

Renewal: A Changed Heart

Day 1:

When Life Dulls Your Edge

Devotional: Have you ever noticed how a brand-new kitchen knife cuts through everything effortlessly? The first time you use it, you're amazed at how smooth and clean each slice is. But over time, that same knife becomes dull. It struggles to cut through even the simplest tasks. Our spiritual lives often follow a similar pattern. When we first place our faith in God, we're excited and energetic, burning bright for Jesus. But life has a way of wearing us down. Difficulty, hardship, heartache, hurt, loss, defeat, and sin all take their toll. We find ourselves spiritually dull, struggling with tasks that once felt natural. But here's the beautiful truth: all hope isn't lost. Just as Jacob's spirit was renewed when he learned Joseph was alive, God can breathe new life into our weary souls. Jacob had been paralyzed by grief, but renewal moved him from despair to purposeful action toward God's calling. The question isn't whether life will wear us down – it will. The question is where we'll turn when it happens. Will we rely on our own strength, or will we turn to the God who specializes in renewal? Everything other than God will eventually fail us. Our favorite teams, our jobs, even our closest relationships will sometimes disappoint us. But God never fails. Renewal isn't just about feeling better spiritually; it fundamentally changes how we see God and follow Him. When we allow God to sharpen us again, we discover that He can restore what life has dulled.

Bible Verse: "Then Israel said, "Enough! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go to see him before I die." - Genesis 45:28

Reflection Question: When life wears you down, where do you typically turn first – to God or to your own strength and resources?

Quote: "Life has a tendency to wear us down. If you think about a kitchen knife with me, when you first buy your knives, they are super sharp. But over time, they become dull. Life wears them down. The same thing happens in our faith."

Prayer: Lord, I confess that life has dulled my spiritual edge. I've allowed circumstances to wear me down and have sometimes turned to everything except You for renewal. Help me to see that You are the source of true restoration. Sharpen my faith and renew my spirit so I can serve You with fresh passion. Amen.

Day 2:

Here I Am – No Excuses

Devotional: Isaiah's response to God's call was immediate and wholehearted: 'Here I am. Send me!' No conditions, no negotiations, no list of requirements that needed to be met first. Just complete availability to God's purposes. How different this is from our typical response! Far too often, we don't actually listen to God. We might read the Bible, go to church, or hear a sermon, but then immediately we start coming up with exclusions. 'God, I'll serve You, but not in that way.' 'I'll follow You, but not to that place.' 'I'll obey You, but not right now.' A renewed heart listens to God with complete openness. It doesn't filter God's voice through our preferences, fears, or convenience. Instead, it responds with Isaiah's heart: 'Here I am. Send me people in my office that I can talk to. Send me students on Sunday that I can engage. Send me to reach people who are hungry to know You.' This kind of listening requires us to set aside our own agendas and trust that God's plans are better than ours. It means being willing to step out of our comfort zones and into the unknown territories where God wants to use us. When we truly listen to God without making excuses, we position ourselves to be part of His incredible work in the world. We move from being passive observers to active participants in His kingdom purposes.

Bible Verse: "Then I heard the voice of the Lord asking: Who will I send? Who will go for us?"

I said: Here I am. Send me." - Isaiah 6:8

Reflection Question: What excuses or conditions do you typically place on your availability to God, and how might He be calling you to respond with a simple 'Here I am' instead?

Quote: "Obedience isn't built off of convenience. Obedience happens all the time, even when it's not easy."

Prayer: Father, forgive me for the times I've listened to You with conditions and excuses. Help me to have Isaiah's heart – completely available and ready to say 'Here I am, send me!' Remove my fears and hesitations, and give me the courage to follow wherever You lead. Make me truly available for Your purposes. Amen.

Day 3:

Obedience Without Convenience

Devotional: We live in a culture that values convenience above almost everything else. We want fast food, instant communication, and immediate results. This mindset can easily creep into our

relationship with God, making us conditional followers rather than faithful disciples. Far too often, we treat obedience to God like a business transaction: 'When this thing changes, when that happens, when this promotion comes through, if this takes place, then I'll obey God.' But that's not obedience – that's just using God as a means to get what we want. Renewed hearts obey God even when it isn't convenient. They understand that obedience isn't built off of convenience; it happens all the time, even when it's not easy. True obedience doesn't wait for perfect conditions or ideal circumstances. Think about Jacob's journey to Egypt. It wasn't convenient for an elderly man to uproot his entire family and move to a foreign land. But when God called, Jacob obeyed. He trusted God's faithfulness rather than waiting for easier circumstances. Obedience in inconvenient moments is where our faith is truly tested and strengthened. It's easy to follow God when everything is going well, but renewed hearts follow Him even when the path is difficult, uncertain, or costly. When we obey God regardless of convenience, we discover that His ways are always better than our timing. We learn to trust His character rather than our circumstances.

Bible Verse: "Israel set out with all that he had and came to Beer-sheba, and he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. That night God spoke to Israel in a vision: "Jacob, Jacob!" he said. And Jacob replied, "Here I am."

God said, "I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you back. Joseph will close your eyes when you die." - Genesis 46:1-4

Reflection Question: What area of obedience to God have you been postponing until circumstances become more convenient, and what would it look like to take that step of faith today?

Quote: "Renewed hearts obey God even when it isn't convenient."

Prayer: Lord, I confess that I've often made my obedience conditional on my comfort and convenience. Help me to follow You faithfully regardless of circumstances. Give me the courage to obey even when it's difficult or inconvenient. I want to trust Your timing and Your ways more than my own preferences. Amen.

Day 4:

The Power of Gratitude

Devotional: There's an old hymn that says, "Count your many blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done." This simple practice has the power to transform

our perspective and renew our hearts. Renewed hearts give thanks for the way God has blessed them. Instead of focusing on what they lack, they recognize what they've been given. This isn't about ignoring real struggles or pretending everything is perfect – it's about choosing to see God's goodness even in difficult seasons. Gratitude is a discipline that requires intentionality. Our natural tendency is to notice what's missing, what's broken, or what's not going according to plan. But when we deliberately look for God's blessings, we begin to see His faithfulness everywhere. Jacob had every reason to focus on his losses – years of believing Joseph was dead, famine in the land, uncertainty about the future. Yet when he learned Joseph was alive, his spirit was renewed. He could see God's hand in circumstances that had once seemed hopeless. When we cultivate gratitude, something beautiful happens in our hearts. We move from a scarcity mindset to an abundance mindset. We begin to see that God has been providing all along, even when we couldn't see it. Gratitude doesn't just change our circumstances – it changes us. Take time today to literally count your blessings. Say them out loud, one by one. You might be surprised by what the Lord has done.

Bible Verse: “Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and bless his name. For the Lord is good, and his faithful love endures forever; his faithfulness, through all generations.” - Psalm 100:4-5

Reflection Question: What are three specific blessings from God that you can name and thank Him for today, and how might regularly practicing gratitude change your perspective on your current circumstances?

Quote: “Renewed hearts give thanks for the way that God has blessed us.”

Prayer: Heavenly Father, forgive me for the times I've focused more on what I lack than on what You've given me. Open my eyes to see Your blessings all around me. Help me to develop a heart of gratitude that recognizes Your goodness even in difficult times. Thank You for Your faithfulness in my life. Amen.

Day 5:

Positioned with Purpose

Devotional: Have you ever considered that your current location, your neighbors, your workplace, and your relationships might not be coincidences? What if God has positioned you purposefully where you are and surrounded you with the people you know for a specific reason? Renewed hearts slow down and see God's provision. They recognize that God is constantly moving and providing, even when we're too rushed or frustrated to notice. When we slow down, we see God's provision. But when we rush – and we're really good at rushing – we miss it. God's

perfect provision is all around us, but sometimes we don't see it because we're hurrying through life, getting frustrated when God doesn't do what we want when we want it. But God is moving and God is providing, often in ways we never expected. Jacob's entire family journey to Egypt wasn't random – it was God's provision for their survival during famine and His plan to grow them into a great nation. What seemed like displacement was actually divine positioning. Renewed hearts also care about the lost because they understand that God has strategically placed them to reach others with the Gospel. Your neighborhood, your workplace, your school – these aren't accidents. God has brought you there for a reason. When we see our circumstances through the lens of God's purposeful provision, everything changes. We stop seeing ourselves as victims of random events and start seeing ourselves as participants in God's grand design. We begin to look for opportunities to serve, to love, and to share the hope we have in Christ with those around us.

Bible Verse: “Jesus continued going around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest.” - Matthew 9:35-38

Reflection Question: Looking at your current circumstances and relationships, how might God be positioning you purposefully to serve Him and reach others with His love?

Quote: “God has positioned you purposefully where you are and has surrounded you purposefully with the people that you know. God's brought you there for a reason.”

Prayer: Lord, help me to slow down and see Your provision in my life. Open my eyes to recognize that You have positioned me purposefully where I am. Give me wisdom to see the opportunities You've placed before me to serve You and share Your love with others. Help me to trust Your perfect timing and provision. Amen.

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Blog Post

Finding Renewal in Faith: Lessons from Jacob's Journey to Egypt

Life has a way of wearing us down. Like a kitchen knife that becomes dull with use, our faith can lose its sharpness through difficulty, heartache, and the daily grind. But just as a dull knife can be sharpened, our weary spirits can be renewed. In Genesis 46, we witness Jacob's remarkable transformation from a man paralyzed by grief to one moving with purpose and urgency toward God's calling.

What Does It Mean to Have a Renewed Heart?

Renewal in faith isn't just about feeling better or getting a spiritual boost. It's about being made new in a way that fundamentally changes how we see God and follow Him. When Jacob learned that Joseph was alive, Scripture tells us "the spirit of their father Jacob revived" - it was renewed, or brought back to life.

This renewal manifested in five distinct ways that can guide our own spiritual journey.

How Do Renewed Hearts Listen to God?

The Power of "Here I Am"

When God called to Jacob saying "Jacob, Jacob," his response was immediate and complete: "Here I am." In that culture, this phrase meant "you have all my attention." It was a declaration of total availability to God.

Far too often, we don't actually listen to God. We might read the Bible or attend church, but then immediately start making exclusions. We think God doesn't really understand our specific situation or that His commands apply to others but not us.

Moving Beyond Excuses

When God says to love our neighbors, we think about how weird our actual neighbors are. When Jesus commands us to make disciples, we convince ourselves we're too old, too busy, or

unqualified. These aren't harmless thoughts - they reveal places where we're not truly listening to God.

A renewed heart responds like Isaiah: "Here I am. Send me." It says yes to God's calling without conditions or qualifications.

Why Do Renewed Hearts Obey Even When It's Inconvenient?

Faith When Inconvenient

God told Jacob to move his entire family to Egypt, promising they would become a great nation there. This seemed contradictory - how do you become a great nation by moving to another country? Yet Jacob obeyed because he trusted God's faithfulness.

God's calling often requires faith that goes beyond human logic. He promises to be with us and provide for us, but the path may not make immediate sense.

Obedience Without Perfect Conditions

We often tell ourselves we'll obey God when everything is perfect - when our job is stable, our stress is manageable, or our circumstances are ideal. But that's not obedience; it's using God for our convenience.

True obedience happens regardless of circumstances. It doesn't wait for the perfect moment or ideal conditions.

How Can We Give Thanks Like Renewed Hearts Do?

Recognizing God's Blessings

The detailed genealogy in Genesis 46 might seem tedious, but it reveals something profound: despite Jacob's years of heartbreak, God had blessed him with a large, thriving family. What Jacob had overlooked in his grief became clear in his renewal.

When we're renewed, we begin to see and acknowledge the ways God has blessed us. We move from focusing on what we lack to recognizing what we've been given.

The Ultimate Blessing

The greatest blessing we can acknowledge is salvation through Jesus Christ. About 2,000 years ago, a perfect man lived, died, and rose again to pay the price for our sins. Jesus took our guilt upon Himself and offers us forgiveness and eternal life.

This Thanksgiving, consider sharing your gratitude for Jesus with those around you. Take 30 seconds to tell your family and friends that you're thankful for your Savior.

What Does It Look Like to See God's Provision?

Slowing Down to Notice

When Jacob arrived in Egypt and was reunited with Joseph, he declared himself ready to die because he had seen God's provision. He was completely satisfied and content, recognizing God's faithfulness.

God's provision surrounds us constantly, but we often miss it because we're rushing through life. We get frustrated when God doesn't do what we want when we want it, failing to see how He's already moving and providing.

Creating Reminders

Just as the Israelites set up stone memorials to remember God's faithfulness, we need ways to remember His provision in our lives. Consider keeping a notebook of God's blessings, creating photo reminders, or establishing family traditions that help you recall His faithfulness.

When we slow down and look back, we can see how God perfectly orchestrated circumstances for our good, even when we couldn't understand it at the time.

Why Should Renewed Hearts Care About the Lost?

Purposeful Positioning

God didn't place Jacob in Egypt by accident - it was part of His plan to grow the family into a great nation. Similarly, God hasn't placed you where you are by coincidence. Your neighborhood, workplace, and relationships are all part of His design.

What if God positioned you exactly where you are to reach the people around you? What if you're His missionary in your community?

Taking Action

Being burdened for the lost isn't enough - we must act on that burden. Here are three practical steps:

Give thanks for the Gospel - When people ask what you're thankful for, be bold enough to mention God and what He's done in your life.

Give hospitality - Welcome people into your life and home. Your hospitality is powerful and different from what the world offers.

Give your heart - Pray daily for the people around you. The word "pray" in Matthew 9 can also be translated as "beg" - plead with God desperately for the harvest around you.

Life Application

Renewal helps us see God more clearly while following Him more obediently. This week, choose one area where you need renewal and take specific action. Whether it's listening more attentively to God, obeying Him despite inconvenience, giving thanks for His blessings, recognizing His provision, or caring for the lost around you - commit to saying "Here I am, send me" in that area.

Questions for Reflection:

- When you're worn down by life, where do you turn for strength - to God or to your own resources?
- What excuses do you make when God calls you to obey Him in difficult circumstances?
- How can you create reminders this week to help you notice and remember God's provision in your life?
- Who has God placed in your life that needs to hear about His love and salvation?

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Small Group Guide

Summary:

This sermon from Genesis 46 focuses on the theme of renewal and how it transforms our relationship with God. Pastor Daniel explores Jacob's journey to Egypt, emphasizing that renewal helps us see God more clearly while following Him more obediently. The message examines five ways a renewed spirit helps us follow God: listening to God, obeying even when inconvenient, giving thanks for blessings, recognizing God's provision, and being burdened for the lost. The pastor challenges the congregation to examine where they turn when worn down, encouraging them to run to God rather than relying on their own strength. Using Jacob's response of "Here I am" when God called him, the sermon emphasizes the importance of being available and obedient to God's calling, particularly in reaching those around us who need Jesus.

Intro Prayer:

Father God, we come before You this morning asking that You would quiet our hearts and remove any distractions from us. Help us to be fully focused on You and open to what You want to teach us through Your Word today. Give us ears to hear and hearts that are ready to receive what You have for us. We ask that You would speak to each person here according to their need, whether they feel close to You or distant, whether their faith is strong or weary. Renew our love for You and bring us to new life through this time together. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Ice Breaker:

What's one thing you're looking forward to most about Thanksgiving this week - the food, family time, football, or something else entirely?

Key Verses:

Genesis 46:1-7, 28-34

Acts 7:9-16

Isaiah 6:8

Questions:

- Jacob stopped to offer sacrifices to God before continuing his journey to Egypt. When you're going through major life changes or decisions, how do you involve God in the process?
- When God called to Jacob, he responded "Here I am." What does it look like practically to have that same attitude of availability toward God in your daily life?
- Pastor Daniel mentioned that when we're worn down, we can look at our giving, time, and priorities to see where we're really placing our hope. What do these three areas reveal about where you turn when life gets difficult?
- Jacob obeyed God even though moving to Egypt seemed counterintuitive - becoming a great nation in a foreign land. Can you think of a time when God asked you to do something that didn't make sense from a human perspective?
- The sermon emphasized counting our blessings and giving thanks. What are some specific ways God has provided for you that you might have overlooked or taken for granted?
- God positioned Jacob's family in Goshen for a specific purpose. How might God have positioned you in your current neighborhood, workplace, or community for His purposes?
- Pastor Daniel challenged us to be burdened for the lost around us. Who are the people in your life that don't know Jesus, and how can you begin praying for opportunities to share the gospel with them?
- Jacob's spirit was renewed when he learned Joseph was alive. What are some practical ways we can pursue spiritual renewal when our faith feels worn down or distant?

Life Application:

This week, create a tangible way to remember and give thanks for God's provision in your life. Whether it's starting a gratitude journal, setting up stones of remembrance, or simply taking time each day to verbally thank God for specific blessings, commit to slowing down and recognizing how God has been faithful. Additionally, identify one person in your life who doesn't know Jesus and begin praying daily for an opportunity to share the gospel with them, asking God to give you a heart that says 'Here I am, send me!'

Key Takeaways:

1. Renewed hearts listen to God - When God calls, we respond with 'Here I am' rather than making excuses or exceptions

2. Renewed hearts obey God even when it isn't convenient - True obedience happens regardless of circumstances or timing
3. Renewed hearts give thanks for the ways God has blessed us - Taking time to count our blessings and acknowledge God's goodness
4. Renewed hearts slow down and see God's provision - Creating reminders and memorials of God's faithfulness in our lives
5. Renewed hearts are burdened for the lost - Recognizing that God has positioned us where we are to reach others with the gospel

Ending Prayer:

Father God, thank You for this time together and for the truth of Your Word. We ask that You would continue the work of renewal in our hearts that You've begun today. Help us to truly say 'Here I am, send me' when You call us to obedience, even when it's inconvenient. Give us eyes to see Your provision all around us and hearts that are genuinely thankful for Your blessings. Most importantly, Lord, burden our hearts for those around us who don't know Jesus. Help us to see that You have positioned us exactly where we are for Your purposes. Give us boldness to share the gospel and wisdom to know how to love the people You've placed in our lives. Continue to renew us and make us more like Jesus. In His precious name we pray, Amen.