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What Should I Be Doing Differently?

1 Corinthians 9:25: (NASB) *Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.*



How is it that life seems to go by so fast? How is it we more often than not look back on our life, the things we did and what we became with a measure of regret, knowing we could have been more or contributed more? Have you ever stopped to think of what makes life happen? It is actually a pretty simple equation: $\text{TIME} + \text{EXPERIENCES} = \text{LIFE}$. Now, we know that is an oversimplification, but stay with us. If we can accept that life is the combination of time and experiences, then wouldn't solving the issue of making one's life fuller and more meaningful be easier to understand? Time is measurable and predictable and we all have the same amount each and every day. Experiences whether they are physical, observational or thoughts, are essentially the sum of what we do with the time given to us each day. What can we do to make our time and experiences produce a rich, fruitful and contented life?

How do we do this with the variety of distractions bombarding us? Much of the thinking for tonight's podcast came from the book, "The Power of Consistency" by Weldon Long. Though it is a book written primarily for those who want to succeed in business, the principles he discusses ring true for our personal lives as well.

To know what to do differently, we need to know what we are doing that is the same!

Building Blocks of Understanding for a Better Life: #1. To better invest my time and maximize my experiences I need to understand - what drives my homeostasis, my comfort zone

Homeostasis or equilibrium (state of balance) would logically be a good thing, since it means that we are on an even keel.

The problem with this is that an even keel for the sinful mind is not the same as for a spiritual mind: 1 Timothy 4:1-2: *Having their conscience seared with a hot iron* - A seared conscience seeks a seared equilibrium! A seared conscience is insensitive or numb to sin - sin no longer bothers us. If our conscience has no sensation for right or wrong we are not on an even keel. This can not only hurt us but also the people around us. We need to start with a *spiritually-based* standard.

 **Where am I, Effecting Positive Change - Personal Growth and Development, Randy Ross**

Evenness and comfort can be deceiving. We need to focus on what is *good* for us, not what is *convenient* for us.

Galatians 6:7-8: We sow to the end result that we seek. The end result we seek is personal equilibrium. But wait...we are Christians who believe in Jesus. If we are "saved," why do we have to go through all of this hard work? Can't we just be ourselves and not worry about it? Because being a "Christian" is more than just believing in Jesus; it is following in the footsteps of Jesus.

Galatians 6:9-12: Seek a higher equilibrium and do not lose heart as you are trying to attain it! Sometimes in seeking a higher equilibrium we try and drag fleshly equilibrium with us.

For Christians, it is important to understand what we will call "aged-based thinking," meaning the ages of time. For instance, the Old and New Testaments had different objectives in the honoring of God. For Israel, their blessings from God for serving Him were primarily land and abundance-based. *For the Christian, our blessings are primarily based in spiritual growth and maturity.* The Israelites in the Old Testament offered animal sacrifices, but the New Testament Christians (including us!) offered themselves in a figurative sacrifice.

We want to sacrifice what we would normally want to do even if what God wants us to do is more difficult, setting aside our personal preferences. But should all earthly things be replaced with something spiritual? No. We still have to take care of our families, work at our jobs to support ourselves, and other things the Scriptures say we should embrace as well.

Is earthly abundance bad? More on this soon...



One more look at another equilibrium example: Luke 12:16-21: At first glance, we might interpret this as saying, “If you prepare for the future, God sees you as a fool.” Does that mean you should not have a retirement plan? No.

So, why did Jesus speak this parable? Luke 12:13-15: It appears the man asking the question was not the firstborn son, who would have received the main inheritance. He was hoping Jesus would mediate to get him more funds, but Jesus would not involve himself with this man’s personal affairs. Jesus was concerned with the man’s *spiritual* affairs. Jesus’ point was that abundance is not wrong, but abundance is an empty poverty if it is without a balancing fullness towards God. Seek equilibrium where all things are well balanced!

It is not wrong to have things, but if those things override godliness in our lives, they become damaging. If we can manage those things in the context of godliness they can become tools, such as to help others.

Observations about our first building block:

- We all seek and need homeostasis - equilibrium.
- Sometimes we find what we think is balance in places that are very unbalanced.
- Just because we “feel” comfortable or we “feel” balanced does not necessarily mean we are. The real world around us is different than our feelings.
- We need to check the tuning of our conscience to see what our feeling of balance is based on. We need to be ethical. Do the right thing even when no one is looking.

All things are created twice. – *Stephen R. Covey* (once in your mind and once in reality)

 **Small wins, *Self-Discipline Techniques*, *Elliot Hulse***

Building Blocks of Understanding for a Better Life: #2. To better invest my time and maximize my experiences I need to understand - My life is a perfect reflection of what is in my box.

In his book “The Power of Consistency,” Weldon Long explains our mind as being a tool box for dealing with life. The tools you have determine how you work on the problems you face in life. **Please see CQ Rewind Full Edition for the quote from page 154.**

What kinds of tools are in the toolbox of YOUR mind?

Let us start with some TMDs - Tools of Mass Destruction - that might be in our toolbox. In contrast with the uplifting Beatitudes taught by Jesus, we will talk about “Baditudes” or bad attitudes.

The Tool of Self-centered Thinking: It fixes my desire to focus only on ME!!

Hebrews 12:14-17: (NASB) Because Esau’s mind was so thoroughly bent on his physical person, he gave away the most sacred and privileged status of his life. After that consequence became apparent, his reaction was to want it back, to beg and cry. This desire for the birthright only surfaced *after the fact*. We may conclude that he was reacting not out of repentance or sorrow but more out of self-centeredness. Esau allowed bitterness to get in the way of the goodness in his life.

The Tool of Stubborn Denial: It fixes my sight to only see what I WANT to see!

Luke 13:34-35: *How could we be as stubborn? Consider our relationships with people who are not a good influence on us, but we like them even though they may be corrupting us. If we keep those relationships, we may be in stubborn denial. We need to walk away from such circumstances and towards what is higher, because many times we are not strong enough to pull those people out of their lifestyle. Walking away and seeking something higher often is a better example to them in the long run.*

The Tool of a Calloused Heart: It fixes my heart to find its comfort in the darkness of sin

Ephesians 4:17-19: The Apostle Paul was telling the Ephesian church they should not be walking in a sinful path, but should be walking at a higher level. The *futility of their mind* was *darkened in their understanding, excluded from God* because it does not look for God. What the heart wants, the heart tries to get. If we only give our hearts the callous sensuality of the sinful human experience, how can we expect true godliness or a God-praising life? Warning: We can have these tools in the toolboxes of our minds even if we profess Christianity. Are we aware these are there and what are we doing about it?



The Tool of Laziness: It fixes my actions to be minimal and purposefully ignorant of reality
Proverbs 26:13-15: Laziness is the most common and inexpensive tool to acquire. Once acquired and placed into anyone’s tool box, it slowly and definitively becomes one of the most costly and destructive tools to own!

Mental and physical fatigue take a toll on us at the end of the day. The older we get, the harder it becomes. Are we focused enough to recognize the tool of laziness and find a positive one to counteract it?

We started with some TMDs - Tools of Mass Destruction. Now let us continue with TMCs - Tools of Massive Construction! The key is self-control and self-discipline. If you can change the tool you use, you can change the outcome of your life.



Small wins; now add more, *Self-Discipline Techniques, Elliot Hulse*

The small win does not change your life, but the discipline that you develop to get and keep the small win is the building block to change your life. Small victories repeated give us something to work with.

The Tool of God-centered Thinking: It fixes my desire to focus on serving and giving
Philippians 3:12-14: To have God-centered thinking does not mean we are perfectly God-centered and we will never again make any mistakes. It means that we are daily working at our desire to always be pointed UP! We get God-centered thinking by reading His word.

The Tool of God-Centered Thinking cancels out the Tool of Self-Centered Thinking.

The Tool of Passionate Acceptance: It fixes my sight to only see what God’s will directs me to see! The Tool of Passionate Acceptance overrides the Tool of Stubborn Denial.

Acts 21:11-14: As the Apostle Paul was ready to leave, one of the Christians there begged him not to go to Jerusalem lest he be taken prisoner. They did not want him to go to prison - the solution was simple - do not go! But Jesus gave Paul the commission to bring the message to the Gentiles, so this was God’s will. Paul’s answer used this Tool of Passionate Acceptance. He was ready to die if that was God’s will. Paul’s example is unbelievable. He was willing to do whatever he needed to in order to show, *Thy will be done.*

Passionate acceptance changes our expectations, because we can now see more clearly! We need to willingly accept God’s will in our lives and act in a way that is pleasing to God.

This means it is not so much about taking care of me, but how can I contribute to YOU. When we think in this way, our lives will begin to change.

Romans 14:13-15: This was about the debate they had in the early church about eating food that was offered to idols. We are taught to be sensitive to the conscience of our brother even if it is not as strong as yours. An open heart instinctively combats the darkness of ego since dark cannot stand the light! We are unique and may have different ways of serving God the best we can.

The Tool of Industriousness: It fixes my actions to be decisive and productive to fulfill God’s will! **Proverbs 6:6-11:** To be industrious is to be active. To be active for Christ is to be an overcomer! It is working hard even when we do not feel like it.

Building Blocks of Understanding for a Better Life: #3. To better invest my time and maximize my experiences I need to understand how to focus on my Circle of Influence and NOT my Circle of Concern.

This is a HUGE point from Weldon Long’s book, “The Power of Consistency.” He clearly explains how our *Circle of Concern* is outside of our *Circle of Influence*, and as such cannot be altered by our focus or worry, no matter how hard we try. We cannot change our Circle of Concern. But, our Circle of Influence is where we can make choices that actually affect the outcome.



Direction not intention, *Effecting Positive Change; Personal Growth and Development, Randy Ross*

“It is our direction - not our intention - that determines our destination.” It is great to have good intentions but if they do not do anything to alter a downward spiral of direction, then intentions are meaningless. How do we focus on our actual direction, our Circle of Influence?



For a practical lesson in determining and focusing on our Circle of Influence and not our Circle of Concern, we look at the Apostle Paul's conversion. Saul was forcibly shown the error of his ways and repented. **Ananias, the Christian brother who would be sent to Saul, did not need force; he simply needed faith:** Acts 9:10-18: Ananias is given a very specific task to accomplish. This task falls within his Circle of Influence, for Jesus proclaimed it to be so in the vision. Ananias says to Jesus, "Saul has done much harm to your saints and continues to do so." He is wandering outside his Circle of Influence into his Circle of Concern and his concern and fear are truly legitimate! He could not change the concern. We need to focus on what we *can* change so we can grow through our experiences in a more contented way. Jesus' answer allays his concern and helps Ananias to focus on that which he *could* influence. He tells Ananias that Saul will be a Christian like Ananias, and Saul will have to suffer like Ananias but will be delivered from the things he will suffer. Ananias walks in faith and applies his influence to *Brother* Saul! THIS WAS A DEFINING MOMENT for both that would lead to the canceling of his Circle of Concern regarding Saul. By doing what he *could* do, the big concern went away.

For us, if we focus on what we *can* change, we might be better able to better put a trial in perspective. Saul did NOT procrastinate - he is healed and then he is baptized! Our time is only well invested when we are focusing on our Circle of Influence. It is wasted, never to be retrieved, when spent focusing on our Circle of Concern. (Even though some of us like to complain and moan and groan over what we cannot change.)

Focusing on others and living with gratitude makes our own trials and difficulties much easier.

Building Blocks of Understanding for a Better Life: #3. To better invest my time and maximize my experiences I need to understand - the primary change I need is to make better decisions and to follow through on them

This is always the inevitable conclusion when we seek to make significant change in our lives. Just like the Stephen Covey quote, "All things are created twice," we mentally create a better life when we make a choice, and we physically create a better life when we act on that choice. We must follow through on that choice.

It is great to say, "I am going to do this," like a New Year's resolution, but we have to act on that choice and follow through.

Many of us fall into the pit of living our lives controlled by others or by our own emotions rather than controlling our Circle of Influence, doing what we can do to change things. While emotions are real to us, they do not necessarily reflect the reality of life around us.

We want to make better decisions and follow through on them.

Philippians 4:4-9: To rejoice always is a decision - and sometimes it is a hard one! Decide and act! Sometimes our circumstances do not lend themselves to rejoicing. We recently spoke to a listener who is in extraordinary pain 24 hours a day. We cannot just read this Scripture to them and say, "Rejoice!" Rejoicing does not mean you are giddy and happy; it is looking at God knowing He knows and cares. To wear our Christlikeness on the outside is a decision and sometimes a hard one. If everyone is miserable and complaining, they want to see the same in you. When Christlikeness rises above that, it creates friction. Decide and act! This might look like kindness, gratitude, generosity or even a smile. There is so much we can do to show a gentle spirit. To release anxiety and embrace prayer is a choice and sometimes a hard one. Decide and act! The peace of God in your life is a RESULT. It is God's action as a result of our making godly decisions in rejoicing, having a gentle spirit and not being anxious! In other words, as a result of us making godly decisions, God gives us peace.

"Create things twice" - first decide to think and dwell on godly things. Then practice that which you have decided to think and dwell on! The Apostle Paul wanted us to see his testimony in his service to God in how he lived his life. God gave him peace through all kinds of trials and tribulations and can do the same for us. This was the same Paul who killed Christians. He then chose and acted differently. He listened to God through Jesus.

*So, what should I be doing differently?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*