

INTRODUCTION

I recently heard a funny story about a pet store delivery truck going down the road. At every stop light, the driver jumped out and ran to the back of the truck, grabbed a 2X4 and started beating on the side of the truck. Nobody could figure out what he was doing, so finally one guy asked him why he kept banging on the side of truck. The driver said, "This is only a two-ton truck and I'm carrying four tons of canaries, so I've got to keep two tons of them in the air all the time."

That may be the way you feel most of the time—you may stay frustrated because you feel like you're carrying a heavier load than you can bear—so you've got to keep half the canaries flying. If you're in need of refreshment, you've come to the right place.

This morning, we're going to resume the series called, "REFRESH: What to do when life crashes." One week ago I was standing on the very plot of ground in Galilee where Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount, which contains these beatitudes. To this day, this grassy hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee is called the Mount of Beatitudes. There were 65 of us there last Sunday morning. Most of our group had been here and heard the first three messages in this REFRESH series. I was thrilled to stand in the very place where Jesus first spoke these words, but what happened next really burst my balloon. After I read the beatitudes I reminded the folks I was currently teaching seven REFRESH steps based on these beatitudes. So, I asked the group, "Can anyone tell me what the first step that begins with R is?" Total silence. Not a single person, including several of our wonderful, godly staff members could recall the first step! So, I helped them with the first one, and then asked if anyone could remember the second step that started with E...nope—not a peep. Surely, one of them would remember the third step beginning with F—after all, I had talked about it seven days earlier. But when I asked, there was only silence again—strike three! I really got a good dose of reality about how memorable my teaching really is! We enjoyed a good laugh together.

Relax folks. There's not going to be a test. Personal spiritual refreshment isn't found in memorizing steps or recalling teaching points. When we're struggling with deep hurts, destructive hangups, and dangerous habits, we don't need another sermon, we need a Savior—and the name of our Higher Power is Jesus Christ. Let's see what He said about how to be blessed:

Matthew 5:1-6. "Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.'"

Our REFRESH memory verse says, "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord." (Acts 3:19)

In case you're keeping track, let's review the first three steps in our REFRESH process. Each step has a refreshing attitude to go with it as well. The first step is to **R**ecognize that I'm not God. The right attitude is, "I am totally helpless." The second step is to **E**arnestly believe God exists

and that I matter to Him. Your attitude in that step should be, "I believe God can help me!" The third step is to **F**ully surrender my life and will to Christ's control. The right attitude to have for that step is, "I'll be meek without being weak." Our fourth Refreshing step is to **R**eceive God's righteousness as a gift of grace. In order to do that, you must adopt this refreshing attitude: "I'll cooperate with God's change process." Grace is God's power to change. In order for God's grace to function in our lives, we must cooperate with Him in this change process. So, let's consider two important truths about what it means to be filled with His righteousness!

I. TO BE FILLED WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS I MUST UNDERSTAND RIGHTEOUSNESS:

In order to know what it is to be filled with righteousness, you've got to understand what it is and what it isn't. I have asked the following question several times in the past, and I enjoy asking it, because each time I do, there are more and more people who come to understand righteousness.

If you are righteous, please hold up your hand. Okay, you can put your hands down. Next question: How many of you are going to heaven when you die? Great! But if you didn't raise your hand to the first question, you can't raise your hand for the second question. There won't be a single unrighteous person admitted to heaven.

So why were you reluctant to raise your hand when I asked you if you were righteous? It's because you assumed I was asking you if you were self-righteous. I didn't ask that. I simply asked if you were righteous. To understand righteousness:

1. I must understand the difference between self-righteousness and God's righteousness

The Bible makes a clear distinction between the two in Philippians 3:9, "I want to be found in him, [Jesus] not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, [that's self-righteousness] but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith [that's God's righteousness]."

To be righteous means to be "in right standing" before God. Self-righteousness is our feeble attempt to be good and to do good in order to gain God's approval. We have a human tendency to want to brag about how good we are—especially when we compare ourselves to people who aren't as "good" as we are!

While I was in seminary, I preached in an old white wooden church in Kentucky. This beautiful white church stood out in shining contrast to the dark crops and trees surrounding it. I thought it was the whitest color possible. But then one week, a snowstorm covered the entire landscape under a blanket of pure snow. When I saw that white church, I was shocked at how dirty it looked. Compared to the pure snow, the building appeared dirty and dingy. The same is true when we compare our very best good works to the purity of the character of Christ. The Bible describes our self-righteous deeds: "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags." (Isaiah 64:6) The phrase "filthy rags" described the putrid, discarded clothing of infected lepers—yuck! But God says our very best deeds are like filthy

rags compared to His holiness.

All of our self-righteous deeds are like filthy rags, but God wants to wrap us in the pure shining robes of HIS righteousness. The Bible says in Isaiah 61:10, "My soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness." (Isaiah 61:10) So how do we exchange our filthy rags of self-righteousness for God's robe of righteousness? We don't have to DO anything. Jesus did it all for us when He died on the cross. The Bible says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (II Corinthians 5:21)

Jesus went to the cross wearing the pure white garment of righteousness. He had never told a lie, never cheated, never stolen, or never spoken an evil word. Even Pilate said, "I find no fault in this man." But on the cross, Jesus took upon Himself all the filthy rags of sinful humanity. In exchange, He offers us His robe of righteousness. If you have surrendered your life to Jesus Christ, God no longer sees your filthy rags; He only sees the righteousness of Jesus Christ!

It is this understanding of righteousness that allows us to take REFRESH step #4: "Receive God's righteousness as a gift of grace."

2. I must understand the difference between positional righteousness and personal righteousness

No matter what I've done in the past or what I may do in the future, God looks at me now and sees the righteousness of Jesus Christ! This is what the Bible means when it speaks of us being in Christ. It means we are positioned in the righteousness of Christ. That's positional righteousness. But if there is a misunderstanding about grace, it is the tendency to think since we're in the righteousness of Christ, we can do whatever we want and God's grace will cover it. Heaven forbid—that's not grace, that's a *disgrace*! Even though we are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus, we must have a desire to live a life of personal righteousness—not to earn God's favor, but so we can walk in fellowship with Him. The Bible says, "Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he [Jesus] is righteous...No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning because he is born of God." (I John 3:7, 9)

Does that mean once you're a Christian you won't sin? No. It means you no longer have a *desire* to sin. Before you were clothed in the righteousness of Christ, you used to run after sin, now as a Christian you run from it. Before you were a Christian, you could sin and not experience any conviction, but since you're born of God, you fall under deep conviction whenever you sin. God hasn't made it so His children can't sin—but He has made it so His children can't sin and enjoy it! That's why we strive for personal righteousness.

II. TO COOPERATE WITH GOD'S CHANGE PROCESS I MUST FOCUS ON:

Let's review our step and refreshing attitude. Step #4 is **Receive** God's righteousness as a gift of grace. The corresponding attitude you must embrace says: "I'll cooperate with God's change process." We can't change ourselves, it's God who changes us, but He won't change us unless

we allow Him to. We have to cooperate with Him. In order for that to happen you must answer this personal question: Are you really hungry and thirsty for righteousness? I'm not asking you if it would be nice or convenient for you to experience God's righteousness—but do you possess a craving hunger and a dying thirst for God's righteous life? If you do, then you will understand a hungry and thirsty person is a focused person! I saw a picture once of a little kid eating dog food—that's a hungry kid!

Most of us have never been truly hungry, where the sides of our stomach were compressed together. We feel hungry if we miss a couple of meals. But there is a condition of hunger where the hungry person is so famished, all they can focus on is finding food. Few of us have ever been so thirsty that our every thought is consumed with the idea of finding a drink of water. Jesus said before you will be filled you have to hunger and thirst for His righteousness. If you are willing to cooperate with God's change process in your life, here are five practical principles you can focus on:

1. I must focus on changing one defect at a time

The Bible says, "A discerning [intelligent] man keeps wisdom in view, but a fool's eyes wander to the ends of the earth." (Proverbs 17:24) You may be at a spot where you're thinking, "Okay, I need to change thirty things in my life." Don't try that or you'll be overwhelmed. Instead why don't you get very specific with God and ask Him, "Father what specific defect would YOU like to work on first in my life? Not what I think needs changing, but what YOU want to change." Don't just pray generally, "Lord, help me be a better person." You can make suggestions, and when you name a need, God has a way of letting you know that's a good place to start. Try praying, "Lord, I need You to work on my anger problem—or my anxiety—or my workaholicism—or my dishonesty."

It's like a dentist probing your teeth to find a sensitive one. You don't really have to say, "That's the one." He knows when he touches it—and you do too! God is like a dentist, and when He touches on the right defect for you to begin, you'll know it! Then cooperate with God as He starts changing that one defect in your life.

2. I must focus on success one day at a time

There's a good reason why Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us THIS day our daily bread." (Matthew 6:11) He didn't say, "Give us this *month* our monthly bread." Why? Because God wants to give you enough strength to change for one day, not for one week, or one month, or the rest of your life.

It's like the tired old joke that asks, "How do you eat an elephant?" One bite at a time. That's how God changes our lives, one day at a time. By the yard, life is hard, but by the inch, it's a cinch. When you're struggling with hurts, hang-ups, and habits, you've got to understand you didn't get into this condition overnight, and you won't find victory overnight either. You have to break it down to bite-sized pieces.

I recently read a humorous prayer that said, "Lord, so far today, I've done all right. I haven't gossiped, haven't been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish or over-indulgent. I'm really glad about

that, but, in a few minutes, God, I'm going to get out of bed, and from then on, I'm probably going to need a lot more help! Thank you, in Jesus' name Amen."

The approach we need to take is to ask God for help for each day—and several times throughout the day. Why don't you pray every morning, "Lord, just for this day, I want to be patient; just for today, I want to stay away from lustful thoughts; just for today, I want to go without once losing my temper."? Rome wasn't built in a day, and character isn't changed in a single day.

3. I must focus on doing good not feeling good

The Bible says, "If you are guided by the Spirit you will be in no danger of yielding to self-indulgence." (Galatians 5:16 *Phillips*) The old popular adage, "If it feels good do it" just doesn't apply to the Christian life. You must focus on doing good rather than feeling good. If you DO the right thing, it may not always FEEL good, but do it anyway. Alcoholics Anonymous uses the phrase, "Fake it until you make it." We could baptize that statement to say, "Don't fake it, faith it!"

Whenever you start doing the right thing, it's not going to feel good at first. It won't feel normal for you. If you're a workaholic and you decide to go home at 5:00 and not take any work with you, you're going to feel weird—but don't pay any attention to your feelings. The first time you try to relax, you're going to feel awkward. You're going to feel like you've got to jump up and do something—but ignore your feelings.

If you overeat, or drink, or smoke, the first time you try to stop, it won't feel right. You'll feel nervous, but eventually your feelings will catch up to your actions. You can't control your feelings, but you can control your attitude, so do the right thing whether it feels right or not!

4. I must focus on people who help me, not hinder me

There are people who are harmful to your recovery. They're the kind of people that toss you an anvil instead of a life ring when you're drowning. The Bible says, "Like a bad tooth or a lame foot is reliance on the unfaithful in times of trouble." (Proverbs 25:19) But there are people who will keep you sharp. The Bible says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens [improves] another." (Proverbs 27:17). One of the best ways to cooperate with God's change process is to change the crowd you run with. Sam Jones used to say, "If you lay down with dogs, don't be surprised when you get up with fleas." To put it another way, "If you don't want to be stung, stay away from the bees."

If you are struggling with alcoholism, don't say, "I'll just go down to the bar and have a few peanuts with my buddies." That won't work. If you're struggling with addiction to pornography, just stay away from those kinds of stores, and those websites.

You can't experience God's supernatural refreshing all alone—you need a support group. Recovery and change happens best in a group where friends can love you and hold you accountable. Have you heard the old saying, "There's strength in numbers?" When I hear that I always say, "There's strength in Leviticus, too." That's why the antelopes in Africa

graze in herds. A single antelope is an easy target for a lion. And a Christian trying to gut it out all alone is an easy target for Satan, the roaring lion who roams around seeking whom he may devour.

As I've attended our Celebrate Recovery meetings, I've watched as people have cheered for their friends who have experienced one month of freedom from addiction to drugs, alcohol, or porn. To think you can overcome your hurts, hang-ups, and habits alone is just another form of denial. Find a group of trusted friends and seek strength in numbers.

5. I must focus on progress not perfection

Once you decide to cooperate with God's change process, don't expect to see results overnight. But you *CAN* expect to see some long term results. The Bible says, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6) Isn't it refreshing to know you aren't responsible for working on your life to bring about change? It is God who is working in you. That truth alone should set you free. God isn't expecting you to be perfect, so don't expect in yourself or in others. Let's look at a refreshing reminder from the last message: The Christian life is a decision followed by a process. If you have made the choice to follow Jesus Christ, that's the decision. After that, it becomes a daily process in which God works to make you more and more like Jesus.

Our job is to surrender *all* our lives to Him. If we hold back, we short-circuit God's change process. Imagine you have a car that's not running properly. You take it to the mechanic and say, "Here, fix my car, but whatever you do, don't touch the engine." The mechanic would say, "Forget it. If you don't give me access to the engine, I can't help you." It's the same way with God. If you say, "here, Lord, here's my life...but don't touch this area" then we thwart His change process.

CONCLUSION

There is a battle going on for your mind and soul, but if you're a Christian, the victory is assured. You have a sinister enemy who wants to steal, kill, and destroy, but Jesus wants you enjoy refreshing life, and enjoy it to the fullest. But there is spiritual warfare going on every day in your life.

Sunday, December 7, 1941 was a day that lives in infamy. The Japanese orchestrated a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor that led to a declaration of war. That attack crippled the American Pacific fleet, but our greatest generation of men and women didn't give up or give in. Instead, American forces went on the offensive across the Pacific Ocean. In order to defeat the Japanese, our forces utilized the same strategy to retake every island under Japanese control. This WWII Pacific Strategy involved three definite stages. First, the Navy was to bombard the island with attacks from the air and ships. They would bomb the island and pelt it with artillery. This was called the "softening-up" period.

That's where many of you are right now. There are explosions detonating in your mind and fragments are flying in all directions and you're thinking, "This isn't working." That's okay; it's

just part of the strategy for God to get you to the point where you realize you can't help yourself.

During the second phase, the Marines were to launch an amphibious assault and establish a beachhead on the island. It might not be very large, maybe only 20 feet deep, and 200 yards long, but once they established the beachhead, they would dig in and bring in supplies, equipment, and reinforcements. When they had the beachhead, was the island secured yet? No. There was still the battle to fight. They might get pushed back temporarily. But once the Marines established a beachhead, they knew the third and final stage was inevitable—VICTORY! It was just a matter of time, because in every single case in WWII, when the U.S. Marines established a beachhead, they always proceeded to that final phase—VICTORY!

In the Christian life, when you take this step and **R**eceive God's righteousness as a gift of grace, God establishes a beachhead in your life. The Bible calls it conversion, or being born again. Does that mean your life is perfect overnight? Not at all. Does that mean you won't have battles and struggles? No, it's a battle every day. But once God has established His presence in your life He has a beachhead and He goes about setting you free day by day until ultimately, inevitably, victory is won! You might be in the middle of a battle right now wondering if you'll be able to hang in there and hold out. God says, "Don't worry. It's not your job to keep at it, that's MY job. I started a good work in you and I'm going to keep on working until I'm finished!" What God has started, He will finish. Remember, once the U.S. Marines established a beachhead they never lost an island. And our God is much greater than any army on earth. Once He has claimed your life, victory is inevitable. As the Bible says in I John 5:4, "Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith."

OUTLINE

Realize that I'm not God

Earnestly believe that God exists and that I matter to Him

Fully surrender my life and will to Christ's control

Receive God's righteousness as a gift of grace

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1. Self-righteousness and God's righteousness

"I want to be found in him, [Jesus] not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."
Philippians 3:9

2. Positional righteousness and personal righteousness "Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he [Jesus] is righteous...No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning because he is born of God." *1 John 3:7, 9*

II. TO COOPERATE WITH GOD'S CHANGE PROCESS I MUST FOCUS ON:

1. Changing one defect at a time
2. Success one day at a time
3. Doing good not feeling good
4. People who help me, not hinder me
5. Progress not perfection



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes