

**SERIES: THE PROCESS OF BREAKTHROUGH  
PART 7: HUMBLE YOURSELF BEFORE GOD**

How to cooperate with God's breakthrough process in my life:

Romans 12:2 says, “**And so dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all He has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind He will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship Him. <sup>2</sup>Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.**” How do I cooperate with God’s change process? Here it is, loved friends. This is incredibly exciting to me. Paul says I allow God to transform me into a new person by changing the way I think. In other words, the mind is a key category in Paul’s vision for renewal. In Romans 8:5-6 Paul writes, “**Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.**” N.T. Wright argues, “**Instead of the ‘unfit mind’ of 1:28, Paul holds out a vision of a mind renewed, able now at last to think for itself what will please God, instead of being darkened by**

**the deceitfulness of sin. The Christian is not meant to rely simply on lists of ethical commands, but to be able to discern to test and approve what God's will is. It seems primarily for general ethical conduct but also, perhaps for specific decisions and occasions. Paul's vision of living sacrifice, and mind renewed, generates a picture of Christian behavior in which rules matter but are not the driving force, in which thought and reflection matter but without reducing ethics to purely situational decisions. And once again Paul insists that God's will, when found and followed, is 'good, pleasing, and perfect.'"**

If you're in a boat, and it's going this way, the autopilot says East, you can force it to go West, but you pretty soon get tired, and you let go of the boat, because it wants to go back East. It's geared to go East, your autopilot, you set it to go East. You can turn it around, by forcibly grabbing the steering wheel and the whole time you're under tension, because by willpower you're going the opposite way that you're naturally inclined to go. Pretty soon you get tired and you let go of the wheel and it automatically turns this way. So I make a decision, I'm going to do \_\_\_\_\_; I make a resolution. By willpower, I force myself. But pretty soon I get tired and let go, and I go off the diet, start smoking again, acting the way I've always done. If you want to change, you've got to change your autopilot.

What's your auto pilot? It's just like me to be \_\_\_\_\_.  
That's your autopilot.

## **Seven ways to change your mind so you can cooperate with the way God wants to change you and make you who He has created you to be:**

Things you thought you could never change. It's real simple. Seven ways to refocus the winning focus, so you can change those habits, hang-ups, hurts, you never thought possible to change.

### **I. Focus on changing one flaw at a time.**

Proverbs 17:24, **“Sensible people keep their eyes glued on wisdom, but fools’ eyes wander to the ends of the earth.”** Some of you come to this year of Breakthrough and this Breakthrough series and think, “This is great; I've got thirty things I want to change.” Don't do it. You'll get overwhelmed. You'll get discouraged. And you won't change anything. You must be specific. What I would suggest you do is you pray to God and say, “God, which specific flaw would You like to work on first in my life? Not what I'd like to, but You.” You don't just pray, “God, I'd like to be a better person.” That in itself can be denial. You've got to be specific. You've got to be very specific. “God, this is what I want to work on: my anger, my judgmentalism, my critical attitude, my anxiety, my tendency to control people, my workaholism, or being dishonest or procrastination, or being aloof, or defensive, or offensive, or so shy that I don't initiate to people, or whatever the behavior is that is separating you

from God, yourself and others. Go back and get your moral inventory that you made in Step 4. Go down that list and say, “God, which of these is damaging my life the most? One of the best ways to know what God wants you to work on is what are the people in your life saying to you? Are they saying you’re too critical? Too angry? Are they saying you’re too insensitive or too sensitive or inappropriate how you’re treating the opposite sex or same sex? Are you spending money you don’t have? Are you too passive? What is it that those closest to you are saying to you in this season in your life? Let Him start working on that. You must work on one defect at a time. Otherwise it doesn't work.

## **II. Focus on victory one day at a time.**

Does Matthew 6:11 say, “Give us this month our daily bread”? No, it says, “**Give us this day our daily bread.**” Vs. 34 says, “**So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.**” Why? Because God wants to give you enough strength to change for one day, not for one week, one month, the rest of your life, eternity. He wants to take it one day at a time so you trust in Him. That's like the old saying, “How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.” Life by the yard is hard, but by the inch, it's a cinch. You take a lifetime problem (you didn't get it overnight -- that barrier, blockage or bondage, and you break it down into bite-size pieces, and you work on it one day at a time, and you get God's strength one day at a time. And you pray when you get up in the

morning, “Lord, just for this day, I want to be patient; just for today, I want to think pure thoughts, instead of lust; just for today, I don't want to lose my temper; just for today, I want to be positive instead of negative.” You ask God to help you for one, or better yet, for the next three hours, “Help me to think good thoughts, help me to face my fears.” And take it a little bit at a time. Ask Him one day at a time. This keeps you from making any rash vows. (“I promise to never do it again, clear into eternity.”) You're doomed to failure if you say that. One day at a time. Bite-size pieces.

If you have a boss that's hard to relate to, and he or she tends to bring out the bad in you, you tend to get resentful. So you get up in the morning and say, “Lord just for the first three hours this morning, may I respond to that boss how You'd have me respond, not get uptight, not get worried, not get resentful, but smile at them.” Matthew 6:34, “Don't worry about tomorrow, each day has enough troubles of its own.” Don't worry about tomorrow, victory tomorrow. Just today. Rome wasn't built in a day, character wasn't built in a day. Character defects aren't removed in a day.

We want instant everything: mashed potatoes, coffee, microwave popcorn. We want instant maturity, spiritual maturity. One day I'm a total mess, the next, I'm Billy Graham. It doesn't happen that way. You must grow by inches. You must grow by days. One day at a time. Don't set a deadline for yourself: “I'm going to lick this thing by this deadline.” No, just work on it one day at a time. You'll work

this step and all of the other steps in this Breakthrough series for the rest of your life. At night you stop and thank God for whatever change or victory, no matter how small: “Thank You that You gave me help today.” Any victory, no matter now minor, you thank God for it, and take one defect at a time, and you get victory one day at a time.

### **III. Focus on God’s power, not willpower.**

You already know willpower isn't enough. If willpower worked you'd already be changed. But you haven't, so you can't. And you won't because you don't have the power to do it. So you know willpower doesn't work. In fact, depending on your own strength blocks breakthroughs in your life.

When you say, “I can work it out, I can handle it, I can do it all myself. Really, I'm fine. This is not a big problem.” It's a big problem, because you've still got it. And we know resolutions don't work. Resolutions are simply forcing the boat to go one way when everything else in the boat wants to go another way. Pretty soon you get tired and let go.

Resolutions don't work. Jeremiah 13:23b says, **“Can a leopard take away its spots? Neither can you start doing good, for you always do evil.”** God says, “Forget it, you'll never change by your own willpower.” But, here's the good news: “I can master anything with the help of Christ who gives me strength.” So you pray, “Lord, I know I can't change on my own power, but I'm trusting You to take away this defect.” I want you to literally imagine God taking away your defect. What are you working on first? My temper? Here's

what I'd imagine in my mind: I imagine taking my temper out and opening up the garbage can, put it in the garbage can, putting the lid on the top, setting the garbage can out by the sidelines. The garbage truck comes up that says, "God & Son, doing business with people like you for 2000 years." Jesus sends out one of His buddies, they pick up the garbage, they dump it in the truck, they crush it down, you see the truck turn around and speed off to heaven. That's what it means to visually think about giving my problem to God. God, I'm throwing my anger in the trashcan again. I'm throwing my \_\_\_\_\_ in the trashcan. The only problem is, I have to have garbage delivery about every hour, not weekly. "God, it's going into the garbage," and then you let God take it away. Willpower doesn't work. You trust God's power, not your own. He can help you master it.

Confess with me Philippians 4:13, **"For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need."**

#### **IV. Focus on what I want, not on what I don't want.**

Philippians 4:8: **"Fix your thoughts on what is true, and good, and right. Think about things that are pure. Think about all you can praise God for and be glad about."**

Focus on good things, not bad things. Whatever you focus on is what you move toward. Whatever you focus on is what dominates your life. If you focus on the bad it will keep dominating your life. If you focus on what you've been it will keep dominating your life. If you focus on what you can be

and what God wants to be in your life, then you move that way. Whatever has your attention, has you. If you say, “I'm not going to think about sex, I'm not going to think about sex...” What are you thinking about? Sex. You don't resist temptation. Not once in the Bible does God command you to resist temptation. Not once. He says, resist the tempter, resist the devil, but not temptation. Why? Because whatever you resist, persists. The harder you push it (“I'm not going to do this”), the harder it pushes back.

Instead of resisting, the Bible teaches refocusing. Just turn the mental channel of your mind. If you're watching a bad show on TV, you don't say, “I'm not going to watch this, I'm not going to watch this...” No, you just turn the channel. You refocus off of what you've been to what you want to be to what God wants to do in your life. This is the power of affirming the Word of God. There are over 7,000 promises in the Bible. Probably the most helpful discipline you could develop is learning to memorize Scripture. Memorize one a week; by the end of the year you'll have 52 verses memorized. They are in your mind so you can use them to counteract these negative thoughts that the devil and other people give you. You fill your mind with God's word. Every time you think a positive thought, every time you think a Scripture truth, every time you think any thought, it makes an electrical impulse across your brain. Every time you think the same thought, that gets deeper, reinforces that brain pattern. Some of you have negative ruts in your mind because you've thought them over and over and over. The only way to get rid

of negative ruts is to think God's word over and over and over.

In your mind you have two scales. On one side are all the negative thoughts that the devil tells you, that former girlfriends and boyfriends have told you, maybe your parents told you, maybe some school teacher who hated you (“You'll never amount to anything”) told you. And over here are the good things that God wants to say about you that are in His Word. You've got more of these negative than you do positive because you haven't spent much time in the Word, if you're honest. Every time you think a positive thought based on the Bible, and you claim a verse, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” you alternate. Every time the devil says, “You can't change,” you say, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” “Who do you think you are? You're worthless.” — “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” “You'll never break out of this, and you ought to be afraid of what's going to happen in your life.” — “There is no fear in love, perfect love casts out all fear.” You keep repeating the positive over and over until finally it's like every time you put a pebble on this side it gets a little heavier, and one day the table is going to turn, and you'll have more positive than negative, and you will be free. You'll be free. God wants to do that in your life. If you focus on not what you don't want but what you do want.

If you took Step 3—surrendering all my life to the care and control of God—and invited Christ into your life, then you know what the Bible says: You are a new person. The old has passed away. God says, “All your past, I've forgotten, you can learn to let go of it too.” You are a new person in Christ with a new identity. Once you become a Christian, your primary identity is based on your relationship to Christ, not your faults, foibles and failures. It's no longer “I'm just \_\_\_\_\_,” it's, “I'm a believer.” Focus on what you want, not on what you don't want.

## V. Focus on doing good, not feeling good

Galatians 5:16: **“So I advise you to live according to your new life in the Holy Spirit. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves.”** If you do the right thing, your feelings will eventually catch up with you. If you wait until you feel like changing, you'll never change. The devil will make sure you'll never feel like it. It's always easier to act your way into a feeling than to feel your way into an action. If you don't feel loving toward your wife or husband, start acting loving and the feelings will come. If you wait until you feel like it, it will be a long time. So you say, “I don't feel like it.” Do the right thing, don't worry about feeling the right thing. Do the right thing even though you don't feel like doing it, because you know it's the right thing to do and you do it anyway. Eventually your feelings catch up. Anytime you start trying to change a major part of your life, a major character defect, flaw, personality weakness, anytime you

start trying to make a major change, it's not going to feel real good at the start. In fact, it will feel very awkward. In fact, it will feel bad, for a while. Why? Because it won't feel normal. You're so used to feeling abnormal, normal doesn't feel normal. So you won't feel real good when you start making the changes. If you're a workaholic and you say, "I'm going to let God work on this workaholism," and tomorrow at 5:00 you decide to go home when the buzzer rings, and you don't take work home in a briefcase, the first time you go home you'll say, "This feels really weird." If you're a workaholic, the first time you try to relax you'll find you don't even know how to relax because you've worked so hard for so long. If you overeat, or drink or smoke, the first time you try to break that habit you'll feel weird: "Nothing's in my mouth." It'll feel funny for a little while, and it may not feel right. But if you do the right thing, over and over and over, eventually your feelings catch up with your behavior and you cannot control your feelings, but you can control your muscles. So you do the right thing whether you feel like it or not and the feelings will catch up with you.

## **VI. Focus on people who help me, not who hinder me.**

The right kind of people will help you. The wrong kind of people will hinder, prevent your breakthrough. 1 Corinthians 15:33b says, "**Bad company corrupts good character.**" In other words, if you don't want to get stung, you stay away from the bees. If you know what kind of people tempt you, just stay away from them. If you're struggling with

alcoholism you don't say, "I think I'll go down to the bar and eat some peanuts." Bad idea. If you're struggling with pornography, you don't go online with your phone, computer, tablets or any other electronic device. You don't get around the things and people that mess you up. On the other hand, the Bible in Ecclesiastes 4:12 says, **"Two are better than one, and a threefold cord is not easily broken."** When you have help from another person, when one person falls the other can help him up.

I said this in the first teaching in this series, but many of you find it hard to believe. You can't experience major breakthroughs on your own. You must have a team. Be in relationships with others. Restoration, reconciliation and breakthroughs always happen in relationships; seldom do they happen on your own. You'll never experience breakthroughs just listening to a series of six or eight messages. It happens when you're with other people. I know many of you struggle with this idea so let me give you an example.

Two weeks ago we talked about building a moral inventory list. You go home and say, "Lord, what are all the things I feel guilty about and regret, and I'm going to do some housecleaning this week." You make a list of those things and admit them to yourself, to God and to one other person you trust. Many of you had every intention of doing that this week. But most likely you didn't. The people who did it are those who are in relationship with someone else who asked

them, “Did you do it? No? I am willing to sit down with you and do it.” Most likely those who have done this are attending our Celebrate Recovery ministry, which I encourage those of you who would like to, or they are in one of our small groups and they have developed relationships with people they trust or they’re in the process of doing that. Those who haven’t done this are most likely not in relationships where they feel safe to do it. If you’re not in a small group yet, I encourage you to pray about it and sign up on one of our Friends Cards to be in a small group, and we will help place you in a small group. Notice this verse in Proverbs 27:17, **“As iron sharpens iron, a friend sharpens a friend.”** You need to be in relationships with other people who accept and love you and will confront you when you need it.

All the willpower in the world cannot make that kind of change in a man. All the therapy, fads, seminars, tapes, cannot make that kind of change in a man. Only Jesus Christ can make those kind of changes in a person with other people in their lives that they trust and they know that these people in their lives value and love them.

## **VII. Focus on progress, not perfection.**

Some of you who have been actively taking the steps we’re discussing each week for our breakthrough series say, “I don't see a whole lot of change yet; I've been in praying for and taking action for a couple months and I don't see a whole lot of change yet.” Don't worry about it. It's a process. It's a

decision followed by a process. And God who starts His work in you will bring it to completion. Remember the beachhead illustration I gave a couple of weeks ago? God establishes a beachhead in your life like an island, and the rest of the war He's taking over the island little by little.

Some of you are thinking that God will only love me once I hit a certain stage, once I get to a certain perfection. That's just not true, loved one. God loves you at each stage in your imperfection and in your growth. God will never love you any more than He already does right now. He will never love you any less than He does right now. As a father, I look at my kids. I didn't expect Whitney when she was in grade school and then high school to act like at 20 or 30 year old. She is right where she should be, and I am so pleased with Whitney Ann. And God is pleased with your growth. It's the direction of your heart that says, "God I ask You to help me voluntarily submit to the changes You want to make in my life. I humbly ask You to remove those character flaws." Now God doesn't start changing you until you commit to being ready for the change. That means voluntarily submit and humbly ask, and when you're ready to ask Him He'll start working in you. We're going to celebrate communion together today.

## **COMMUNION**

**“As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then He broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, ‘Take this and eat it, for this is My body.’<sup>27</sup> And He took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He**

**gave it to them and said, ‘Each of you drink from it, <sup>28</sup>for this is My blood, which confirms the covenant between God and His people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many.’” Matthew 26:26-28**