**Lesson: Tools for Change**

 In order to change behavior, a person must change his or her thinking; in order to change thoughts, that person must have a change of heart. You’ve probably heard it said: “You can’t change anybody but yourself, and you have to make the effort to change.” It’s true, isn’t it? Wanting to change requires caring about yourself; and caring requires love. And the love of God can change anybody.

God is the source of all love; in fact, God is love. The Lord said that the most important commandment is to love God first, and the second most important is to love others as yourself. Notice that the second part includes you and implies that you should love yourself as you do others. All too often, people neglect themselves when it comes to distributing their love; they become too wrapped up trying to satisfy everyone else and end up neglecting their own needs.

* PRO 3:5–7 ~ Trust in the Lord with all your heart and don’t rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.
* ECC 10:2 ~ A wise heart inclines a person to do what is right.
* MAT 22:35–40 ~ A lawyer in the gathering, in an attempt to trick the Lord, asked, “Master, what is the greatest commandment of the Law?” Jesus replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind: this is the first and most important commandment. And the second most important commandment is similar to the first: love your neighbor as yourself. If you obey these two commandments, you will fulfill all the Law and the prophecy.”
* 1 CO 13:2–8,13 ~ Even if you have the gift of prophecy, can understand mysteries, and have a faith to move mountains, you are nothing without love. Even if you give all you have to the poor, you profit nothing if you don’t have love. Love is patient. Love is kind. Love is never envious or conceited. Love is not rude, self-seeking, or angered, nor does is it find pleasure in sin. Love does not think of sinful things nor is it provoked by evil. Love rejoices in the truth. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always endures. Love never fails. Faith, hope and love abide, but the greatest of these three is love.
* COL 3:15 ~ Let the peace of God rule in your heart.

 One of the major roadblocks to change is fear, like being afraid of failing, or of the past coming back to haunt you, or of what you have become, or that nothing will change, or that it will be too hard. People worry endlessly about unimportant or trivial matters; they seem preoccupied dwelling on life’s stumbling blocks. If they expended the same amount of energy working the problem that they did worrying about it, then it probably wouldn’t be a problem anymore.

Love conquers the fear that torments our minds. Since the power of love comes from God, it follows that fear must be the power of evil, because the two cannot coexist. Love consumes fear just as light consumes darkness.

* 1 JO 4:7–12,16–21 ~ Let us love one another, for love is from God, and those who love are born of God and know Him. If you don’t love God you can’t know Him because God is love. The love of God was manifested among us through His only Son, so we might live through Him. If God loves us so much, we should love one another; if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is perfected in us. If you abide in love you abide in God, and God abides in you. This perfect love gives us confidence on the day of judgment, because there is no fear in love but perfect love destroys fear, because fear brings torment. We love because God loved us first. You can’t say you love God and hate your brother without being a liar, because you can’t hate someone you have seen and still love God who you have never seen. So, you should love God and your brother (neighbor).
* 2 TI 1:7 ~ God did not give us a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind.

 Fear causes us to have a tormented mind, but love enables us to have a sound mind. If you want to think clearly, and stay focused on the positive, you need God’s love living in your heart. Otherwise, fear will block your way and you may veer from the path. Thus, the first and most important tool for change in your toolbox is love, which will overcome the obstacle of fear that the devil will use to infiltrate your thoughts.

 Once the person cares enough to amend his or her life, they begin to believe that such change is possible. But you can be sure that Satan will try to destroy your faith by bombarding you with doubt. When it comes to God, we don’t doubt Him because He never goes back on His Word. But when we place our faith in ourselves or others, there is a chance that we will be disappointed. Therefore, your faith and confidence should be placed on God, who changes everything in your life once you have experienced that change of heart. You cannot succeed without Him; indeed, without God you will fail. Faith is an important tool in the toolbox, because it helps us overcome doubt, which constantly tries to dominate our thoughts and leave us with uncertainty. Doubt comes from the weakness of our flesh, but faith comes from the Holy Spirit and assures us of the truth which eliminates uncertainty.

* 2 CO 5:17 ~ If anyone lives in Christ, he or she becomes a new creation; old ways have passed away, and behold, all things have become new.
* HEB 12:2 ~ Jesus Christ is the author and finisher of our faith.
* JOH 15:3–5 ~ Jesus said, “Now that you have been cleansed by the Word which I have spoken to you, you can live in me as I live in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit when separated from the vine, neither can you unless you stay connected to me. I am the vine and you are the branches. If you stay connected to me you will bear much fruit, but apart from me you can do nothing.”

 God promises to give us everything we need, in addition to the kingdom. That is our hope, and because we have faith, we do not doubt Him. If you cling to His promises, you will succeed in achieving the changes you desire, without depending on your own strength, but letting the Lord be your strength and guide. When you follow in the ways of righteousness, you will always be heading in the right direction. God will illuminate the route for you for His light is ever-present; if you do not see the light, you are off the beaten track or going in the wrong direction.

* PSA 119:105 ~ God’s Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.
* PSA 145:14–16 ~ The Lord raises those who fall and lifts those who are down. The eyes of all wait for Him and he gives them what they need when they need it. He opens His hand and satisfies the desires of every living thing.
* MAT 6:31–34 ~ Jesus said, “Don’t worry about your worldly needs; your Father in heaven knows what you need. Instead, seek first the kingdom of heaven and the righteousness of God, and this you will receive, as well as all your earthly needs. Don’t be concerned about tomorrow for it will bring its own problems; you have enough to deal with today without worrying about tomorrow.”
* HEB 11:1 ~ Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

 Looking forward to the possibilities that lie ahead gives us purpose, courage, and direction. If you keep focused on the big picture, you will see the Lord waiting at the finish line. And He will give you everything you need and you will prosper, because that’s what He said would happen if you remain connected to Him. However, we don’t know exactly what His plan is or when it will happen because if we did, we could anticipate everything and life would be awfully boring. So, we must never give up hope, and that hope leads to glory.

When one feels hopeless, they become desperate, behave irrationally, and take unnecessary risks. Hope is a powerful tool because it enables us to conquer despair, another one of those obstacles that the evil one uses to distract us from seeing the big picture. Hope becomes the model of change, whereby we can envision what lies ahead, the opportunities available to us, and what positive growth might look like.

* PSA 130:5 ~ I wait for the Lord; my soul waits for Him and in His Word I will hope.
* ECC 8:6–7 ~ For every purpose under heaven there is a season, a time designated by God, although misery and trials may continue to occur. Since we do not know what that purpose is, who (but God) will be able to tell us when?
* ROM 5:1–5 ~ Being justified by faith we achieve peace with God through Christ, in whom we have access by that faith to the grace in which we stand, rejoicing in the hope of glory. Therefore, we rejoice in time of tribulation, knowing that it teaches us patience, it strengthens our hope, and we gain experience.
* ROM 8:24–25 ~ We are saved because we hope. But hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for things they can see? However, if we hope for what we cannot see, we must be patient.
* GAL 5:5–6 ~ Through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness. Circumcision is of no avail; instead, it is faith working through love.

 Clearly, it follows that patience is another valuable tool. Never give up, quit, or not try, because that is the only way to guarantee failure. Even if we do not succeed the first, second, or tenth time, this does not constitute failure, because once you succeed in a given challenge then failure is no longer possible, and you will be ready to move onto the next challenge. Unfortunately, it takes time; but our timeframe is usually not in concert with God’s. If you trust in Him, you know that good things will come your way; you just aren’t sure what or when.

Patience overcomes exasperation, giving up, quitting. The more you try the better you get, and when you triumph, you’ll have a new skill set to bring with you as you take a giant step forward.

* PRO 1:21 ~ People develop their own plans, but it is the Lord’s purpose that will prevail.
* LUK 21:19 ~ Jesus said, “The result of your patience is to possess your soul.”
* JAM 1:3 ~ The trying of your faith produces patience.
* ROM 12:12 ~ Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, and be constant in prayer.

 Like a skilled Olympic athlete, you can run this race and win the crown if you stay focused on the road ahead and never lose sight of the finish line. You will notice the hurdles that you must breach, but they will not mask your view of what lies beyond. And you will leap over them with ease because you have trained hard for the event and in the process developed the patience and ability to persevere.

 Before, you may have considered the hurdles as obstacles that often obscured your vision of the goal. But they were not obstacles at all, just challenges that you faced head-on and eventually overcame, thereby providing additional knowledge and ability. In fact, these challenges became opportunities for further success, each of which got you closer to the objective, which strengthened your resolve, confidence, and character.

By Andrew Barber (Posted 10/01/2022)

 These gifts of love, faith, hope, and patience, they are freely given and form the basis of your relationship with God. They provide the inner strength that enables you to overcome adversity and periodic setbacks. The key to employing these tools effectively is staying united with God in spirit. We connect with God the same way we connect with others: communication. Speak to Him often in prayer; listen to Him as you read and meditate on His Word, and when the Holy Spirit speaks to you through ministers of the Word.

Let Christ live in you and He will show you the way for He is the key to opening your heart. Always look forward, not backwards, expecting only that God’s purpose in your life will be revealed in due time and the timing will be impeccable. Stay on the highway that takes you to the ultimate destination, which is heaven, where the reward of eternal life with the Lord awaits you. Meanwhile, enjoy the journey as you explore all the possibilities, because you will discover meaning in your life, purpose to everything that happens, and guidance at every crossroads.

* ISA 64:4 ~ Nobody has ever heard, seen, or even perceived the wonderful things that God has prepared for those who love Him. (also 1 CO 2:9)
* LUK 17:20–21 ~ Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven will not appear while you are looking around for it, because the kingdom of heaven is found within you.”
* JOH 14:2 ~ Jesus said, “In my Father’s house are many mansions; I’m going ahead to prepare one for you.”
* GAL 5:22–23 ~ Fruits of the Spirit include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things.
* PHP 4:8 ~ Whatever is true, honest, just, pure, lovely, uplifting, virtuous, and praiseworthy—think about these things.

Remain positive in your outlook. Don’t let the negativity rule your mind; such thoughts will only bring you down, and usually have no semblance of truth. There is no challenge too menacing or temptation too great that you cannot overcome with the Lord on your side. Bring your troubles to Him and He will give you peace, assurance, and conviction. All your dreams will come true and you will become the person you strive to be, and were meant to be.

* LUK 1:37 ~ Nothing is impossible with God.
* PHP 4:13 ~ I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.
* JAM 4:7 ~ Submit to the Lord. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.
* 1 JO 4:4 ~ You are from God my children, and have overcome the world; because greater is He that is in you (Christ) than he that is in the world (Satan).