**M A K I N G all things N E W**

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**And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” (Revelation 21:5)**

Have you ever thought about how much time and money we spend on new things or on renewing old things? We want a new car, not a used one. Newspaper and magazine subscriptions have to be renewed. We polish our shoes to make them look new again. We put in a new razor blade for a closer shave. Farmers rotate their crops to renew the soil. We fight urban sprawl with urban renewal. We have to use a new password on our computers to keep things safe. We even go on vacation to get a new lease on life, even though we often come back more tired than before we left!

Alas, most of our human attempts at making things new are futile. No onehas come up with a way to make us young again; or innocent again; or surrounded again by lost loved ones. But God’s approach to making things new never ends, never stops, and never fails. He renews our hope, gives us a new spirit, and molds us into new creatures in Christ. In fact, God is so good at renewal, we can even be born again!

God has a surefire program for renewing people: when we minister with God in renewing others, we get renewed right along with them. Spiritual renewal occurs whether we’re ministered to or doing the ministering—kind of like the Trinity: We minister to someone; that makes one and two; then God ministers to both of us and that makes three.

But in order to do things through us, God first has to do things to us.

Like helping us love people unconditionally with no agenda.

Like forgiving others not just 7 times like Peter, but 77 times like Jesus

Like slowing us down to make time available for the people God wants busy-ole-us to renew

Like accepting people who are imperfect

Like these nine special people (who will spell out an important message us shortly): Marian, Aaron, Keith, Irv, Nora, Gerardo, Nicole, Earl, and Will

Let’s start with **M**arian. She learned she had cancer and would need emergency surgery. Monica, Marian’s co-worker, gave Marian hope by relating how she herself had recovered from similar surgery and was now in good health. Monica accompanied Marian when she visited her oncologist, Dr. Martin, who asked Marian about her insurance coverage. Trembling, Marian admitted she had none. “No problem,” said the doctor, “There’s no charge for my services, and my clinic can help you finance their charges. See you tomorrow morning for surgery.”

**By reaching out to a coworker, Monica participated in the renewal of Marian’s life,**

**just as Jesus renewed the health of the woman in a crowd who touched his robe.**

And then there was **A**aron, who admitted to **A**ndy that he said some untrue things behind Andy’s back that almost got Andy fired from his job. “I don’t expect you to forgive me for what I did,” Aaron told Andy, “but I’m glad it didn’t cost you your job!” Surprisingly, Andy smiled at Aaron and admitted, “Andy, I’ve also told lies that hurt others, so welcome to the club. No use of you suffering over this, Andy. I know how it feels.” Then the two grinning men shook hands.

**When Aaron confessed to Andy, Andy’s instant forgiveness made Aaron a new man.**

**Andy didn’t judge Aaron; instead he judged and renewed himself, just as the tree-climbing tax collector, Zacchaeus, did when he boldly sought out Jesus in a crowd.**

Now let’s meet another one of God’s renewal projects. Fifty year-old **K**eith was down on himself because of his dead-end job as an office window washer. He was telling Karen, an office manager who often hired keith’s services, that he was doing basically the same work today he did thirty years ago. “My career is nothing to be proud of,” Keith told Karen. “I make enough money to scrape by, but I never get ahead. Washing windows is all I know how to do, even at my age.” “But Keith,” Karen pointed out, “window-washing isn’t your true career. I know about your Cub Scout activities. My grandson loves your scout troop. He’s the one who told me you were a window washer; that’s how I came to hire you. I recently talked with the head of scouting for this region, and he said you’re the best scout master he’s ever seen. You’ve deeply touched the lives of hundreds of boys and young men over the years. Don’t you consider that significant, Keith? You’ve invested your time, your energy, and your heart in something precious and permanent. You’re not a window washer, Keith, you’re a life builder.

**A whole new world opened for Keith when Karen encouraged him.**

**Keith suddenly saw the light, just as the blind man healed by Jesus.**

**Thanks to Karen, Keith realized, “My life does count.”**

**Keith was good at washing windows, but even better at washing feet.**

Ian shook his head and chuckled when he spied the white paint spills on his driveway; not to mention the three foot unpainted bare spot on the eves. “Oh, well, Ian thought to himself, “Irv tried hard and my house does look better.” **I**rv, the unemployed factory worker, had indeed worked hard, despite his below-par painting skills. Ian paid Irv top dollar any way, overlooking his struggling efforts. “Irv needed the money for sure,” Ian thought to himself. “Maybe I can think of a few more things he can do around here.”

**Jesus provided whopper catches of fish for his hard-working disciples to support themselves.**

**Ian’s generosity not only put money in Irv’s pocket,**

**it also renewed Irv’s resolve to stand on his own two feet.**

**All Ian had to do was accept Irv just the way he was: imperfect and in need of renewal.**

On the day Nora was released from prison, **N**ick gave her a new job. Nora was amazed. She knew how hard it was for any ex-con to get a decent job, but she couldn’t believe Nick was the one who offered it to her. After all, it was embezzling several thousand dollars from Nick’s company that sent her to jail in the first place.

**Jesus took risks giving new life to shunned lepers and to his own headstrong disciples.**

**The risks Nick took helping Nora gave her a new start in life.**

**G**erardo didn’t know when, if ever, he would see his family again. When he could find work, Gerardo made about twenty hard-earned dollars a day picking crops from Texas to Indiana as they ripened in the crop cycle. As a Mexican illegal, he hadn’t gone south to Juarez, Mexico for over three years to see his family—too expensive and too risky to move willy-nilly across the border. His 17-year old daughter, Gabriella, worked the sewing plants in Juarez, because her family needed more money than her father was able to send back working the land. Garrett, the owner of an El Paso freight company, happened to overhear Gabriella telling a friend that she hadn’t seen her father in several years. But just a short time later, Gabriella was reunited with her father. Garrett’s trucking company secured Gerardo a green card and hired him to legally drive trucks back and forth across the border. Gerardo was back home again with his family, but he saw Gabriella only on weekends. That’s because Garrett helped her enroll in an El Paso vocational school on a scholarship awarded by the trucking company.

**Gary’s compassion and willingness to get involved renewed the lives of these struggling Mexican aliens, just as Jesus renewed the life of the despised Canaanite woman’s daughter.**

**N**icole hadn’t seen her two teens in the many months she’d been locked up for drug-use. Nicole feared her oldest daughter was living with an abusive man and that her younger son had already dropped out of school. She told her cousin, Nate, during jail visitation that she hated herself for not being there for her children. “God is through with me, I know,” Nicole told Nate. “But is there any hope for my son and daughter?” Nate then told Nicole about the much bigger mistakes made by Moses in the Bible, by King David, and even the Apostle Paul. “But those three guys stuck with God, and God stuck with them,” Nate assured Nicole. “God not only forgives us, he keeps on loving us, Nicole. Your life is not over, and God is not through with you or your family.” Nate then laid out a piece of blank paper and asked Nicole to trace her hand a pencil. “What’s that for?” Nicole wondered. “This is I so I can hold your hand every day when I pray for you and your children.”

**Praying for forlorn people like Nicole moves the Holy Spirit to work mysteriously and miraculously in renewing their lives. Unconditional love begets grace, just as when Jesus forgave the sorrowful woman who washed his feet in tears and dried them with her hair.**

**E**van knew from personal experience about Earl’s addictions. “Been there, done that,” Evan thought to himself. Over the next two years, Evan was there for Earl, fighting to help him put his crumbling life back together. Evan was there with encouragement instead of condemnation; with a car so Earl wouldn’t try to drive his; and with healthy food instead of Earl’s normal junk diet. Evan never ran out of patience. Speaking a few years later at Earl’s funeral, Evan was deeply moved as he read Earl’s last letter: “Evan, I won’t be around much longer, but you’ve convinced me that God is real and forgiving and loving. That’s because I’ve seen God many, many times—shining through you, good friend.”

**The best way to share your love with others is to share your life with them.**

**Walk with them; bare their burdens; overlook their faults. Remember how Jesus transformed and renewed the sinful life of the Samaritan woman at the well.**

**W**endy’s son, Bill, was dead because of that drunk driver. Wendy knew she would never see Bill again, but she made up her mind to see the jailed driver. He’d been on Wendy’s mind night and day since the accident. She was going to see him alright. A week later, Wendy did just that, when in front of the judge, the broken 22-year-old man received a 22 years prison sentence. Wendy saw him at the state prison one month later, and then the next month, and the month after that. In fact, Wendy visited him in the same prison year after year after year, encouraging the now older man; reminding him each time of God’s forgiveness and love and of her own forgiveness and love. She thanked God for his genuine faith and healed life free of alcohol and guilt. Wendy loved both of her sons unconditionally: her deceased biological son Bill; and her born again spiritual son, **W**ill.

**Through Wendy’s outreach, Will got a new life the very same way**

**Christ helps all of us renew our lives: through sacrifice.**

God is in the business of making things new through his unconditional love and grace; through his forgiveness; and from his Word. When we reach out to those hurting and trapped in life, God will shine through us to make their lives new and our own life renewed.

Can you recall the alliterative names of the nine people plus one in our scenarios whose lives were renewed by God’s surprising grace? Let’s go down the list and also include the names of those God worked through.

**M** for Marian and Monica

**A** for Aaron and Andy

**K** for Keith and Karen

**I** for Irv and Ian

**N** for Nora and Nick

**G** for Gerardo, Garrett, and **G**abriella

**N** for Nicole and Nora

**E** for Earl and Evan

**W** for Will and Wendy

If we line up these first letters, they spell out God’s mission to mankind:

“**M-A-K-I-N-G N-E-W**”

Mankind has figured out how to renew and fix inert things like cars and trucks, batteries, and cell phones. But only God knows how to fix people. He does it through love, forgiveness, mercy, and patience. But He also wants us to be spiritual mechanics, working with Him fixing and renewing the lives and spirits of those he brings into our lives. Just like God, we also can love others unconditionally and forgive them permanently.

We can be over-lookers:

* Overlook their sins.
* Overlook their nationality.
* Overlook their lifestyle.
* Overlook their income level.
* Overlook the neighborhood they live in.

We can be blind:

* To their appearance
* To their failures
* To their vices
* To their slips and falls in life

We can be kind:

* With our time
* With a smile
* With an encouraging word

We can forget about:

* Our rush to judgment
* Our political ideologies and religious theologies
* Our own troubles
* We can step outside our own social class.
* We can put our busyness on the shelf for a while.
* We can listen more than we talk.
* We can walk to distressed people instead of away from them.
* We can live out our religion, not just talk about it.
* We can accept others even when they reject us.
* We can do something for others even if they don’t reciprocate.
* We can persevere patiently.
* We can pray every day.
* We can hate the sin but love the sinner.

God renews us through others: people far, people near, and people dear. Through people who are tall, small, or not likable at all. Through those we know, through a stranger, and those in danger. We don’t have to like them to love them.

Probably we don’t even remember most of the people who helped renew our lives through the years. But, hooray, we’ll meet them all in heaven one day. For now, though, the greatest experience in this life is witnessing God making all things new for us, in us, and through us again and again.