**“ACCEPTANCE…with Joy”**

 Ron was a nice enough fellow, but his life had been anything but nice or enjoyable. He had gone through an expensive divorce which had left him alienated from not only his ex wife but their two daughters as well. The slumping economy had devastated his business and left him owing the IRS $80,000. He was depressed and lonely when he came to our single’s ministry. Ron wrestled with anger, bitterness, depression and regret but as a Christian he learned that he needed to accept his situation and give thanks in all things. Then he needed to forgive and follow through with his commitments and obligations, allowing God to rebuild his life. Amazingly, he paid off his IRS debt over the next five years while learning to accept his situation… with joy. He began serving his church family with zeal and faithfulness and a few years later he remarried a widowed woman who had learned the same difficult lesson of accepting the loss of her young husband.

**The Situation Some Of Us Face** Many people struggle with accepting the life they are living, or the problems they face. Some long for life the way it used to be or even a life that might have been. However, God wants us to experience life to the fullest each day, he desires that we experience fulfillment and joy in the life we have right now. Scripture teaches the devil’s chief aim is to destroy our lives and steal our joy; it also teaches that Jesus came to give us a full and meaningful life. With that knowledge, how can we learn to accept the life and the circumstances we now face and not a begrudging acceptance but with sincere joy?

**Thoughts That Plague Us**

* I wish I had his or her life instead of my life with the challenges I face.
* I wish I could go back in time 5, 10, 15 years or more, much like the Beatles song “Yesterday”
* Why me Lord? Why did this have to happen to me?
* If only I had not made that decision. I wish I could undo it.
* Is this the best life has to offer?

**An Honest Evaluation – The Truth Will Set You Free**

* Your own decisions might have created the situations you are struggling with, but…
	+ God wants to give you a new start.
	+ God can and will use the mistakes from your past to help others if you let him.
* It could be worse and I do have much to be grateful for.
* This may be an ongoing battle but one helpful definition of success is “lengthening the time between failures”.
* Being aware that this difficult situation may not be the final chapter in your life will make accepting it much easier.

**How Can I Accept The Life I Have Today?**

1. **Seek any lessons God might have for you from your current situation.**

**Pain:** “*I have never read a poem extolling the virtues of pain, nor seen a statue erected in its honor, nor heard a hymn dedicated to it. Pain is usually defined as “unpleasantness”. Christians don’t really know how to interpret pain. If you pinned them against the wall, in a dark, secret moment, many Christians would probably admit that pain was God’s one mistake. He really should have worked a little harder and invented a better way of coping with the world’s dangers. I am convinced that pain gets a bad press. Perhaps we should see statues, hymns, and poems to pain. Why do I think that? Because up close, under a microscope, the pain network is seen in an entirely different light. It is perhaps the paragon of creative genius.”*  --Philip Yancey, Where Is God When It Hurts?

C.S. Lewis wrote, *“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”* -- The Problem of Pain

2 Corinthians 4:17 *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*

 Ken was a man who was struggling to dig out of a hole he had created by his own choices. He traded the Gay life style for his wife, kids, ministry and reputation. In rebuilding each of those areas he was motivated by Psalm 119:67 & 71. *Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.*
 I highly recommend the following prayer when you’re experiencing a painful situation resulting from poor choices in your life: *“Lord, help me learn all I need to from this experience so I never have to repeat it!”*

1. **Be aware of other’s lives that are more difficult than yours, resist the temptation to compare yourself to people with a lighter load or an easier road.**

 When you look around, be sure to compare yourself to the right folks. If you ever visit our neighbors south of the border you will get a good dose of reality and a reminder of how good we have it here in the US. We have little to complain about next to the Mexican people and most of the world. Check this out…

* Did you eat yesterday? One third of the world is starving, and another third of the world is under-fed.
* Do you live in a war zone? Many people do not live in a country that is at peace today. When we think of war in the world today, we often think of [Iraq](http://voices.yahoo.com/theme/518/iraq.html) and Afghanistan, but there are many other countries at war today. Chechnya, Columbia, Israel, Sudan, Somalia, India, and [Pakistan](http://voices.yahoo.com/topic/26257/pakistan.html).
* Do you have a bed to sleep in? According to Inter Press Service, there are more than 100 million homeless people worldwide. Millions more have a home to live in, but sleep on a dirt floor or share a bed with many other people.
* Do you have access to clean drinking water? More than a billion people in the world do not have clean drinking water. Almost 2 million people die every year because their water is unsafe.
* If our house catches on fire, the fire department will come.
* If we catch a serious illness, the emergency rooms will not turn us away.
* We do not live in fear of someone killing us because we are the wrong religion.
* Our children can go to school and learn how to read.

**Blind But Happy**

*“O what a happy soul am I! Although I cannot see, I am resolved that in this world contented I will be; How many blessings I enjoy that other people don’t! To weep and sigh because I’m blind I cannot and I won’t.”*  ***(***Helen Keller at 8 years of age)

**Helpful Scriptures**Proverbs 30:8 *Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.*Luke 12:15 *Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”*

1. **Identify & enjoy the things you do have, which is the secret of contentment.**

Philippians 4:4-6 *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

1. **Change what you can, accept what you can’t change, and learn to recognize the difference.**

*St Francis of Assisi penned The Serenity Prayer around 1200 AD.*

*“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change;
Courage to change the things I can; And wisdom to know the difference.*Acceptance, courage and wisdom”… How are you doing in these areas?Are you accepting of the things in your life that aren’t going to change, no matter what you do or how hard you try?

Remember this… You can’t change your looks or your family… and you definitely can’t change other people!

1. **Seek out people and places that you can impact for the good. While seeking happiness for others we will consistently find it for ourselves.**

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*

1. **Be positive, Be proactive, and Be persistent!**

Proverbs 17:22 *A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.*
 **Six Ethics of Life**

*Before you pray – believe
Before you speak – listen
Before you spend – earn
Before you write – think
Before you quit – try & try
Before you die – live!
 Anonymous*

1. **Don’t settle for acceptance, reach for acceptance with joy.**

Habakkuk 3:17-19 *Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, 18 yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. 19 The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.*

**Encouraging Scripture That Helps With Acceptance

Psalm 119:67 & 71** *Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.
71 It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.***Proverbs 12:25** *Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up.***Proverbs 14:30** *A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.***Proverbs 17:22** *A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.***Proverbs 30:8** *Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.***Habakkuk 3:17-19** *Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, 18 yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. 19 The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.***Matthew 6:33-34** *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.***Philippians 4:4-6** *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***Philippians 4:13** *…seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.***1 Peter 5:6-7** *Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. 7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.***1 John 4:18** *There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.***2 Corinthians 4:17** *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*