

Getting Unstuck
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Last week I preached on Starting the Year Off Right. If you weren't here I encourage you to go online and listen to it. I talked about how change takes more than willpower or resolutions, it takes the power of God. We tap into that power through His Word and the Holy Spirit.

This week, I felt led to preach a message called Getting Unstuck which gives the other side to the teaching on change.

There is a video called Stuck on an Escalator. That video shows us the ridiculousness of being stuck on an escalator. That's because if an escalator shuts down – it turns into a set of stairs.

Obviously – all these people who thought they were stuck had to do was walk up the escalator. But they were waiting for someone else to come fix things for them. They were unwilling to do anything about their situation themselves. They were passive and did not take any action to get unstuck.

Many of us do that in life! There are many ways people get stuck in life. They can get stuck in an addiction or in a dead-end job or in debt or in a bad habit or in any number of other ways.

And there are many reasons why people get stuck in life. It could be due to wrong thinking or unrepentant sin or unforgiveness or laziness or a victim mentality that blames others or the system.

Whatever the reason, many people are stuck in life and if you want to get unstuck you must do something about it! Always doing what you've always done will always get you what you've always got.

All of us have a destiny in God – but we have an enemy who wants to keep us stuck so that we never attain that destiny. That's why Hebrews 12:1-2 says:

Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

To get unstuck, we must deal with everything that holds us back. Why do we need to get unstuck? So we can move forward. So we can become all God wants us to be.

Here's the first key to getting unstuck:

1- To get unstuck you must first admit that you are stuck!

Let me ask you: where are you stuck? If you say nowhere – you’re probably unaware or in denial because all of us are stuck in some way.

Now understand this: you can be stuck in some areas of life and free in other areas.

You might be free in worship – but still stuck in struggling to read the Word.

You might be free to advance in your career – but stuck in your ability to build meaningful relationships.

You might be free in your ability to eat right and exercise – but stuck in a secret addiction.

Being in denial will keep you stuck. Not admitting you are stuck will keep you stuck. It’s that way with sin. 1 John 1:8-9 says:

If we say we have no sin (refusing to admit that we are sinners), we delude and lead ourselves astray, and the Truth is not in us. If we admit that we have sinned and confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Not admitting your sin will keep you stuck in a lie and keeps you lost. Admitting your sin sets you free. Now – not every area of stuckness in life is due to sin. But the principle is the same. To get unstuck you must first admit you are stuck!

2- Realize that no one else can get you unstuck.

The responsibility to get unstuck is yours and yours alone. I know you need God’s help to get unstuck – but God’s not going to do it without your willingness. And yes – we all have mutual responsibility to help each other – pray for each other – counsel each other – but you can’t help an individual who will not help themselves. Every single one of us must take responsibility to get unstuck in life!

I like the part in the video where the escalator repair man got stuck also. That shows us that none of us are beyond getting stuck. And it shows us we can’t helplessly depend on others.

I once read a book called Learned Optimism that talks about a behavior known as “learned helplessness.” A person who repeatedly encounters seemingly unsolvable crises may learn, over time, to behave helplessly. They give up because they think things will never change no matter what they do. Unfortunately, this behavior that developed from past experience often prevents the person from recognizing, or acting upon, opportunities to get unstuck.

The impact of learned helplessness on people can be huge. For instance - students with learned helplessness perform more poorly in college than students with the same IQ.

They don't lack intelligence - they lack resilience, and don't recover from major setbacks.

Learned helplessness is not caused by adversity! Learned helplessness is caused by the way people *interpret* adversity.

People who believe they can do nothing about what happens in life stop trying to deal with those events; they get stuck on the escalator.

When people develop learned helplessness – they become pessimists.

An optimist is someone who sees things positively.

A pessimist is someone who sees things negatively.

One sees the glass half empty and the other sees it half full.

I used to think people were just born one way or the other until I realized that we can learn to be optimists by taking our thoughts captive and renewing our minds with God's word!

You see - pessimists view problems in life as personal, pervasive and permanent. By personal I mean that when pessimists go through a tough time they think it must be because of something they did. To pessimists, it's always their fault – everything is about them.

Pessimists also see problems as pervasive. That means that if they have a problem in one area of life, it affects every other area of their life. Now because of this one problem, life is just not worth living.

Pessimists also see problems as permanent. They think their problems are here to stay and nothing good will ever happen again.

But optimists are different - they realize that sometimes they are to blame for problems - but not always. An optimist would say, "Hey, that one area is tough, but look at all the good in my life. This may be bad now, but it won't last forever."

If you want to get unstuck, you must have optimistic faith in God: that He is a good God who has good plans for us!

You need to learn this phrase, "Yes, but it's going to change."

Yes, I might have financial problems, but praise God, it's going to change.

Yes, I might have family problems, but praise God, it's going to change.

Problems may come today, but praise God, they don't come to stay.

Yes, bad things may come into our lives, but they come to pass, not to last.

Troubles come, but they will go.

So - I make the choice to rejoice in all circumstances! I choose the truth of God's word over every other word – even my own! And I confess that I will see the goodness of God in the land of the living!

Jesus told His disciples about this in John 16:20-24. He was preparing them for His death and He said:

I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world.

So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. In that day you will no longer ask Me anything. I tell you the truth, My Father will give you whatever you ask in My name. Until now you have not asked for anything in My name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

Joy comes from asking. Joy comes from seeing things from God's perspective. Joy comes from trusting God. And that leads to getting unstuck.

3- Trust God, but put feet to your faith!

Too many Christians are like the people stuck on the escalator – just waiting for something to happen. They might even cry out to God – and prayer is something we need to do – but it's not the only thing we should do!

I want to be really clear here - Prayer is an expression of faith. Prayer is the greatest work we can do. Sometimes prayer is the only thing we can do in certain situations. But not all the time. Sometimes there is other work to do.

In Exodus 14:15-16 Israel was trapped between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea. Moses began to pray.

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground."

In other words, God said, "Stop praying and start moving."

Joshua 7:1-13 tells how God was angry with the Israelites because of sin and how that had led to them being defeated in the Battle of Ai. Joshua and all the elders prayed and cried out to God all day. Verses 10-13 say:

The Lord said to Joshua, "Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. Go, consecrate the people. Tell them, 'Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow; for this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: That which is devoted is among you, O Israel. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove it.'

In other words, there's a time for prayer and there's a time for action. There's a time to seek God and there's a time to do what He says.

There's a time to hear God's word and there's a time to be a doer of the word.

Some people over-spiritualize everything. Their answer to everything is "We need to pray. We just need to trust God." We do need to pray and we do need to trust God, but James 2:20 says:

Faith without works is dead.

There's a time to pray and believe and there's a time to plan and organize. There is a time to get busy and get to work.

There's way too much passivity in the body of Christ today. Passivity is defined as the trait of remaining inactive; a lack of initiative. There are different reasons for passivity –

- Sometimes it comes from physical, emotional or mental exhaustion.
- Sometimes it comes from fear or worry.
- There is a spirit of passivity that attacks people.
- Some people are just plain spiritually lazy.
It's too hard for them to pray and read the Bible and do warfare.
- Sometimes passivity comes from ignorance of the truth.
- Usually passivity comes from a wrong view of God – a wrong view of His part and our part in life.

1 Corinthians 3:9 says: *We are God's fellow workers.* We work with God, which means there is work for us to do.

A farmer is one of the best examples of working with God. Do farmers pray for good weather, rain when it's needed, etc.? Of course.

Do they trust God for a bumper crop? Yes.

But are praying and believing enough? NO!

What if they prayed and believed but never planted any seeds?

What if they prayed and believed and planted seeds but never watered?

What if they prayed and believed and planted seed and watered it, but never harvested their crop?

The farmer must pray and believe – that's faith. But he must combine it with works – planting, watering, weeding and harvesting. But he still needs faith, because he knows he can't give life to the crop, that's God's part. In all of life, God has a part and we have a part. We cannot do God's part and He will not do our part.

If the farmer says, "I'm tired of all this farm work, so I'm going to stop doing any work. I'm just going to trust God with my future and whatever crops He grows in my fields will be enough," what's going to grow? Nothing or weeds. So in your life, if you are reaping a bunch of nothing or a bunch of weeds, I would look at your works.

I know this seems confusing to people because we are taught – rightly so – that we are saved by faith, not by works. Ephesians 2:8-9 says:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

So many people stop right there, but Ephesians goes on to say in v. 10:

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

We are not saved by works, but true saving faith will result in works. In other words, true faith will change your life. Works are evidence of genuine faith. What we do does not save us - but what we do shows whether or not we have saving faith.

Faith and works go hand-in-hand. Hebrews 6:1 tells us that the foundation of the Christian faith is: *the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.*

Here's some practical examples of how faith without works is dead in our daily lives:

- Believing for someone to get saved but never sharing the gospel with them.
- Believing for financial blessing but not tithing or giving or budgeting or controlling your spending.
- Believing you can be an overcomer without doing any spiritual warfare.
- Believing for a job but not looking for a job.
- Believing for friends but never initiating relationships.
- Believing for a good grade on a test, but never studying.
- Believing for a good marriage but not communicating with your spouse, not resolving conflicts, not walking in forgiveness.

When people come to me and say their marriage is not working anymore, I ask, "What's not working?" They'll say, "It's just not working." Let me let you in on a secret: No marriage just works all by itself. If a marriage works, it's because two people are making it work!

Faith without works is dead and if you're not willing to do some work in your marriage, it will die. It's the same way in every area of life. I've known Christians who were stuck in tough situations – marriage problems or financial problems or out of work or something else – and they're just sitting at home waiting for something to happen. I ask them, "What so you think is going to happen by just sitting at home waiting for something to happen?"

I can tell you what is going to happen – NOTHING!

No money is going to magically appear! No job is going to magically appear! No happy marriage is going to magically appear! In fact, left to themselves things will only get worse!

Please hear me – there is a place for praying and waiting – but waiting on God is not doing nothing.

Biblical examples of passivity go all the way back to the beginning – when Adam passively stood by doing nothing when Eve was deceived. That’s the same thing many husbands do in their homes – just allowing the enemy to have his way with his family.

Another biblical example of passivity is Saul and his army vs. Goliath. For forty days Goliath came out and ridiculed the army of Israel. And what did they do? Nothing.

And along comes a shepherd boy named David. When he saw Goliath ridiculing the army of Israel, he wondered why no one was doing anything about it. The passive army of Israel accomplished nothing.

That’s the same thing many of us accomplish when we are up against huge obstacles – nothing. We get paralyzed with fear and do nothing. When we do nothing we reap a great big harvest of nothing.

But one man with faith in action accomplished a miracle in the power of God. I believe that if any of the men sitting there doing nothing would have stepped out with faith in God, they could have defeated Goliath. God blesses faith in action – not faith without works, which is dead.

- The army of Israel was stuck in fear because of one giant until David put his faith to work and killed Goliath with a slingshot.
- Moses was stuck between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea until he put his faith to work and parted the sea.
- Paul and Silas were stuck in prison until they began to praise God at midnight and God sent an earthquake to set them free.
- Jonah was stuck in the belly of a whale until he repented of his rebellion and chose to do the work God called him to do.

And there is a work God has called you to do! All these Bible heroes got unstuck when they put their faith to work. It’s time to get unstuck by putting your faith into action! You need to put it into action in your home, your finances, your work, everything you do.

It’s time to get off the escalator just waiting for something to happen! It’s time to walk up the stairs – walk in faith – walk in love – walk in the light - walk in holiness – walk in the grace of God and walk in victory. And all of that is only possible when we walk in the power of the Spirit.