

From the Inside Out
Philippians 1: 12 – 13
August 23, 2009

I have observed that many people try to make changes – physical changes, style changes – by making alterations to their outsides. Cosmetic surgery is a major industry in the U. S. If I want to appear to be younger than I actually am, a little tuck here, a little nip there, I will be magically decades younger. Want to get rid of blemishes caused by use of tobacco or alcohol? Just go to a specialist and have the unsightly wrinkles and other skin conditions removed. No one will be wiser.

But the truth is that you haven't changed your insides; you remain the same age chronologically, and the havoc you wreaked on your body through your lifestyle choices is still present. Real change must come from within: lifestyle changes in how we approach life. Only then can we improve our health and general well being.

In our spiritual journey, the same principle holds true. It is better when spiritual things come from the inside out. Yet I must say that many people are trying to change their spiritual journey by making external alterations. "If I attend church regularly, or do charitable work, or keep the Golden Rule, then I'll become that more spiritual person."

And when the day of crisis comes, and they react the same way they did before. They wonder why there isn't a change in their thinking, or in their attitude, or in their approach to the situation. Remember, it is better if things come from the inside out.

Today, I want to share with you 4 things, that if you can find them from within yourself than without, your spiritual journey will be more rewarding and meaningful.

What do I have to find within me?

1. I must find within me the spiritual purpose for what is happening to me (Philippians 1: 12 – 13).

A. If I am able to find the spiritual purpose for what is happening, I can deal with the circumstances of my life.

B. Paul is in prison when he writes the letter to the church at Philippi.

1. Think about it: if found behind bars for simply speaking of our religious beliefs, most of us would become bitter toward the world, even angry at God.

2. Paul's response is to dig deep within himself and say, "I guess this is just another opportunity God has given me to preach the gospel to another audience."

3. His evaluation of verse 12 comes, not from looking at the bars or the chains, but from looking within, to the Holy Spirit.

C. If Paul can find a spiritual purpose for being in prison, you and I should be able to find the spiritual purpose underlying whatever is happening to us.

1. Have financial problems, or issues with illness? Look within, and ask, "Heavenly Father, what is the purpose of this experience? What is the deeper meaning and goal of this?"

2. I must develop a personal conviction that tough times make me spiritually stronger (1 Peter 1: 6 – 7).

A. We're all going to experience tough times; tough times are universal.

1. Yes, my tough time may not be the same as your experience; but it is real, and it is going to challenge my faith, my hope, and my trust in the future.

2. What separates us is what is inside each person. Those who are able to find an internal purpose for their troubles are better able to handle them than those who don't.

B. Three different New Testament writers give us compelling reasons why trouble serves to strengthen us:

1. 1 Peter 1: 6 – 7: troubles build my faith. Paul draws on the step of "proving" gold in the refining process of precious metals; by heating raw materials containing gold, the result is a purer grade of gold. The ultimate effect of a time of trials, therefore, is to refine our faith, and to eventually render it stronger and more pure.

2. James 1: 2 – 4: troubles are a way to grow spiritually. Faith tested in the crucible of testing yields the fruit of endurance; and endurance has a perfect (or mature, more finished) ending; James says it then lacks nothing. Actually, James's entire first chapter builds on that foundation to encompass the total picture of a mature Christian, concluding with his summation of pure and undefiled religion: "*This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained from the world (v. 27).*"

3. (Paul) Romans 5: 3 – 5: troubles build hope in God. The process of building our relationship with God is the laying of layers of spiritual development upon each other: tribulations (daily stresses and strains) cause the growth of perseverance (patience), which develops a proven Christ-like character, which then is manifested in enduring hope, which finds its fulfillment in the love of God in the person of the Holy Spirit in each Believer's life.

C. These three men didn't see troubles accomplishing the exact same result, but they all recognized the importance of internalizing a spiritual purpose *before* trouble comes calling.

1. Have you internalized your spiritual purpose before the onset of trouble? Have you set your course by the presence of the Holy Spirit, and according to the Father's plan and purpose for you? Any external plan, philosophy, or self-made goals will wilt and dry up in the glare of trouble.

3. I must determine within me the present and future will govern my life and not the past (Philippians 3: 13 – 14).

A. The Apostle Paul had hunted down and killed Christians. In fact, after coming to know Christ, he refers to himself as the chief of sinners.

1. If he allows himself to obsess about his blood-soaked past, Paul would have been ineffective as a follower of Jesus because he would be overwhelmed with guilt and shame about his past.

2. But he chose to live in the present and focus on his future in Christ, and not live in the past.

B. If I don't determine within myself to live for today in Christ, and focus on the future He has promised me, the past will control my life.

1. We all have events in our lives that, if we allow the guilt and shame to rule us, can easily govern the rest of our lives.

2. Some of us have lost a loved one and cannot get past it. Some of us are shackled to the past because our life didn't turn out the way we expected or planned. Some of us are living in fear of the shadow from our past will crash in to confront us.

C. Whether 8 or 88, we need to allow God to apply His grace, mercy, and forgiveness to our soul, in order that we can live at peace in our present, and in victory about our future.

4. I must determine to say “No” even before I find myself in the situation of having to say “No” arrives (1 Corinthians 6: 12).

A. Have you ever said to yourself, “At the church dinner, I am going to adhere to my diet plan and not eat as much as usual?” Or perhaps you have a similar one-on-one in the Golden Corral parking lot. But, as if some force outside yourself has seized control of your body, you have filled your plate to overflowing and are thinking about going back for seconds!

1. Maybe it is the pull of pornography when you turn on the computer and go to the internet. Or is it the siren song of gambling? Of some other addictive behavior?

2. The power of addiction of any kind is that the compulsion is so great *within* the individual. Therefore, external “fixes” are seldom successful, unless there is a corresponding change *inside*.

1. What's wrong? You haven't internalized the word “No” to situations where you will be vulnerable.

3. For example: You have been involved in an extramarital affair. You have made the decision to reconcile with your spouse, sought to repair the broken connections, done all you can possibly do to refocus on your marriage. Yet, you still find yourself in the presence of the person you were involved with, and you are ashamed by the feelings that well up within you – feelings you have promised to never have for that person again. Why is this so? Because you haven't swept clean your soul and heart, and replaced those sinful feelings with a renewed spiritual commitment to the Lord.

B. You need to internalize “No” before you find yourself in the situation where temptation is present; for example *before you get in that buffet line!*

One last encouragement: the most effective way to internalize your decision-making is to consistently say, “Thank you” to God. When we habitually thank God for what He does for us, the line of authority is firmly set, and when trouble comes, we can react to it from an internally-driven place of gratitude.

Where are you today? Perhaps you are in the depths of crisis, and all the fixes you have tried have failed to deliver the peace and victory you hoped for. Perhaps you have lost sight of the presence and power of God, and so you are left holding the ashes of bitter failure. Some of you would have to confess, “Today I realize I am not in love with Jesus, and I have settled for quick fixes for my troubles instead of the enduring solutions He can give.”

I invite you to come to the altar and fall in love with Jesus today.

Let's pray!