



LOUDER
than WORDS

THE POWER *of*
UNCOMPROMISED LIVING

ANDY STANLEY

Author of the Bestseller HOW GOOD IS GOOD ENOUGH

LOUDER
than WORDS

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Chapter Ten

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

*The integrity of the upright will guide them,
but the crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them.*

PROVERBS 11:3

As we have seen, transformation of character requires renewal of the mind, and renewal is a lifestyle. Therefore, some new habits are required. This may feel unnatural initially. Anytime we try something new, it feels somewhat uncomfortable, even intimidating. Remember turning on a computer for the first time? How about your first kiss? Think back to your first time behind the wheel of a car. What about your first experience lifting weights or trying to keep up in aerobics class?

After my first step aerobics class, my buddy and I went up to meet the teacher. There were about ninety people in the class, so I wanted to make sure he knew he had some newcomers. I introduced myself and told him that this was my first class. He smiled and said, “I know.”

As you begin to apply the principles of renewal to your life, you may feel like the whole thing is too contrived to offer any authentic spiritual benefit. After all, it shouldn't be this complicated to become a person of character, should it? Shouldn't we just get better naturally because we want to?

Well, actually, no. When you take into account the world we live in, the families we grew up in, the pain we have experienced, and our propensity toward sin, there is a great deal of negative inertia we must overcome. Our natural drift is toward selfishness, not Christlikeness. To expect that you can drift effortlessly toward Christlikeness is tantamount to believing you could drift effortlessly up the Colorado river—it's not going to happen.

The good news is, it will only take one or two positive experiences with renewal to convince you that it's worth the effort. Learning to ride a bicycle is almost always a painful experience. Knees and elbows bear the marks of courage and determination. Ah, but that initial experience of freedom—that first solo flight of twenty or thirty yards—is enough to convince any kid that it will be worth the effort (and pain) in the end.

In the pages that follow, I am going to give you four practical tips to help you “put on the new.” Remember, the goal of this step is to effectively counter the specific lies that have infiltrated your belief system.

I. SPEAK THE TRUTH OUT LOUD

I'm often asked, “Can the devil read our minds?” I don't think so. I can't read anyone's mind, but I can often guess what someone is thinking. The better you know someone, the easier it is to predict his thoughts and actions—as well as *influence* his thoughts and actions. The devil doesn't need to be able to read our minds to influence what we think.

For that reason, it is important to speak the truths of God's Word out loud. Jesus felt that it was necessary to say out loud, “It is written.” He

didn't look at the devil and meditate. He didn't try to stare Satan down. He spoke the truth right out loud: "It is written..." We would be wise to do the same.

You may feel a bit strange the first time you try this. But go for it anyway. Volume isn't the issue here. You don't have to shout it. Just say it.

Something powerful happens when we verbalize truth in the face of temptation or discouragement. Truth is powerful. Truth moves us beyond the realm of interpretation and assumption into the realm of reality. Truth takes our emotions and subjugates them to what is real.

Our feelings are wonderful followers, but they are terrible leaders.

This is why the Psalms are so powerful. There we find David's human interpretation of the events and circumstances surrounding him. We find there all the emotions that we would expect someone in his situation to feel. Then we read as David subjects his thoughts and fears to the test of truth. What is especially important to note is that he was not content to make this a mental exercise. As a musician, David had experienced the power of truth verbalized. By verbalizing his internal battle, he gained perspective and strength—he moved the battle from the internal world of subjectivity into the realm of objective reality. Sure, his enemies were all around him. Yes, there were times when all seemed lost. Yet in the midst of all of that, David writes:

But as for me, I shall sing of Your strength;

Yes, I shall joyfully sing of Your lovingkindness in the morning,

For You have been my stronghold

And a refuge in the day of my distress.

O my strength, I will sing praises to You;

For God is my stronghold, the God who shows me lovingkindness.

Verbalizing truth reshuffles our emotions. Truth frees us to feel *appropriately*—it casts a revealing light of reality on emotions that are stirred up by lies, misunderstandings, and inaccurate interpretations of the circumstances around us. It is hard to be honest if you are *afraid* of the outcome. It is difficult to be accountable if you are *worried* that someone might lose respect for you. Purity is difficult to maintain if you *feel* as if there are no consequences.

But spoken truth has a way of neutralizing misleading feelings. Truth deflates the swelling emotions that push us in self-destructive directions. Speaking the truth brings needed perspective to our panicking soul.

Sandra and I have a friend who grew up in a destructive home where she received almost no verbal affirmation. Needless to say, her self-esteem was in serious need of an overhaul. She became a Christian in her early forties. Slowly she began to accept the fact that her heavenly Father really did accept and love her. Unfortunately, this woman worked in an environment that reinforced most of what she heard growing up. Everything was negative. She was made to feel as if she couldn't do anything right. No praise. No gratitude. Just griping and complaining.

We tried unsuccessfully to help our friend find another job. And over time she resigned herself to the fact that God must have placed her there for a reason. Once she settled that issue, she began looking for ways to cope with the criticism. I suggested she think through what was being said about her at work to make sure there wasn't something she could do to improve her relationship with the people in her office. She came up with a couple of ideas, but nothing significant changed. Next, I had her write down the emotional messages her coworkers were sending her. An emotional message is what we *feel* someone is saying about us. This was her list:

“You're worthless.”

“You're incompetent.”

“You're stupid.”

Every day was full of rejection. Add to this the scars from her past, and you can imagine the emotional shape this woman was in. But once she was able to identify and isolate the specific emotional messages she was receiving, she knew at once they were lies. She was mature enough in her faith to know that she wasn't worthless. She was overqualified for her job, so she knew she wasn't incompetent. And she would never have gotten her job to begin with if she had been stupid.

Realizing that these were all lies was helpful. But it wasn't enough. Next, she went to the Scriptures to dig out a handful of truths she could use to counter the untrustworthy messages she was receiving in daily doses. Here is a sampling of the verses she chose:

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

ROMANS 5:8, NIV

For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

I CORINTHIANS 6:20

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

ROMANS 8:1

I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well.

PSALM 139:14

All day long she would say these verses out loud, just under her breath. Every time she was made to feel unworthy...*I have been bought with*

a price. Every time she was made to feel stupid...I am fearfully and wonderfully made. When feelings of rejection welled up in her...While I was still a sinner, Christ died for me.

For three years, this was her daily routine. Nothing in her office environment changed. Nobody expressed appreciation for this woman's character and patience. But when God finally led her out, she was a different person. As I would listen to her share the details of what went on in her office, I would often wonder how I would have responded to so much criticism. I don't think I could have survived. And she would be the first to tell you that it was only through constant renewal that she was able to survive—and prosper. Such is the power of spoken truth.

2. PERSONALIZE THE TRUTH

This strategy for renewal involves quoting the truths of Scripture in the first person. For example, one of my character goals in life is purity. Just about every day I receive an emotional message that makes me feel as if I have no choice but to entertain whatever impure thoughts pop into my mind. The passage I have committed to memory to counter these feelings is from Paul's letter to the church in Corinth:

We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

2 CORINTHIANS 10:5

When I quote this verse, I put it in the first person. "I am destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and I am taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."

This is a powerful verse. The term *speculation* can be readily applied to the “I wonder what it would be like” scenarios our minds are prone to latch onto.

I wonder what it would be like to be married to him?

I wonder what it would be like to try one of those?

I wonder what it would be like to watch that?

I wonder what it would be like to...

Another verse in my purity arsenal is found in Paul’s letter to the church in Rome: “So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh” (Romans 8:12).

Again, when I quote this verse, I put it in the first person: “I am not under obligation to the flesh to live according to the flesh.”

3. PRAY THE TRUTH

A third way to “put on the new” is to incorporate handpicked truths into your prayers. Another one of my lifelong character goals is loyalty, especially as it relates to my friends. One of my verses for loyalty focuses on what I say about other people:

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

EPHESIANS 4:29

Often I pray, “Lord, today it is my desire that no unwholesome word proceed out of my mouth. Let every word I speak be edifying according to the need of the moment that it may give grace to those who hear.”

When you begin to incorporate these truths into your prayers, you’re

voicing your acceptance of the truth back to God. You're embracing the truth in His presence. Your prayers become an audible expression of your agreement with His plan for your character.

4. MEDITATE ON THE TRUTH

This is something my father taught me to do when I was very young. It's not something he suggested I do; instead, it was something I grew up hearing him talk about. He used to say, "Andy, the last thing I think about at night before I go to sleep is the truth." He would choose a verse or a part of a verse and rehearse it in his mind over and over until he fell asleep.

King David made this a part of his nightly ritual as well: "When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches" (Psalm 63:6).

Throughout the Psalms, David refers to the habit of meditation:

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the
counsel of the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of sinners,
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night.

PSALM 1:1-2

Daytime meditation? If you're like me, you don't have much discretionary time to sit around and meditate on anything! Other than bedtime, the only consistent time I have to meditate is in the car. I write down my memory and meditation verses on little cards and put them somewhere on my dashboard. This has been my habit for eleven years. I have memorized

dozens of verses while driving down the road. Some of my most helpful insights have come as a result of memorizing and meditating in the car.

A PLACE TO BEGIN

This was not meant to be a “Four Steps to Successful Christian Living” chapter. These four suggestions are not steps to take. They are habits to develop, and that implies process.

Begin by developing your arsenal of verses. Then start committing them to memory. Now you might be thinking, *I can't memorize Scripture*. Guess what? You have just stumbled across a big lie that stands between you and the character you desire. “I can't memorize scripture” is a lie so common (and so absurd) that you would have thought we all would have recognized it for what it is a long time ago.

Of course you can memorize Scripture! You can memorize anything you want to memorize. In fact, you have memorized a lot of things you never intended to memorize. I walk around our house singing the Barney theme song all the time. You turn on the radio, hear one bar of music, and off you go—singing lyrics you never once sat down and made the effort to memorize.

The problem is not our ability or capacity for memorization. The problem is the *priority* we have given to memorizing Scripture. Granted, it's not the easiest task we will undertake, but it may very well be one of the most important. If you are going to put on the new, you need to have something new to put on.

Jesus stressed the importance of having something new to put on. He explained the process of renewal this way: “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31–32).

There's an equation in this passage that's so simple, and yet so profound.

Immerse yourself in My teaching + Discover the truth = Be made free

The word *continue*, or *abide*, is translated from a Greek word meaning *to remain* or *stay*. It is used in other places to refer to a specific geographic location. For example: "After this He went down to Capernaum, He and His mother and His brothers and His disciples; and they *stayed* there a few days" (John 2:12).

Jesus' point in John 8:32 is that His followers ought to stay, or remain, in His word. In the same way we would encourage someone on a diet to "stay with it," so Jesus exhorts us, "Don't give up. Don't grow weary. And don't drift away. Stay in My Word!"

If we remain in His word, we will "know the truth." Now, this is different from "hearing" the truth or being "told" the truth. And I don't believe Jesus is referring to one's general knowledge of the Bible. He does not promise that we will get any smarter. He promises freedom. And freedom comes when the specific truths of His Word cast a revealing light upon the lies that support our attitudes and emotions.

Of course, Jesus was talking about an internal freedom—being set free on the inside. The freedom He referred to does not depend on circumstances. He wasn't talking about being free from the Roman government. He wasn't talking about getting out of prison. He was talking about an *inside* freedom. He was promising the freedom to become everything God intended for you to be. The freedom to be molded and conformed to the image of Christ.

Remaining in His Word and discovering the truth removes obstacles between you and your character development. Truth paves the way for progress.

When I was in my midtwenties, it came to my attention that I had a habit of lying about my involvement in sports while in high school. When people would ask me if I played any sports in high school, I would always say, “Yes, I ran track and played soccer.” Technically, that was true. While I was in high school, I did run around the track and I did play soccer. What I didn’t say was that both of these activities took place during my PE class. I was never on either the soccer or track team at good ol’ Tucker High.

Now, every time I told that lie, I felt terrible. But I could not bring myself to look at somebody in the eye and say, “No, I never participated in any team sports.” This had been going on for years. I would promise myself I wouldn’t do it again, but over and over again I would lie.

Finally, during my third year in seminary, of all places, something happened that forced me to deal with this character flaw. A friend of mine rushed up to me at church and said he had some great news. He told me he thought he could work it out for me to be the chaplain for the SMU football team.

My heart sank down into my socks. My friend was thrilled about this wonderful opportunity he had landed for me. And I felt like throwing up. That’s when I knew I had a real problem. I knew there was a connection between my lying lips and my quivering knees.

After a week or so of real soul searching, I hit upon the root of my problem: I believed a lie. Somewhere along the way I had begun believing that to be a real, respectable, worthwhile man, I had to have accomplished something athletically.

Well-placed lies are powerful. They can chart our course for a lifetime if we let them. When I realized what had happened, I got busy replacing those lies with truth. In a short amount of time, I was free. Athletes no longer intimidated me, and I didn’t feel compelled to lie about my athletic

accomplishments. Before long, I could laugh about my lack of athletic prowess. Years later, I was invited to do a chapel service for the Atlanta Hawks. I remember walking into that room full of giants and thinking, *We've come a long way, haven't we, Lord?*

YOUR PART, HIS PART

God is going to use a variety of things to shape your character. In most cases your only responsibility will be to trust Him and remain faithful. Renewal is the exception. The principle of renewal allows us to be proactive in our pursuit of character. It gives us a place to start. Renewal is our way of working alongside the Holy Spirit as He endeavors to conform our character to that of the Lord Jesus.

You know what you want to become. You have now surfaced some of the lies that stand in your way. Hopefully, you have started developing a list of verses that communicate the truths you need to focus on. Now start quoting them out loud. Personalize them. Pray through them. Turn off that radio and start meditating on them. And in the end, you will no longer be conformed to this world. You will be transformed.

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