

Small Group Material

My One Word (2012) Series

Week #2 “ A Lens.... Not A Promise”

Overview Of The My One Word Series

Americans celebrate the New Year by dropping a ball at midnight in New York City. A million people gather for the event and billions more watch on TV. Most of us wake up the next day and make a list of the things we want to change about ourselves this year. Changes like losing weight, quitting smoking and getting out of debt. A new year means a new start. It's the perfect chance to get serious about our desire to change. But almost no one commits to these changes and most have given up on them completely within a month. We just keep dropping the ball. What if you don't need a list of sweeping promises? What if your hope to change is just one word away? What if you actually did something about one thing instead of nothing about everything?

Bottom Line Week #2

The goal is not for COMMITMENT, but DEPENDENCE.

Key Scripture

Psalm 90:9-17 (NIV)

9 All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan. **10** Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away. **11** If only we knew the power of your anger! Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due. **12** Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

13 Relent, LORD! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants. **14** Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. **15** Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble.

16 May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children.

17 May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us - yes, establish the work of our hands.

Romans 12:1,2

1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. **2** Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Lamentations 3:19-23

19 I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. **20** I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. **21** Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:

22 Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. **23**

They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 24 I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."

Insight, Reflection & Discussion Questions

Based on the ratings, it is safe to guess that one of America's guilty pleasures is wasting time watching *Dancing with the Stars*. There is something oddly fascinating about borderline celebrities performing completely out of their element.

The first few weeks are the most painful to watch as contestants struggle to learn the tango, waltz or salsa. Their movements are stiff and they always seem to be a step behind their partner. Words like "spastic" and "convulsive" could be used to describe what happens once their feet hit the dance floor. Fatigue and frustration set in as they attempt to master something that is so unnatural to them.

Maybe it is because I have two left feet, but I admire their ability to embrace and endure the struggle of becoming fleet footed. For the most part, I've come to grips with not knowing how to dance, but this hasn't always been the case. On numerous occasions, my wife suggested we take a dance class together.

My initial reaction was to say, "No way." I'd make excuses, like that lessons would be another expense for our shoestring budget or yet another activity to fit into our busy schedule, but that wasn't the true source of my hesitation. My reluctance stemmed from knowing I might trip over my own feet or that my clumsiness might make it necessary for my wife to ice her feet after every class.

Sadly, my initial reluctance in learning how to two-step is a direct result of my tendency to throw in the towel when things get challenging. Like everyone else, I naturally choose comfort and routine over struggle.

Yet, struggle needs to take place for me to grow and learn. Change will always be met with resistance. Maturity is found in those moments when we embrace the struggle by facing it head on. Many of us see our struggle as wrong. Somehow, though we understand that every other life change is hard, we believe that spiritual change should be easy.

Likewise, we are puzzled when destructive thought patterns keep popping up, or when bad habits are hard to break, or when we feel like we're spending more time stumbling than actually walking with God. The truth is, you can't become like Christ in 3 or 4 easy steps. Our transformation is a process in which struggle is inevitable and resistance is expected. This struggle, this resistance, builds strength, but only when we surrender to God.

James 1:4 reminds us "perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." This verse should give you hope: it gives you *permission* to struggle. When we are tempted to give in is not the time to quit. This is the moment in which we look to God to see what he is teaching us. My One Word is about learning and embracing something new.

Your One Word should serve as a lens through which you see not only how you should respond to things that you encounter, but also to help you see why you don't respond the way you should. This makes room for your struggle. Keeping your eyes focused on God is the key to being formed into the image of God, because what you see determines the direction you go.

Your One Word focuses on effort. Instead of trying to do everything, your one word is going to help you narrow your focus so your efforts will be effective. It will be hard. It is not in our nature to embrace struggle. Instead, we resist it. In the face of uncertainty and risk, we tend to eliminate struggle. We want hassle free maturity. But, when it comes to the condition of your heart, you must embrace it. Your One Word will help focus the necessary effort to embrace the struggle required in the formation of your heart.

Change cannot and does not come without struggle. The encouraging thing is that God wants to meet us in the midst of our struggle. That is exactly where he wants us to be: Where we have exhausted all our human strength, patience and will, and have nothing else to rely on but him.

The reality is our normal natural pace of life is not going to push us towards spiritual formation. This is why the author of Psalm 90 asks the Lord for help in numbering his days. Numbering your days reminds you that transformation is an ongoing process. This verse is written in the form of a prayer request. The fact that we have to ask God for this is an indicator that we don't instinctively do it well. We shouldn't feel defeated or ashamed by the fact that we need help. Your world will help frame your vision in a way that allows you to see how every day counts in the formation of your heart.

Your effort is not to change, but to remain in a place where God can change you. The goal is not commitment, but rather dependence. Make no mistake, this exercise will require tenacity. Commitment is required. But, you are not just making promises to yourself that you will be different. Rather, your commitment helps you focus on your dependence on Christ. You discipline yourself to walk with God, not merely keep the rules.

The challenge is going to be for you to focus on one thing for an extended period of time. You must have an articulated, measurable map to determine how God's image is being formed and revealed in your life. You are not promising to never do something again; instead you are creating a lens through which you can see your life changing and being formed into the image of God. This will enable you to have some tangible and measurable way in which you are able to depend upon God to work in your life.

ENGAGE

- **How do you suffer from this 'all or nothing' type mindset when it comes to your walk with Christ? How does this type of thinking set us up for failure and discouragement? What does this say about our understanding of the transformation process?**

- **How does viewing our ONE WORD as a lens rather than a promise enable us to live in the tension of how things are and how things really should be? In what way does it provide clarity and focus to our situation?**
- **When it comes to the transformation process, what do you feel you struggle with more: endurance or being intentional about change? What makes you answer in the way that you do?**
- **Read Psalm 90:9-17. What dangers exist when we discard or label something as a “bad” day? How do we discount the learning, formation and redemption of that “bad” day?**
- **Read Romans 12:1-2 and Lamentations 3:19-23. In view of God’s mercy, what does it look like to embrace struggle?**
- **What impact would your word (or potential words) have on the way you see your life?**
- **What resistance are you already encountering with your word or potential words?**