of the old files on your computer and getting rid of the unnecessary ones that you never use anymore. There are some files that just take up space and slow the system down. There are others that can actually be harmful, like viruses, and the longer you allow them to hang around, the more damage they cause you. They can sometimes make the whole system crash. GIGO.

A lot of people can identify the thinking that has gotten them messed up, but don’t know how to change it. In the second part of Romans 12:2 Paul tells us how. Remember, the first part is a negative command, basically to stop allowing the world to force you into its mold.

That's followed by a positive command to allow God's Word to renew and transform you—to cause a *metamorphosis*. It’s like the change from a caterpillar into a butterfly. Grammatically, this command is in the passive voice; God does it, but we allow it. We **let** our minds be transformed from the inside out so we can be people who prove and experience the will of God. Our lifestyle begins to demonstrate God's will—that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

My wife’s mother used to pastor a lot of rural churches in Georgia, and she would meet some interesting characters. One day they were invited over to have dinner with an older lady from the church. There were chickens and goats in the yard, maybe in the house too, but you’ll have to ask Marnita about that. The house was filthy. When they sat down to eat, the food was grey, the plates were dirty – before they started. There was a dead fly stuck to the top of the saltshaker. You wonder how people can tolerate such nasty conditions, but when people live around trash long enough, they get accustomed to it. It starts to seem normal. We get used to a nauseating stench if we breathe it long enough.

Spiritually, a lot of Christians have filled their minds with so much garbage from the junkyard of this world that it doesn't seem like garbage anymore. Their lives never change, and they can't figure out why. The things that God has called "trash" - unholy attitudes and behaviors, bad habits, choices that will lead

us down a bad path and ruin our relationships—have become very acceptable among many believers. We're often trying to figure out what's true and righteous when God has already told us how to find out. He has given us his Word to guide us and put his Spirit within us. If we don't quench the Spirit, our conscience will lead us in the right direction. But if we choose to live in squalor, we'll start to accept it as normal.

This is why many polls report almost identical statistics between Christians and non-Christians on issues like marital fidelity, honesty, spending habits, and addiction to pornography. We're unconsciously being conformed to this world, not transformed to the image of Christ. We eat and drink what the world offers us in enticing advertisements, standards of living, romance novels and soap operas, Internet porn, violent movies and video games, and so much more simply because we haven't consciously determined to stop being conformed to *"the pattern of this world"* (Rom. 12:2). The result is impure thoughts and attitudes that build a nest in our hearts and minds. The world system is so seductive that we don't realize how bad it stinks.

Here's the deal – most of this happens unintentionally. It's kind of like reading the newspaper. When I was a Youth Pastor I did an illustration one time where I did a whole series of activities using newspapers. I had them take a whole stack of newspapers and crinkle them all up and put them in the center of the floor, and then I'd make teams and have them try to leave as much paper in the other team's corner as they could. I had them build things with paper; we did all kinds of stuff. But then when we sat down and everybody quieted down I had them look at their hands. Of course, they were all black and dirty from newspaper ink.

Very few of them even realized that all of the fun they were having was causing them to be filthy, yet that was the truth. Isn't that what it can be like for all of us? We work, we live, we play, we're entertained in a world that has largely set itself against even the idea of God. Those attitudes and mindsets rub off on us and we find ourselves almost imperceptibly moving away from the relationship with God that we once had.

I see this all the time. I see this with Christians who are doing well until they take on a job or activity that keeps them out of church on a regular basis. They don't mean for it to happen, but over time their love for God fizzles out and dies, and they wonder where He went. It's like Jesus spoke of in the Parable of the Sower in Mark 4:18-19, *"Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful."*

What is it that you're allowing in your life that is choking out the good things that God is trying to do in you? If you want to be successful in making positive change, you need to take out the trash and replace those bad habits with others that will move you in the right direction.

What are the negative thought patterns that consistently derail any progress that you are making? I see women, all the time, who settle for men who are not right for them simply because they don't believe they can get or even that they deserve better. I see men, all the time, who languish in jobs they hate because they don't believe that they are capable of doing something meaningful. I see people, all the time, who don't get involved because they've convinced themselves they have nothing of value to contribute. These are bold-faced lies, all of them.

In John 8:31-32, *“Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

We need to replace the lies with the truth. Some of these lies have been passed down from generation to generation – and they need to end with you. Let your children breathe the exhilarating air of freedom because you dared to do something different. Get in the Word of God; read some good books; listen to some good music; find a good mentor. As Philippians 4:8 says, *“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”*

As a pastor, let me ask you a sensitive question about your spiritual health: What trash do you have in your life right now? If Jesus were inside your mind today and you asked him what he thought about its contents, which areas would he find most uncomfortable? He wouldn't condemn you for it; He still loves you just the same. But would He feel at home there? The point of Romans 12:2 is not to condemn but to bless you with the experience of God's perfect will by the renewing of your mind. Which areas of your life need to have some trash taken out?