

JANUARY 2009 Week 1 TEACHING

Hold Up...Wait a Minute...

Started working on that New Year's Resolution have you? Before you dive into it with all cylinders blazing, hold up...wait a minute. Digest a little food for thought first.

Before you set sail on the ocean of self deprivation, ask yourself a question. What are resolutions about anyway? The dictionary defines "resolution" as a firm determination to accomplish something. For each of us that "something" is a little different. For some it involves better health choices like losing weight, exercising more, and cutting loose some bad habits. For others it may involve changing jobs, terminating unhealthy relationships, or finding new ways to an increased quality of life. Whatever our resolutions are about, in most cases we consider them to be a bridge to a happier state of being.

It is said that 90% of us will fall short of our resolutions and not accomplish what we set out to do. Now you probably don't like those odds and I don't either. But the truth is-- so many of us fail when it comes to sticking to New Year's resolutions that they've now taken on a kind of negative connotation; people just expect to fail at them, and what's worse is that they expect everyone else to fail too.

Tackling the problem or circumstance that is the focus of our resolution isn't the bridge to happiness (If it was, 90% of us would be doomed to a very unhappy existence.) And in some cases making a resolution may do more harm than good. It's not exactly what you want to hear when you need to make a change and have chosen the start of a new year to put it in motion, but help is on the way.

God never intended that any us should be in bondage. He wants us to be free of anything that causes us to feel defeated and unhappy. Our lives are so incredibly complicated and weighted down with baggage that we can't see our way clear to trust that, but we must. Trusting His love opens the channel to our success. So if we want to be committed to resolutions of any kind that is the place to start, by unloading the baggage that hinders us from being fully persuaded in God's love.

How do we navigate our way to success? Well kicking the ol' heavies of doubt and insecurity to the curb is a good place to start, but it ain't easy. It requires preparation, and preparation is the map that will point us in the right direction.

As you've heard me say many times, preparation is the process of taking some old stuff off and putting some new stuff on. Trust me ladies and gents, that is the process by which any form of promotion or elevation will take place. Change will not occur unless we make room for it. You can see this principle in just about every aspect of life.

Colossians 3:9,10 NLT

9 Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old evil nature and all its wicked deeds. 10 In its

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place you have clothed yourselves with a brand-new nature that is continually being renewed as you learn more and more about Christ, who created this new nature within you.

God has an expectation that dictates we put off the negative aspects of how we spoke, thought, and behaved (the language, attitudes, and behaviors that are contrary to His will), and put on the things that are in agreement with His will. If we are unwilling to do that, then there is little hope that we will do much more.

Colossians 3:12-17 NLT goes on to tell us exactly what we ought to be putting on:

12 Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

13 You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

14 And the most important piece of clothing you must wear is love. Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony.

15 And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are all called to live in peace. And always be thankful.

16 Let the words of Christ, in all their richness, live in your hearts and make you wise. Use his words to teach and counsel each other. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts.

17 And whatever you do or say, let it be as a representative of the Lord Jesus, all the while giving thanks through him to God the Father.

I just adore the NLT translation of Colossians 3:14. It says "*the most important piece of clothing you must wear is love...*" Wow!!! You can put on the most expensive, designer duds that anyone has ever made, but it won't look anywhere near as good on you as love.

The love of God must swell to overflowing in our hearts. It's a tremendous reality and it takes up a tremendous amount of space in our lives. We don't have time to focus on the negative. Doing so slows us down and causes us to miss opportunities. And focusing your attention on the external won't get you very far either. As I stated earlier, tackling the problem or circumstance that is the focus of our resolution isn't the bridge to happiness-- the Word of God is.

Luke 11:28 NKJV

28 But He said, "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

True happiness comes from hearing the Word of God and allowing it to saturate our minds and hearts to the point where we are living it day by day. The Word tells us that God wants us to clothe ourselves with "*tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.*" He wants us to wear love as a second skin. He wants us to love unconditionally, out of a pure heart.

This is particularly poignant for single sistas and brothas, because you sometimes think that to love unconditionally is to give of your body....uh,uhh,uhhhhh!!! Romans 12:1 very clearly tells us that God requires us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to HIM. Your leftovers won't cut it. How can any of

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us so freely offer the most precious thing we own to another human being and not present it as a holy sacrifice to our Heavenly Father? That's just plain out of whack.

To love unconditionally is to love with the love of God in your heart. It means that you are willing to support, bless, care for, pray for, and minister to a man or woman without the lower part of your body being involved.

At a time when we can clearly see that dreams DO come true and anything and everything IS possible; when it seems that everyone is getting their 15 minutes of fame, we would do well to remember that our turn is just around the corner. Will we swerve into it gracefully by being fully prepared and wearing God's designer gear, or will our suits still be at the cleaners?

Don't let it be you. When you're making your New Year's resolutions...first things first. Think about clothing *yourself in tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and most importantly, love*. Then ask God if you've got any holes or tears in that clothing that need a little mending. If it does, He'll show you how best to do that. Begin your resolutions with a commitment to be more anchored in the things of God, and then allow the Holy Spirit to lead, guide, and direct you through the trouble spots. When you do this, you'll be well on your way to resolute success.

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