



Be Renewed

Adult Learning Material

This material is designed to be used in conjunction with the Be Renewed series.

Week One (Sunday, Oct. 18): Be Renewed and Take HEART

Key Passage: 2 Corinthians 4:16

¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

2 Corinthians 4:16 (NIV)

Here Paul is writing to the Corinthian church, a church full of new believers in Christ, and he fully understands their predicament. He knows they are discouraged by their present circumstances. He doesn't diminish that reality, but he says to them, don't let your circumstances control your responses. In all things, your responses to your circumstances should be measured by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That Gospel is your measuring rod. The Gospel gives you guidance as to how to respond. Knowing that, Paul says, "do not lose heart."

What does Paul mean by *losing heart*? The idea is, in the light of the difficulties you're facing, don't do harm, don't give up, and don't grow weary. But how is it possible to not lose heart, do harm, or grow weary? When our situation is so heavy on our shoulders, doing harm seems to come too naturally. So how do we keep from losing heart? Know that through Christ, you are being *renewed* every single day. In the same way, for example, at the end of the day, your smartphone battery is so depleted, it might not even turn on. Yet, you plug it in, and shortly the renewal process begins, and before you know it, it's recharged, ready for another day. The Gospel does the same thing to our inward spirit. When we are depleted, ready to do harm or give up, we are renewed to be able to face another day.

We can apply these principles to the goal our church is pursuing through Be Renewed. We have been in a difficult time personally, as a church, and as a nation. But we are not losing heart. We are going to claim the promise of Paul as we are renewed in every aspect of our discipleship lives: prayer, Bible study, service, and generosity. It's a holy time for us to Be Renewed.

Group Discussion

1. What does "losing heart" look like? How do we know it when we see it?
2. What causes us to give up when we lose heart?
3. How is *being renewed daily* the antidote for losing heart?
4. How can you Be Renewed in prayer, Bible study, and especially generosity, during this season?

Personal Reflection

1. Think about times in your life that have caused you to lose heart. What feelings does that raise?
2. How do you prevent your circumstances from dictating your responses?
3. Is it okay for believers to lose heart and do harm? Think about this.
4. How has the Gospel renewed you today?
5. Read the Giving Discipleship Journey. Which of the givers identifies where you might be on the Giving Discipleship Journey?

Getting Ready for the Week

1. Monday: Think about your day today and list the ways you can avoid losing heart.
2. Tuesday: Did you find yourself doing harm at all yesterday? How can your renewed-self avoid that today?
3. Wednesday: Now that you've identified where you are on the Giving Discipleship Journey, write down some ways that being that kind of giver keeps you from "losing heart."
4. Thursday: Pray for your pastors and church leaders to take heart.
5. Friday: Pray for your pastors and church leaders to Be Renewed today.

Week Two (Sunday, Oct. 25): Be Renewed in My THINKING

Key Passage: Ephesians 4:21-24

²¹Since you really listened to him and you were taught how the truth is in Jesus, ²²change the former way of life that was part of the person you once were, corrupted by deceitful desires. ²³Instead, renew the thinking in your mind by the Spirit ²⁴and clothe yourself with the new person created according to God's image in justice and true holiness.

Ephesians 4:21-24 (CEB)

In this passage, I love how Paul begins with "since" because it has implications for future actions. Some examples of how this works in our lives: *Since* you have cleaned your room, *now* you can go out and play because you showed responsibility. *Because* you got your oil changed, *now* you can drive your car another 3,000 miles. *Since* you ate your green beans, *now* you can have dessert. Okay, these examples are rather mundane, but you get the point. *Because this, now this.*

He says to the Ephesians, "Since you have heard about Jesus" and have learned the implications of the truth that comes from knowing the Gospel, the Good News, *now* you will live radically different lives. Get rid of self-centeredness (You might want to also read 2 Corinthians 5:17) and how you used to live. "Since" you know Jesus and His Gospel, let the Spirit of Christ *renew your thoughts and attitudes*—what you think and how you act, and put on your new nature. You were created in God's image to be like God—to live rightly and to live a set apart life.

See how Paul uses the *Since this, instead* formula? I want to reverse it a little bit here, and say it this way: Now you can live rightly and set apart for God's work—acting in a way God acts—since you have heard about Jesus and His Gospel, and have allowed the Spirit to renew your thoughts and attitudes.

To Be Renewed in our thinking has implications for us on the Giving Discipleship Journey. Take a look at the Journey book. Each of the givers described in this book are on a journey—a thoughtful journey—of having their thinking and their attitudes renewed as it comes to living a generous life. *Since* we are being renewed in our thinking, *now* _____ . Fill in the rest yourself as it relates to your generosity.

Group Discussion

1. What reason or reasons does Paul give that makes renewing one's thoughts and attitudes possible?
2. Describe ways that knowing Jesus and the implications of the Gospel have changed the way believers think and act.
3. The Giving Discipleship Journey is designed to help you think through the change of heart that must occur for a full transformation. How does renewed thinking help us live into a life shaped by generosity?
4. How does acting generously imitate God's relationship to us?
5. What are ways that we can aid the Spirit with renewing our thoughts and attitudes?

Personal Reflection

1. Reflect on the *Since this, instead* formula. What are some of your *instead* items you would list since you have come to know Christ?
2. Again, thinking about the *Since this, instead* formula, examine where you are on the Giving Discipleship Journey. How could *Since this* of knowing Christ help you Be Renewed to take the next step of the Giving Discipleship Journey?
3. What might be some areas of rightful thinking and attitudes that you want to invite the Spirit to grow in you?
4. What obstacles seem to be in the way of you taking the next step in the Giving Discipleship Journey?

Getting Ready for the Week

1. Monday: Think about your day today and list the ways you can be renewed in your thinking and attitudes as a disciple.
2. Tuesday: Think today how knowing Christ has renewed your thinking and attitudes, and has enabled you to imitate God in your dealing with people.
3. Wednesday: Knowing which step you are on in the Giving Discipleship Journey, write down some ways that being that kind of giver helps to be renewed in your thinking.
4. Thursday: Pray for your pastors and church leaders to be renewed in their thinking today.
5. Friday: Pray for your pastors and church leaders to Be Renewed today.

Week Three (Sunday, Nov. 8): Be Renewed with a STEADFAST SPIRIT

Key Passage: Psalm 51:10-12

¹⁰Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me."

Psalm 51:10-12 (NIV)

Psalm 51 is perhaps one of the most beautiful in all the Psalter for its honesty and humility. God once referred to David as a "man after my own heart," but David's later actions did not square with the heart of God indicated here. As a matter of fact, we could say David "lost heart" and hence, "did harm," referring back to our lesson of week one.

But in Psalm 51, David, having acknowledged his sinful behavior, has recognized that it has caused a tremendous rift between God and himself. He longs for the heart that beats with God's heart, when he cries, "Create in me a pure heart, O God." David knows that God as Creator, is the source of all that's good. David longs to have a pure heart, and he entreats God to create that in him. He also pleads with God to "renew a steadfast spirit within him." A steadfast spirit is unswerving and unwavering in its devotion and service to God, and David begs to have that kind of heart.

David recognized that God could turn God's back on David. God could cast David out of God's presence and remove God's spirit from him. David pleads for this not to happen. Instead David prays, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me." Restore is to regain that which one had but has lost.

We are moving to a crucial tipping point in our Be Renewed emphasis. Like David, we pray for that unwavering and unswerving heart that beats with God's heart and draws us into God's presence. Soon it will be time to commit ourselves to a Giving Discipleship Journey that will enable us to grow in our generosity and therefore, in our faith. It's time for us to be honest and humble as David to Be Renewed with a Steadfast Spirit as we grow in our faith.

Group Discussion

1. Discuss the characteristics of a "pure heart."
2. Discuss David's request to have God "Renew a steadfast spirit" within him. First, what is a "steadfast" spirit? Second, describe a life that is motivated by a "steadfast" spirit.
3. Discuss how having a "steadfast" spirit will help you along the Giving Discipleship Journey.
4. Describe what "restored joy" looks and feels like.

Personal Reflection

1. List some attitudes that will change in you when God creates a pure heart in you.
2. What emotions might you feel if God removed God’s presence from you?
3. Likewise, describe the emotions that you might experience if God overwhelmed you with God’s presence.
4. How will a “pure” heart and “renewed joy” help you in making your decision in the Be Renewed initiative?
5. I pray that God will sustain me to: _____. (Fill in the blank.)

Getting Ready for the Week

1. Monday: It’s a new week. How will you approach this week with a “pure heart”?
2. Tuesday: Think about ways God has recently restored the joy of God’s salvation to you?
3. Wednesday: Think about how taking a step forward on the Giving Discipleship Journey can help to restore the joy of salvation in you.
4. Thursday: Pray for your pastors and church leaders to be restored in the joy of salvation today.
5. Friday: Pray for your pastors and church leaders to Be Renewed today.

Week Four (Sunday, Nov. 15): Be Renewed in my STRENGTH...powered by HOPE

Key Passage: Isaiah 40:31

³¹... but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength; they will fly up on wings like eagles; they will run and not be tired; they will walk and not be weary.

Isaiah 40:31 (CEB)

In the book of sermons, *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler*, author John Claypool documents the process of loss, grief, and recovery from the death of his eight-year old daughter to leukemia. Claypool's honest handling of the pain and his authentic wrestling with faith was subtly described as he talked about Isaiah 40:31. He reflected, when we can no longer run because our strength is gone, and when soaring seems utterly impossible, making ourselves just walk one more step may be the best step of faith we are able to take.

Strength depleted can be renewed, this is what we have been talking about throughout these weeks during the Be Renewed initiative. Hope is the fuel that makes renewed strength possible. To demonstrate that, Isaiah points to the sky. Renewed strength sometimes enables us to soar like eagles. Flying above the fray, we're able to look down and say, "I can do this!" Or if flying is not your thing, then having renewed strength might be like running down the block or around the neighborhood and not growing tired. Hope has so renewed your strength that you are just able to keep going. Yet sometimes, like John Claypool, flying is still out of reach and running is out of the question but hope still propels us to take that next step and not pass out!

During these weeks we have been considering the Giving Discipleship Journey to guide us in our Be Renewed emphasis. Perhaps you are an *initial* giver. Giving to our church is new to you. We applaud your taking the first step onto the discipleship journey. Maybe you're a *consistent* giver. You made the faith decision to be regular in your giving. Possibly you have moved on the journey and are an *intentional* giver. Giving has become a priority in your discipleship and decisions—an intentional act. Are you at the *sacrificial* giver milestone? Your giving is governing your spending/saving rather than your spending/saving governing your giving. And finally, you might have arrived on the Giving Discipleship Journey as a *lifetime* giver. Your giving is based on lifetime generosity you can offer.

Think about where you are in the Giving Discipleship Journey. Remember, hope in the Lord will renew your strength. It will embolden you to soar to the next milestone on the journey. Are you ready to soar? It will empower you to run to the next giving level with renewed strength. Will you accept the challenge to run? It will enable you to walk until the journey ends. It's your time. Be Renewed in strength and powered by hope!

Group Discussion

1. How does hope in the Lord enable "renewed strength"?
2. In a practical way, describe how faith today might be described as soaring on eagles' wings. In other words, what does soaring look like today?
3. Describe some moments of your faith journey in which you ran and were not found weary.

4. At times, life comes at us, and the best we can do is just walk and not faint. Talk about that as a group.
5. How will “renewed strength,” facilitated by hope, empower you to take the next step in the Giving Discipleship Journey?

Personal Reflection

1. Can you name a time where hope in the Lord renewed your strength?
2. Remember a moment in your life where renewed strength had you soar like an eagle.
3. Think about a time when walking and not fainting was an absolute feat of strength itself.
4. You and your church are getting ready to make generosity decisions that will impact your future and your church’s future. Pray that hope in the Lord will renew your strength to make that decision faithfully.

Getting Ready for the Week

1. Monday: Open yourself up to the hope in the Lord today.
2. Tuesday: Help someone you know soar, or run, or even just walk in the Lord today.
3. Wednesday: Knowing which step you are on in the Giving Discipleship Journey, think about soaring to the next level. What will it take to make that happen?
4. Thursday: Pray for your pastors and church leaders that they will be renewed in strength today.
5. Friday: Pray for your pastors and church leaders to Be Renewed today.
