

Transformed Through Truth – April 2016

#1 Run Shirley Run 4/1, 4/26

“Run, Forrest, Run.” Remember the movie Forrest Gump? He says, “Now you wouldn’t believe me if I told you, but I can run like the wind blows. From that day on, if I was going somewhere I was running.” My mom, Shirley Adkins, lives this way – she keeps on running. She decided to start running races at age 70 and hasn’t stopped. What does it take to keep on running?

Two things:

1. Resolve: My mom is determined not to give up. Webster defines resolve: “a firm course of action.” There are days she doesn’t feel like going to the gym or going on a jog, yet Mom keeps her schedule. I am impressed with how she implements her plan. Day in, day out, she follows through with her commitment to work out no matter how she feels.

“Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” Heb. 12:1

2. Renew: My mom resets her mind everyday through prayer time with God and studying His word. She asks God for help, even after dad passed away, mom continued and even increased her work outs.

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Heb. 12:2

Are you determined to keep running the race? Let’s pray, Heavenly Father, thank you for your word that serves as our inspiration to stay in the race. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

#2 Former Widow 4/2, 2/27

Former widow – that’s my new title. I am now married to Jim Turner. I like the sound of “former widow” and it gives me great joy to feel “safe in the

harbor of marriage,” I pray I will not forget the lessons I learned as a widow, single woman or single parent.

God opened my eyes to the plight of widows on my first return trip to Africa, a mere nine months after Pastor Paul’s death. There are ten times as many widows (women) as there are widowers (men.) African women whose husbands are murdered or die grieve for up to two years; the women often lose custody of their children, removed from their homes and sometimes their possessions are taken away, to be distributed among family members. African widows, familiar with social status changes and adjustments, knew I was navigating the rough waters of the same rushing river of grief they had endured and were surprised I had made the effort to visit them –it was a ministry of presence mission trip.

I was compelled by love to tell my story – to share about my lost love and how my hurt was being exchanged for God’s hope. I told of Pastor Paul’s untimely passing, listened to the stories of others’ loss and cried tears with my African sisters. I reminded them of one of my favorite scriptures, which continues to give me peace “The righteous perish, and not one takes it to heart; the devout are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.” Isaiah 57:1,2

#3 Have You Seen My Hope? 4/3, 4/28

To abide in hope is more than saying I wish. It’s more than desiring something to come to pass, looking forward to an event or being in a person’s presence. Hope is defined by Webster as “expectation of something desired; thing that gives, or an object of focus.” Hope is more than mere wishful thinking, yet hopelessness can bring on despair, depression and even thoughts of suicide. Proverbs 13:12 reminds us, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick.” No wonder why the Bible approaches hopelessness in a different category from guilt and anxiety and even depression and suicide. Instead of categorizing hopelessness (also

known as despair) as a psychological disease, the Bible calls it disobedience. It is refusing to trust God. Hopefulness is a choice to trust God in the midst of impossible circumstances. It is relying on the unchanging attribute of God's faithfulness. Psalm 37:3 remind us, "Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart." When we find pleasure in God, we give him first place, submit to His plans and are directed by His hand.

And then we can easily put into practice what Psalm 37:4 says "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him and he will do this."

Abiding in hope is confident expectation for God's provision. He is our refuge, our joy, our deliverer, our help, our strength and our comfort. Why would we hope in medication or therapy or anything else before we hope in God? Let's pray, "Father, Thank you, you send hope when we wait on you. In Jesus' Name, Amen"

#4 Looking for Hope 4/4, 4/28

23 million Americans suffer from anxiety disorders, 17.5 struggle with clinical depression, 530,00 attempt suicide, others endure daily feelings of fear and hopelessness. Airline passengers worry about flight safety, patients agonize over the dangers of surgery or deadliness of their conditions; business people fret because of corporate decisions, collegians shudder at the uncertain future of their careers. 62 percent of Christians in America are worried about the future and 20 percent are searching for meaning and purpose in life. The Bible assures us there is real hope. Heb. 11:1 "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do

not see.” Romans 8:24 adds, “hope that is seen is no hope at all.” When we put these two verses together, we see that hope refers to the promises of God, even when the fulfillment of these promises is still in the future and unseen. When we hope in God, we fix our eyes on His promises, rather than on personal circumstances. As believers, a Christ-centered hope must be the foundation of our lives. Hard times come and hard times go, but God’s promises are forever. Here’s a few for you to keep with you,

Psalm 56:3 “when I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?”

Psalm 62:8 “Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.”

Proverbs 3:5 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight.”

#5 Hope for All Time 4/5, 4/29

Someone once said, “the only constant in life is change.” We must expect it. We must anticipate change to come, and when it does, trust God. How does God want us to rely on Him in the process of change? Romans 15:13 says, “Now may the God of HOPE make you full of joy and peace through faith, so that all hope may be yours in the power of the Holy Spirit.” As we let that verse sink in, we can accept the fact that God knows what changes are ahead of us, and He has our best interests in mind. God is faithful and will provide for us.

I am the type that doesn't like change, I've been known to look back and dwell on "the good old days." Years ago, my first husband, Paul and I planned for months to attend a reunion at our college. We were disappointed when no one we knew was there. We decided "the good old days were good and gone." It's sad when things change, we must grieve our losses, move on and rely on God in a deeper way Change is inevitable. Change must be grieved as a loss. Ever felt like you've lost HOPE? Jill Briscoe says, "Change interrupts our nesting habits and intrudes into my comfort zone. But with change we have a new start, a clean page and an opportunity to try again. That hope renews us." It's hard to embrace change because we only see the world immediately around us, advertisers tell us things will make us happy, we get lost in pursuing more stuff. Instead of trying to get more stuff, let's focus on making stories, memories and invest in people.

#6 Hope Again 4/6, 4/30

It happened again. Dialogue, discussion, difference of opinion, my feelings were hurt at a holiday family gathering. Choking back the tears, I ran to the bathroom, locked the door behind me, hid my face in a bath towel and sobbed, "I will never attend a family function again." I poured out my feelings, how I was misunderstood and mocked. Suddenly, I remembered my Bible study in Psalm 42:5, "Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again

praise Him for the help of His presence.” The sweet words of hope soothed my aching soul and calmed my broken heart. I forgave my offenders, and asked God to bless them. After drying my face and repairing my make up, I returned to the kitchen, I felt love and grace toward my offender. The help of God’s presence remained a constant, as I submitted to God’s offer for me to trust Him and hope in Him regardless of my feelings. This was a sacrifice of joy, as I thanked God for the hurt, felt a song of praise and feelings of joy. My feeling of hope had returned because I chose to be confident in God and what He promised. 2 Cor. 6:4,10 reminds us, “As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance, in troubles, hardships and distresses...sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, yet possessing everything.” Let’s pray, “Heavenly Father, thanks for the example your son, Jesus Christ provides for us. He suffered with joy, yet had hope. Let me do the same with your help. In Jesus’ Name, Amen”

#7 Do Not Give Up 4/7

Scrapbooks need pictures, boxes need to be unpacked, letters need to be written. It’s nearly impossible not to feel guilty when it comes to unfinished projects. Instead of giving up on completing projects, I think of these unfinished projects as a temporary state and give myself permission to set them aside. But, when it comes to people, God has given me a special mission never to give up on His people. In order to do this, I must direct my thoughts to God more and seek His face continually. This is the only way to never give up on people. With perseverance, I trust God to work in me and pray for His work to continue in others. “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never

perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.” John 10:27-28 As I listen to Him, I seek Him about how to love others and encourage them to take responsibility for their own growth. As you might imagine, this takes an active not a passive stance. I must be attentive to God with sustained effort, this synergy provides the necessary strength and determination for me to follow through. I cannot forget about God or shift into neutral. My enemy never rests, the world I live in is constantly at war, so I must be alert and keep on praying. “Pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” Eph. 6:18 Let’s pray, “Father, thank you for reminding me to never give up. Amen.”

#8 The Three Buckets 4/8

Want to make a difference with your life? Me too. Well, guess what? We can! Jesus said, “I came that we may have life and have it abundantly.” John 10:10 The choices we make today contribute to one of three buckets. The first bucket is time, what we do with our time that will affect eternity. Mark Twain says “The two most important days in our lives are: first, the day we are born and the day we find out why we were born.” Are you spending your time earning money to buy more stuff? That’s the second bucket – stuff. The media wants to sell us more things that they say will make us happy, to get more stuff, we have to make more money, when we get more stuff, we have to spend more money to take care of our stuff. Matt. 6:19-21 says “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your

treasure is, there your heart will be also.”The last one is the stories bucket: we invest ourselves into something that outlasts our lifetime. It’s the one that we bring the intangible things - like relationships that matter. These things are participation, places, prayer, peace, people, pictures, purpose, and even play. Romans 12:2 ”Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to prove what God’s will is—his good, pleasing perfect will.”

#9 Opportunity Not Obstacle 4/9

Ever had to let go of something familiar and embrace something brand new? The Children of Israel who were slaves in the evil city of Babylon. Jeremiah wrote a letter telling them to move ahead with their lives. In Jeremiah 29:5, he said, ”Build houses, settle down, plant gardens, eat what they produce”. ..basically, God said, “Carry on your lives as normal, even in the middle of slavery in enemy territory.”

Our lives cannot grind to a halt during difficult times, in tough situations, we must adjust and keep moving.

If you’ve ever changed churches, you know what it feels like to leave familiar terrain and faces, and walk into the new place and ask for directions. It’s weird to worship with strangers. Years ago, my pastor-husband and I were looking for a church. He was in-between jobs. We were late because we couldn’t find the kids’ classrooms, we thought we’d

slip into the service, the prelude was ending but there were no empty seats in the back. So we marched up to the front row as wondering gazes followed our every move, we felt self-conscious. It felt sort of like “enemy territory.” We didn’t know our way around the church, the names of the people or the songs, yet we knew God brought us to a change-point in our lives. With God’s help we handled it and settled in. We grieved the loss of the comfort and familiarity of our former home church and within a few months settled into our new church. We chose to look at the challenge of change as opportunity not obstacle. We can do the same: will our time of transition become an obstacle or an opportunity?

#10 Let Go to Take Hold 4/10

Ever had to let go of something familiar and embrace something brand new? The Children of Israel were slaves in the evil city of Babylon. Jeremiah wrote a letter telling them to move ahead with their lives. In Jeremiah 29:5, he said, “Build houses, settle down, plant gardens, eat what they produce”. ..basically, God said, “Carry on your lives as normal, even in the middle of slavery in enemy territory.”

If we look to God and His stability in the midst of change, we experience His faithfulness, His provision and His goodness. Looking back too much can “freeze” us, like Lot’s wife, as she glanced a longing look on the

pleasures of Sodom and Gomorrah, she was turned into a pillar of salt. In Jeremiah 29:7, the prophet told the Israelites to “Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile.”

This was strange advice to these captives who were enslaved by their enemy. This is the type of outlook that sets us apart from the world. When we trust God, we are showing the world that the object of our trust doesn't change like our circumstances.

God never changes. This is His attribute of immutability, which means “never changing or varying.” Understanding this reminds us God will always be the same, He is stable. Psalm 102:25-27 says, “In the beginning, You laid the foundations of the earth...but you remain the same and your years never end.” Let's pray, “Heavenly Father, thank you for the change that seems like an obstacle, blocking my path. Thank you for showing me it is an opportunity, an open door to new things. In Jesus Name, Amen”

#11 Change is Part of Life 4/11

I don't like change at all. In the past year, I've experienced more change than in a very long time, more than the past twenty years. Last year, right before our wedding, my husband sold his family home of 32 years, we bought a home together, within three months got married. I moved into our

new house, and moved from my family home of 26 years. We had been married only ten weeks, when my father died suddenly. Most of the changes have been positive, they have still been the means for me to make adjustments, which cause stress.

I love what Joyce Meyer says, “Change is necessary – it’s part of life. Most of us would say we want change but we can’t keep doing things the way you’ve always done them and hope or expect to get a different result.”

Things in your life will change when you change your mind. Romans 12:2 says, “Do not be conformed to this world...but be transformed (changed) by the [entire] renewal of your mind [by its new ideals and its new attitude], so that you may prove [for yourselves] what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God...” (The Amplified Bible).

We renew our mind with the Word of God! It is living and active and has power to change us

Stop and think about what you’ve been thinking about. “All things are possible with God. And I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength!” Be bold and tell God, “I want You to change me. I want You to use me to change anything in the world that you want to use me for.”

#12 Change = Opportunity 4/12

The challenge of change has become God's open door for me to embrace the new adventures He has in store. Early in my ministry, my late husband Pastor Paul and I suffered the disappointing consequences of a devastating decision made by our senior pastor. My husband was fired from his pastoral position. There was no sin in our ministry. When we left the church, we were bitter, resentful and angry. Within a year, we attended a seminar "Resolving Spiritual Conflicts" taught by Dr. Neil Anderson. Someone once said, "the only constant in life is change." But God stands firm when everything else moves.

Thankfully, the only one thing that hasn't changed in my life is my God. In fact, his character quality of immutability, which is something that only can be attributed to God. Immutability means – never changing, always the same, constant, reliable. Isaiah 54:10 says "Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, "who has compassion on you."

I've now let the challenge of change become God's open door for me to embrace the new adventures He has in store. I am so thankful He will not change His mind about His plans and purpose for me. I encourage you, whatever changes you are facing, grab on to God, He is reaching out to

you; let Him pull you back up. It's only through Him that you can get up again and stand firm because He never changes. Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever." May God's presence and peace engulf you to face your changes.

#13 Conditional Love 4/13

"Do you love me", asks Golde in Fiddler on the Roof, "do you really love me?" Her husband Tevye's answer, "For 25 years, I've lived with you, had children with you, worked to take care of you, do I have to tell you I love you?"

Love is not just a feeling. Love is a commitment. We love because God first loved us. Matthew 20:28 says, "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Telling others we love them is something not only beneficial for them, it's important for us.

Golde knew Tevye was committed to her, their relationship and their family. Yet she wanted her husband to say those three simple words: I love you.

At a retreat, I was asked to define the true meaning of Biblical love. I was asked: "In what ways do you fail to practice Biblical love?" This took a little thought, so I translated how I've been loved into how I love. OK, I confess

I'm shallow. I realized my love is conditional, if someone treats me in a certain way, I love them. If they don't, I withdraw to protect myself from being hurt. Pain makes me isolate. When I am not being filled, I look at deficits and defeats which we somehow justify as reasons to dismiss or deter the relationship.

To love others without conditions, I choose to serve without scorekeeping. It's hard not to be discouraged, especially if at first don't feel any different, in time, you will feel loving. And who knows, you may even hear those beautiful words, "I truly love you, I do."

#14 Blues Epidemic 4/14

Anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, blues epidemic. Did you know that in America today, depression is so prevalent that it is called the 'common cold' of mental illness? From the ten year span of 1985 to 1995, visits to the doctor that resulted in a diagnosis of depression almost doubled and overall, in the twentieth century there was a tenfold increase. We all have the legitimate need to belong and share a fear of rejection. I noticed this in the recent transition for Jim and I, as we changed churches. We have a desire and need for legitimate Christian fellowship, a necessary thing the church must provide. So if believers share life, how is it we are depressed? We must apply Heb. 3:13: "encourage one another, as long as

today is called today, lest any of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” Encouragement of each other comes by way of doing what you would like to have someone do for you to encourage you. We must share our burdens with each other, to trust God with the people He has allowed in our lives at this time. And walk in Ephesians 5:18-21, “Be filled with the spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Besides sharing ourselves with trusted believers, we also must trust God and believe His word. I John 4:4, “because the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”

#15 Suffering Saint 4/15

Most young ladies living in the 1600's would have been thrilled to be engaged to be married. But fifteen year old Jeanne was depressed, it could have been because her marriage had been arranged by her father, to a man 23 years her senior. After the wedding, as a newlywed, things got much worse for Jeanne, her own husband and mother-in-law plotted and raged against her, provoking and abusing her, not allowing her to pray or have time alone. Believing that Christians can have an inward life of prayer, she sought God and said “I saw, O God, that Thou didst create the soul to enjoy

its God. When the soul is quiet and emptied of all its own, it wishes nothing but what Thou wilt.”¹

Madame Jeanne-Marie Guyon endured suffering and persecution. Inward prayer and deep abandonment to God sustained her through difficulties in childbirth, illness and death. A widow at age twenty-seven, Madame Guyon continued to enjoy her God, indifferent to everything on earth because ‘her will was lost completely in union with God’s will.’

Years later, Madame Jeanne-Marie Guyon would experience persecution, public humiliation and imprisonment for her practice of inward prayer. Madame Guyon viewed her sufferings as opportunities to love God. “It is impossible to love God without loving the cross,” she said, “and a heart devoted to the work of the cross finds the bitterest things to be sweet. Often we bear the cross in weakness, and at other times in strength, but both should be alike to us in the will of God.”

Let your sufferings take you to the deep place of inward prayer, peace and hope. “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” Romans 8:18

#16 Give Up the Grudge 4/16

Several years ago, my late husband Pastor Paul and I found ourselves in an unforeseen, extremely hurtful circumstance. It all happened so fast. Days earlier, we were investing our lives in a work we loved. Now we were asked to leave. The dominos were toppling and it seemed they couldn't be stopped.

We could hardly believe what was happening—or that it was happening to us. Our roots ran deep in this place. In addition to our livelihood, we had friendships and relationships with leaders and mentors. How were we to graciously relinquish what had been our lifeblood for the past seven years? How were we to grieve privately and heal honestly, without grieving the Holy Spirit publicly or harming others? We struggled with a gamut of emotions: anger, bitterness, betrayal, jealousy and resentment.

Everyday life brings many opportunities to exercise forgiveness, from small incidents to huge offenses: a driver cuts into our lane, a well-meaning co-worker gives unsolicited advice, a prodigal child strays, or a spouse has been unfaithful. Daily we are faced with the choice to walk in the freedom of forgiveness or the bitterness of unforgiveness.

How do you give up a grudge and recover spiritually? We learned to embrace four essential principles of forgiveness:

The first one is: We need to recognize and identify the existence of our feelings of unforgiveness. In our case, when we took time to sort out our feelings, we were able to greater understand the immeasurable forgiveness the Heavenly Father offers us. Romans 2:4 reminds us, “Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you toward repentance?”

#17 Give Up the Grudge 2 4/17

“Forgive them? But you don’t know what they did to me!”

Everyday life brings many opportunities to exercise forgiveness, from small incidents to huge offenses: a driver cuts into our lane, a well-meaning co-worker gives unsolicited advice, a prodigal child strays, or a spouse has been unfaithful. How do you give up a grudge and recover spiritually? We learned to embrace four essential principles, here are the last three:

2.We must specifically identify the deeper issues? God understands our

feelings and reminds us that the substitutionary process of forgiveness is His idea. Best illustrated in the life of Jesus Christ in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “God, the Father made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf.” Jesus Christ bore our sins, and we should bear one another’s sins and forgive as we have been forgiven.

3. We have to confess and let forgiveness work in the core of our emotions. We must allow God to expose the root cause of our emotions. Neil Anderson says, “Unless forgiveness visits the core of our emotions it is incomplete.” Not only will God use adversity to teach us things we could not learn any other way, He will also prune us for greater and more effective service.

4. Forgiveness is a command, a choice, a crisis of our will. When we decide to give up control and surrender the circumstances, we refuse to hold onto the hurt and the hate. Jesus was asked, “How many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times? Jesus answered, “Not seven times, but seventy-seven times,” Matthew 18:21-22. Martin Luther King said, “Forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is an attitude.”

#18 Where's My Happy Ending? 4/18

Like a royal convention, princesses flitted across the floor in silk, tulle and satin. There were small ones, tall ones, different ages, sizes and shapes. Mini twenty-pound, six month old baby princesses in strollers rolled alongside wobbly toddler princesses in tiaras, as they tripped on floor-length hems. Teen-age princesses showed off their elbow length gloves, balancing on their platform heels. Gowns flashed, glitter sparkled, princesses twirled. The premier of Cinderella brought princesses from all over the county. It reminded me of the heart's desire of every woman and girl, a desire to be rescued by a handsome prince, we ask ourselves, "where's my happy ending?" The end of our story, the happy ending along with lasting hope is found only in God alone. We look elsewhere – possessions, medication, alcohol, entertainment, yet these are temporary fixes. The only true happy ending can be found in the heart that finds its satisfaction in God. Real hope is found only in God. Jesus said in Matthew 11:28, "come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." Our ending will be happy, if we discover our end begins with Him. I John 4:16, "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us." Let's pray, "Heavenly Father, we have believed the lie that if we feel beautiful, we are accepted. Father,

help us to bring our broken hearts and frustrated desires for our happy endings to you. Thank you for allowing your love to transform how we live. In Jesus' name, amen.”

#19 No More Excuses 4/19

“Not now, I don't have time, I don't feel like it,” are excuses I've used to put off making a decision. Although these explanations might be valid, they are also methods I use to give myself permission to procrastinate. Each time I've decided to postpone the decision, it is disobedience to what God wants, my faith erodes and my trust in God is non-existent.

In John 5:1-11, there was a man paralyzed for 38 years, he lived in a 'colony' of people with disabilities: blind, deaf, lame and paraplegic. The man had gotten used to his own condition of inability to use his legs to walk and had grown accustomed to his circumstances. He was not expecting to ever walk again. He had seen many people healed, it seemed like everyone but him. Explained in vs 7 'from time to time the angel of the Lord' would come down and stir the waters, the first one to step into the pool would be cured of whatever disease he had.'

Jesus asked the man in John 5 vs. 6 “Do you want to get well?” Seems like an obvious question, doesn’t it? The paralytic man had to admit he wanted to walk; Jesus wanted the man to admit his condition. For 38 years, he watched scores of miracles: he’d witnessed hundreds of others’ sight restored, hearing renewed, limbs returned to function. And Jesus asked him, “Do you want to get well?” Really? Was Jesus mocking his condition? Sarcastic? Hardly. Jesus wanted the paralyzed man to recognize his condition and invite Jesus to work. Jesus asks us, “Do you really want to get well?” If our answer is yes, it’s an invitation for Jesus to work.

#20 Get Up and Walk 4/20

In John 5:1-11. A man was paralyzed for 38 years, he lived in a ‘colony’ of people with disabilities – these were severe impairments: blind, deaf, lame and paraplegic. The man had gotten used to his own condition of inability to use his legs to walk and had grown accustomed to his circumstances. Like the paralyzed man, some of us don’t know we are paralyzed, we get used to limping along. We make excuses to cover up. God wants to reckon with us. He asks “Are you willing to do whatever it takes to get well?” He wants us to allow Him to have his way and let go.

The bandages of my past paralyzed me— I was wrapped up in shame, blame, unworthiness. God had forgiven me, yet I couldn’t forgive myself.

One day, God asked me to publicly share about my years as a rebellious and promiscuous teenager, alcoholic, drug addict, alcoholic, drug dealer. He asked me to explain how I had heard and believed – 1 Peter 4:8 – how God’s love covered a multitude of my sins. I didn’t want to do this, but I was at a crossroads, ‘would I trust God?’ I asked myself “Do you want to get well?” I had to honestly confess, admit my condition; that was the first step to my healing.

The paralyzed man made excuses about why he couldn’t get well. The man said ‘no one would help me up.’ Basically, it was other people’s fault. He said people cut in front of him. Jesus said, vs “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” Get moving! When the paralyzed man did what Jesus said – he was healed. Stop making excuses for your healing, today!

#21 Prisoner No More 4/21

I made excuses for years; I was afraid of what other people would think. When I faced my wounds, losses, I realized many others had gone through similar things. Although difficult to face what paralyzes us, *Purpose Driven Pastor Rick Warren says, “We are all products of our past, but we don’t have to be prisoners of it.”* What’s paralyzing you?
guilt,loss,addiction,abuse,abortion,affair,shame or perfectionism.

Jesus tells us “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” When you do what He asks, watch Him open doors for you. God has opened many doors for me, once I chose to share how He healed my addictions, He restored to me the years I had wasted on abusing drugs and alcohol. He allowed me to see those in the lifestyle of addiction from a different standpoint. Now I could share with them the same healing and hope I received from Jesus. Jesus did a new thing in me and He could do it for others in the same struggle if they were willing to answer affirmatively to the question, “Do you want to get well?”

“Do not call to mind the former things or ponder the things of the past, behold I will do something new, it will spring forth, will you not take notice of it?” Isaiah 43:5

Jesus told the man twice to “Pick up your mat and walk.” His paralytic mat was where he had spent his whole life. Can you imagine? Thirty-eight years on the same mat? Jesus told him, “You are well...” and the man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who made him well.

If the Son has set you free, you shall be free indeed. John 8:3

#22 The Past Has No Power 4/22

Each time I share the story of how God healed my addictions, shame, blame and God continues to heal me from the pain of this world. All I have to do is say, “yes.” No more excuses.

“Sharing with others your shameful past and God’s glorious grace doesn’t bind you to your past – it frees you from it’s power to hurt you any longer.”

Liz Curtis Higgs

Jesus tells us “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” When you do what He asks, watch Him open doors for you. He restored to me the years I had wasted on abusing drugs and alcohol. He allowed me to see those in the lifestyle of addiction from a different standpoint. Jesus did a new thing in me and He could do it for others in the same struggle if they were willing to answer affirmatively to the question, “Do you want to get well?”

“Do not call to mind the former things or ponder the things of the past, behold I will do something new, it will spring forth, will you not take notice of it?” Isaiah 43:5

Jesus told the man “Pick up your mat and walk.” His paralytic mat was where he had spent his whole life. Can you imagine? Thirty-eight years on the same mat? Jesus told him, “You are well...” and told the Jews that it was Jesus who made him well.

Dear Heavenly Father, forgive us for making excuses. Thank you for your mercy as we have told you, "not now." Thank you for your faithfulness, love, patience, grace and mercy. We do want to get well. We ask you to do whatever it takes to heal us Jesus' name, Amen.

#23 Turning Over a New Leaf 4/23

We don't have to wait to start a new year to turn over a new leaf. Maybe you've been thinking about starting a new routine, adding a new discipline, even memorizing a Bible verse. All it takes is a few minutes of evaluation and although implementation may take time, positive change and personal growth is ultimately rewarding.

We might feel forced to turn over a new leaf when we are in crisis. In an emergency, there's an urgency to fix a problem or come up with a solution. This was the case with King Hezekiah, in Isaiah 36:1 - 3. As the ruler of Judah, he had a very big problem. A large area of cities including Jerusalem were to be attacked by a blood thirsty Assyrian army. The king of Assyria sent a letter to ask King Hezekiah, "What is this confidence that you have?" Isaiah 36:4. King Hezekiah did a key thing in response to the crisis:

King Hezekiah worshipped the Lord. Isaiah 37:1, “And when King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth and entered the house of the Lord.” Instead of running from God, Hezekiah ran to God. Before going into God’s presence, he tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth, a sign of being in mourning for his sin of handling things his own way. He repented from his sin, outwardly by putting on the clothes of repentance and humbled himself inwardly by seeking God’s presence.

Let’s pray, “Heavenly Father, help us heed King Hezekiah’s example: to repent of our sin, mourn over it and humble ourselves before you. Help us learn your ways. In Jesus’ Name, Amen”

#24 Expect the Unexpected 4/24

The example of how King Hezekiah handled his problems is helpful for those of us in crisis. He did three things in response to the unexpected enemy attack on Judah.

1. King Hezekiah worshipped the Lord. Isaiah 37:1, “And when King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth and entered the house of the Lord.” Instead of running from God, Hezekiah ran to God. He repented from his sin,

outwardly by putting on the clothes of repentance and humbled himself inwardly by seeking God's presence.

2. Seek out godly leaders. King Hezekiah asked his advisors to join him in repentance and humility. As his representatives, they did this and spoke to Isaiah. Isaiah gave them a letter with a promise and a message for King Hezekiah.
3. Lay out the problem before the Lord. Isaiah 37:14, "Then Hezekiah took the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it, and he went up to the house of the Lord and spread it out before the Lord."

King Hezekiah literally 'laid out his problem to the Lord.' I love the concept of this. King Hezekiah took the message, the letter from Isaiah and chose to leave his problem of the angry Assyrians at the feet of the Master.

We can learn from King Hezekiah's example. The first thing we can do is, to repent and humble ourselves. And then, consult with godly leaders. Next, write each problem in your life down on paper and then spread them out in front of the Lord. Let's turn over a new leaf today - lay out all of our

problems before the Lord. In this way, our problems become His and not ours!

#25 Survivors 4/25

I'm intrigued by stories of survivors. Did you know it is possible to survive a free-fall from the Sears Tower in Chicago? Or what if you fulfill a lifelong dream of skydiving and your parachute fails, could you survive the fall? The answer is still yes. The Wiki How-To manual says, "Hundreds maybe thousands of people have fallen from such heights and lived to tell the tale." You can increase your chances of survival by putting to use a few helpful skills. We literally trip and fall as we walk through life, like toddlers who move from cruising the couch to the first wobbly steps on their own.. Accidental falls happen when we least expect them and leave us surrounded by a mess.

Beyond the literal, physical ways we trip, teeter or collapse, life brings change and challenges that can move us out of our comfort zones. Facing emotional, spiritual or physical challenges can plunge us into aimless descent. Ever feel like you've been tripped up by an addiction, tormented by shame? Slipped up by doubt? Or fallen headlong into depression?. God wants us to reach out to Him in times of difficulty, doubt, despair, depression, disappointment, disease, destruction, divorce, discouragement,

domestic violence or death.— Ken Baldwin. Golden Gate Bridge jump survivor says, “I instantly realized that everything in my life that I'd thought was unfix-able was totally fixable - except for having just jumped.”

God’s hand is extended to us. His will for us when we are down and out is for us to turn to Him and ask for a hand up. Psalm 145:14 says, “God gives a hand to those down on their luck, gives a fresh start to those ready to quit.”