

Who Is Your Family? —June 5, 2016

By Wayne J. Schneider — Gratia agimus tibi (We give Thee Thanks)

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St. Mark 3:20-35 -

The Los Angeles Times printed a case study on boredom. Boredom can all too easily become epidemic. Many people are half-living and half-dying of boredom. Boredom is a denial of joy which is a heartbreak because joy is always available.

I heard a preacher say that life is like a funnel. It only depends on which way you go in. If you go in like the world at the big end where it appears that the opportunities are endless, then you find that life tapers down into tedious smallness.

For the believer, God turns the funnel around. "*Narrow is the gate*" that leads to eternal life, but it opens into fabulous freedom and a glorious newness. And it continues to open now and forever! There is no smallness or boredom with God!

It is sometimes tempting to look at our lives and say, "*Oh what's the use, I'll never amount to anything, my life is almost over. I live in a rut. I'll just settle for who I am, nothing more or less,*" and sadness covers us like an emotional wet blanket.

But I want to tell you that the Christian life offers you vast horizons. It offers you great new beginnings. It's possible to have a fresh start. Whoever you are, you can begin again.

I want you to see all of the possibilities that we have for a new beginning. First, the promise. For the growing Christian consistent

renewal is the norm. Ephesians 4:23 says to "*be renewed in the spirit of your minds....*" And that is in the present tense. "Keep on being renewed." It starts in your mind, the thinking center. God wants to change the way you look at your life.

St. Paul says, "*While the outer man gets old, the inner man is renewed day by day.*" That's a promise to the believer. She is refreshed, and should always be rejuvenated. St. Paul says in Philippians, "*I will be one who lives in fresh newness of life.*" And in II Corinthians 5:17, "*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.*" When you meet Jesus, the new has come and just keeps coming.

God's new beginning comes from a crisis or a process. We sing about it in the hymn "Great is Thy Faithfulness." That Israel is a nation is a miracle. Isaiah 43:19 says, "*Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.*" And in verse 25 God says, "He will remember their sins no more." God will restore them to a brand new state! And God wants to do that for you, too. God's plan for history ends in superb newness: A new heaven and a new earth. Our world is always under persistent restoration by God's grace. In the Book of Revelation we read, "*Behold, I make all things new.*" The things of the world become older and smaller while the things of God are renewed and increase.

Jesus attends a wedding and H₂O becomes the best wine. That's how God works, God always improves. St. Paul says that

we are constantly being changed by Holy Spirit "from one degree of glory to another." We have not yet seen what God wants to do with us!

I know what it feels like when the heavens feel as brass, when my life seems dull when I seem to be sinking, and like St. Peter I cry out "Lord, save me!" And God does. God's gift of mercy allows me to begin again and again.

As I've said, sometimes it's a crisis that brings me to a new beginning. Confession is good for the soul. I put-off my ordination for four years because I felt unworthy of the position of pastor. Too many times to mention I have been devastated by personal weakness and sin, unable to manage my thoughts. Either by God's word or the sharp word of a believing friend, I found hope and grace again and again, and God gave me another beginning.

Perhaps you need a fresh start. God is the only one who can untangle your mess. Whatever you are caught in God can free you. The prophet Hosea can help here: "/ will heal their faithlessness, I will love them freely. . . ."

That's God. Onesimus was a runaway slave fearful of returning home. St. Paul writes to his owner, and he is welcomed back home. St. Mark quit working with St. Paul. Later, St. Paul writes "Bring me Mark for he is important to me." And Mark began again.

In Ephesians 4:22-23 we find that we are to leave the old nature, the old way of life, and put on the new by the renewing of our minds. You may question why the church universal is often ineffectual, spiritually slow, acting and speaking like the world. If we

think and act like the world, we become the world. God wants the church to be refreshed, renewed. To do this, we must turn in the direction of God. _

St. Peter denied Jesus three times and after the resurrection Jesus asked St. Peter three times, "Do you love me?" giving him a new beginning. Might St. Peter have been thinking, "Do I still have a chance to serve God after all my failures?" God says, "O course, Peter." Isn't that cool? I

Just believe, that's the hardest thing. The prophet Joel says it this way: "I will restore the years which the locusts have eaten." God is willing to do this for you. Trust God for a new beginning for your life. Determine to have confidence in God for a larger life than you are living now.

There is a beautifully cute story about a couple who lost their farm during the great depression. They sold all they owned and purchased a tiny drugstore in the Midwest. It was hard times, and the drugstore was doing poorly. _

While watching people driving by the drugstore one day, the wife said to her husband, " What these people need is a drink of cold water." And that's what they did. In a radius of twenty-five miles, signs read "Free ice-water. Wall Drugstore. Wall, South Dakota." It caught on, and people came, drank, and bought. It sounds so dumb, but it worked. Do you know you can find these signs the world over? London, Paris, Korea and beyond.

God has made many promises to you. It is up to us to have a plan. Today is the day of commitment. The commitment is one you have heard many times: "*I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of Goo', that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy,*

acceptable to God, which is your reasonable (and spiritual) service. And be ye not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed' by the renewing of your mind. ..."

I want you to make a new commitment today. The new commitment is this — you've read it many times." (Romans 12:1,2)

What God desires for each of us is a brand new attitude. You ask: "How do I do this?" We can follow F.B. Meyer's advice. His life revolved around seven rubrics for daily life.

- "1. Make a daily, definite, audible consecration of yourself to God. Say it out loud: 'Lord, today I give myself anew to You.'
2. Tell God that you are willing to be made willing, about all that He wants you to do. (You may not be ready at this u; you know it; but say, 'Lord, I want to be made willing. You make me ready.')
3. Trust God to do What God promises for you.
4. Be current in your confession.
5. Entrust to Jesus every temptation and anxiety.
6. Be in prayer always, read the Word and good books, and seek the fellowship of believers.
7. Rely on the Holy Spirit's power.

There are many ways to begin anew. There is 'self-talk.' For example, you can say upon awakening something like "I will rejoice in God every day." Or, you can start reading God's word regularly. But it all starts with God. Alleluia. Amen.