

“Getting Unstuck So We Can Live Free!”

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“Getting Unstuck From Things We Believe To Be True, But Are Not” July 1, 2018

Key Texts: Philippians 3:7-14

I. Introduction: Different Ways of Getting Stuck and Unstuck

Getting unstuck is never easy. Some places we get stuck in are easier to get out of than others. This past winter we unfortunately had 2 incidents where people leaving our parking lot ran into the ditch here just below the playground. On one occasion, 4 or 5 of us were able to push the car out. On another, 4 or 5 of us could not budge the car, so we hooked up a strap and pulled it out.

I suppose you could say there are different levels of getting stuck and different means by which one might get unstuck. At the end of the day we'd all rather be more like this turtle pictured crossing the road down at Batna versus our logo picture on its back.

What has you stuck? And for today, what are the things you may believe about yourself, your family, your church, or country that might be keeping you stuck. Stuck in your thought life or your same old routines, same old bad habits, and same old fears. Keeping us in the stuck box versus learning to live freely. One of the reasons we stay stuck in various situations comes from self-deception. Self-deception determines one's experience in every aspect of life.

II. Stuck From Our Own Self-Deception

Self-deception means “the action or practice of allowing oneself to believe that a false or invalidated feeling, idea, or situation is true”.

That may look like: This bad thing happened to me. What did I do to deserve this? In other words, we tend to think when something “bad” happens it must be because we did something wrong and we must be being punished by God for it.

The Cambridge Dictionary adds this about self-deception: “It is the act of hiding the truth from yourself.” I think because the truth is unpleasant and we do not tend to like unpleasant things about ourselves and so guess what happens? We stay stuck!

How do people tend to self-deception? Some common situations look like:

---The alcoholic or drug addict who is self-deceived in believing that his drinking or drug habit is under control.

---The husband who is self-deceived that his wife is not having an affair.

---Another example is Air Florida Flight 90 which crashed into the 14th Street bridge in Washington, DC in January of 1982. The reasoning was pilot error. The deeper reason? Self-deception. The pilots failed to turn on the engines' internal ice protection systems, used reverse thrust in a snowstorm prior to takeoff, and tried to use the jet exhaust of another plane in front of them to melt their ice, and then failed to abort the takeoff even after detecting a power problem while taxiing and seeing ice and snow build up on the wings.

III. Where Are Things Building Up For You?

Where in your life, your workplace, your family, your classroom, do you see things building up, but you're not paying attention, or using someone else's exhaust, or not owning up to your responsibility to do something about a situation. We'll just keep pushing this forward and eventually we'll take flight, right?

All too often our self-deception keeps us stuck and, more often than not, eventually leads to more pain and suffering than we could ever foresee. For sure it keeps us from freely being who God made us to be. We live in sin, entangled and stuck by its snare and barbs.

IV. Saul to Paul—Learning to Press On!

Before Paul became Paul, he was Saul. Saul was raised in a religious family with all the best Jewish schooling and training he could get. When he is writing to the Philippians he is thinking about all the progress and success he had in life. All his credentials, credits and how he was looked at to put down this so-called movement called “The Way”. Paul thought Christianity was heretical and blasphemous and his zealous intent was to quiet this movement by having its leaders killed. He saw Christianity as a political menace to his Jewish society and Jesus’ teachings to be false. I mean summing up all the laws, 613 into 2? To love God and to love your neighbor. Too simplistic thought Paul.

Then, one day, Paul encounters Jesus on the Damascus Road. This is after Jesus’ death and resurrection and after Paul still Saul, has one of the apostles, Stephen, stoned to death. Long story short, Saul becomes Paul because he met Jesus, experienced Jesus, and allowed Jesus to reshape, and remold his thinking and his entire way of living.

Paul describes this as, “I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus, my Lord, for whose sake I have lost everything—all things. (vs 8)

And while I know I am by no means perfect, I do press on to take hold of that for which Christ took hold of me. I haven’t gotten there yet, but what I do is forgetting what lies behind me, I strain forward to what lies ahead.” (vs12-13)

Paul, because of Jesus, and seeing life a new way, was able to get unstuck from a brutal past and to move forward into a whole new way of life. How he thought, how he related to others, how he used his life experiences to help others see how they may be stuck so that they could begin to live life in a better way, in Jesus’ way! Gets expressed like this, “I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus”. (vs14)

V. Staying Stuck is Often Caused by the Lies We Believe

Paul chose not to stay where he was. He chose not to stay stuck. You cannot stay stuck and press on at the same time. Pressing on means we stop looking back, or living in the past, and move forward into the future God has for us. It does not mean being perfect. It does mean we are to look at things from a mature perspective, to be honest in evaluation of ourselves and our situations and to stop telling ourselves things that are not true about ourselves or our situations.

Let me share a few with you and see if it rings any bells:

1. Telling yourself you are not doing enough or are not good enough.
2. When you have this or that then you’ll be happy.
3. I’ll get to that tomorrow.—Friends that’s called procrastination. Stop saying “You will”, and start celebrating “You did!”
4. No one understands me, or I’m all alone in this.
5. I’ll be alone forever.
6. Things are not happening for me because of my past mistakes. My questions is “What can you learn from past mistakes, change, and then you’ll “press on” more quickly.
7. Telling yourself you have no control of your life.

8. It's my parents' fault. We have to stop blaming whoever we are blaming. Paul never blamed his parents from what I read.
9. We believe this lie—If that person really loved me they would do _____, you fill in the blank!
10. I can't trust myself, or anyone else for that matter.
11. I have no purpose.
12. I am not worthy of being loved.

Do yourself, God, your family, and friends a favor. Take some time to think about and reflect on what holds you back, or has you stuck. You may relate to one or more of these, or have your own set of lies you believe about yourself.

VI. Being Honest About Where the Problem Lies

The key is, be honest, get real. Don't allow yourself to be self-deceived.

Here is what is at stake. An infant learns to crawl and in doing so pushes herself backwards around the house. Backing herself around, she gets lodged beneath the furniture. There she thrashes about, crying, banging her little head against the sides and undersides of the furniture. She is stuck and she hates it. So, she does the only thing she knows to do—she pushes even harder, which does what? Only worsens her problem.

If this infant could talk, who would she blame her problem on? Most likely the furniture. After all, she is doing everything she can think of. The problem couldn't be hers. But of course, the problem is hers, even though she cannot see it. While it's true she is doing everything she can think of, the problem is precisely that she can't see how she's the problem. And having the problem she has, nothing she can think of will be a solution.

Self-deception is like this. It blinds us to the true causes of our problems, and once blinded, all the solutions we can think of only makes matters worse. To the extent we are self-deceived and believe those lies we tell ourselves, our happiness, satisfaction, faith development, leadership and all our relationships will stay stuck.

VII. What Scripture Teaches Us About Our Thinking

The Bible tells us in Proverbs 23:7 “As a man or woman thinks so is he or she.” That says a lot. Your and my thought life, what we believe to be true is what shapes who we are, what we do, and ultimately our actions, our ability to stay stuck or live freely.

Paul was able to get beyond any lies he may have believed about himself by living into Romans 12:2 “Do not be conformed to this world...,(Might I add what this world tells you), but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

And the Bible teaches us we can have a truer view of ourselves and our problems—our stuck places in this way “You God will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on God because you trust in God.” (Is 26:3)

Paul was able to press on and do in life what he did because he did not allow his past, or lies he might have believed about himself to control his thought life and therefore actions. He learned to leave the old behind and to press on to be like Jesus and to live for Jesus.

VIII. How Jesus Helps Us and What He Wants Us to Know

Just know Jesus has come to earth, given his life, shed his blood, and rose again so we don't have to be stuck and especially stuck by the lies we might believe about ourselves and situations that are not true. And like

the little girl stuck in the furniture, how can we learn to take responsibility for our own stuckness, learn to relax and trust in God, and then begin to, like Paul, move forward. Forgetting what is behind us and straining forward to what lies ahead!

As we prepare to come to the Table, replace some of those lies that are not true with things that are true.

1. That God loves me and has a plan for me.
2. That I am not alone and others have gone through similar things and are glad to care for me.
3. I won't be alone forever. God has a plan for me.
4. If bad things have happened, God still loves me and is with me.
5. Be honest, stop blaming—help me own my stuckness and not be self-deceived.
6. And please know you are worthy of being loved. Not because we are worthy on our own, but because of what Jesus did for us on the cross to make us worthy. So our sins could be forgiven, so we could get untangled from sin's grip and be found worthy as we seek to live, choose to live, our lives pressing on to win the prize for which God has also called us to, heavenward in Christ Jesus.

IX. Closing Prayer

Let Us Pray:

God, thank you for sending Jesus to give us a way out of being stuck, whatever that means for each person. Today, we've focused on things we believe to be true, but are not. Lies we tell ourselves, or in some cases, what others have said to us that we've internalized. In a moment we can confess those things before you, come to your table to receive forgiveness, lay it down, and move forward, press on, with our minds being renewed and transformed so we can live a life worthy of the calling you've given to each of us. Come, Lord Jesus, help us hear what you think of us and help us embrace that in our hearts, minds, and in our living.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.