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God's Process For Life Change
"Moving From Our Denial To God's Reality"
(Part 1)

Intro: I really don't like this getting older thing. I'm only 43 and I already think getting old stinks! There are just certain realities about getting older that I simply don't like to embrace. I have to watch what I eat – cholesterol (No more Costco muffin with a glass of milk – hardly any more chips) The discovery of new aches and pains. You go and do something..."That's never hurt before." There's this realization you can't do everything you used to. Be careful. My eyes aren't getting any better either – My optic nerve in my right eye continues to deteriorate – drops for the rest of my life.

- Now, I could ignore reality and choose to live in denial of these things, but that wouldn't be very productive. In fact, it would be damaging. It would make growing older worse than it has to be. Unfortunately, this is how many people live. Firmly fixed in denial of the issues in their lives...not just physical issues – life issues
- Today we begin a new 8 week series about God's Process For Life Change. How does God change our lives? How do we cooperate with God? Transformation is real! God can radically change our lives. BUT, we have to let Him. The first step in this journey is our choice to move out of our denial and into God's reality. (3 choices to do this)

I. Admit Our Lives Need To Change

A. I have things that hinder my life

Heb. 12:1 "...let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us." (NLT)

- 3 truths from this verse!
- 1. We all have hindrances. We all have things in our lives that hinder us from becoming what God wants us to be and hinder us from accomplishing what God would have us do. (Things entangle us – impede our progress – rob us – they weigh us down – no one is perfect – we ALL have hindrances.
 - Attitudes / old wounds / behaviors / addictions / wrong thinking /
- 2. God has a race for every one of us to run. In other words, God really does have purposes and plans for your life that are unique just to you. There is a specific journey for you He wants you to discover and walk in.

3. We all have the responsibility to “strip off every weight” that slows us down or hinders us from experiencing this. We need to allow God to show us what the “weights” are, and then be willing to cooperate with Him by “stripping them off”.
4. There are too many people trying to run the race of life without first stripping off the weights. This is why life ends up being a lot harder than it has to be. You can’t run weighted down. (Visualize runner with weights)
5. The very first step in life change is admitting I have extra weights that need to go! I have hindrances. If you can’t admit this, you are still firmly fixed in your denial and your life will never change.

B. I cannot change these things myself

Rom. 7:18-19 “...no matter which way I turn, I can’t make myself do right. I want to, but I can’t. When I want to do good, I don’t. When I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway.” (NLT) How many times have we all felt like this? No matter how hard you try you just keep failing.

- 4 key decisions we all must make to move out of denial of our weights.

1. Stop denying the pain: The extra baggage in your life creates pain. We become experts at denying the pain in our lives. In fact, we are so used to it that now it becomes normal! “It’s not so bad.” STOP! There is pain!
 2. Stop playing God: The Bible says that we can’t serve two Master. You are either going to serve God or serve yourself. These are the only two options that exist in this life. We play God when we are the ones in control of our lives. If we’re honest, we’re all pretty lousy at it!
 3. Start admitting you CAN’T do it: I have said this many times...If you could have changed your life, you would have done so by now. It’s time to start admitting you CAN’T do it. You don’t have the power to change yourself!
 4. Start admitting your life is unmanageable: This one is tough. Why? Because so many of us function at a high level even with all our weights. We certainly don’t look “unmanageable. We look “put together”.
 - It’s easier to apply this to someone with chemical addictions
 - BUT, many of us have specific areas that are unmanageable. (Marriage / Emotions / Jobs / Parenting / Bitterness – Unforgiveness / Thought life / Finances /)
 5. Can we all admit there are areas of our lives that need to change? This is the first step in getting out of denial and allowing God to change your life.
- Some of you are already thinking, Pastor Dale, I don’t have denial issues.

II. Agree What Denial Is

“Denial is a false system of beliefs that are not based on reality. Denial is self-protecting behavior that keeps us from honestly facing truth.”

A. Denial is a false system of beliefs

Rom. 1:25 “Instead of believing what they knew was the truth about God, they deliberately chose to believe lies.” (NLT)

1. These people chose to believe lies about who God was, (false system) but it doesn't stop there. We can choose to believe lies in every area of our lives. Anytime we do not embrace reality, we choose to embrace a lie...a false belief.
2. Jesus was always confronting people's false beliefs.
Mark 7:9 “You reject God's laws in order to hold to your own traditions.” (NLT) Sometimes we reject God's truth to hold on to our false beliefs.
3. These beliefs are a lot like traditions because we've known them so long. Many of you grew up with these false beliefs...dysfunctional / unhealthy ways of living and relating to others. You still think in the same ways. You think living this way is normal.
4. Denial is not based on reality. There is a phrase commonly used for this called, “The Elephant in the Living Room”. Explain – The reality is that there is an elephant in the living room, yet everyone denies it exists.
5. Everyone knows dad has a drinking problem / your marriage is falling apart / financially on the brink of bankruptcy /
6. The false belief is that if I deny it enough times it will go away! The issue will get better by doing nothing. This is NOT reality!
 - Statements of denial - Slide

B. Denial is self-protecting behavior

Jer. 6:14 “They offer superficial treatments for my people's mortal wound.” (NLT) My people have a cancer and you gave them a band-aid. They have a terminal sickness and you called it a cold. (When we don't deal with the real issues that is self-protecting behavior)

John 8:46 “...since I am telling you the truth, why don't you believe me?” (NLT) Why are you rejecting reality? Jesus was always confronting the self-protecting behavior of the religious leaders of His time. They were firmly entrenched in denial of their own sin that was destroying them.

1. We do the same thing all the time. By not facing reality, we think that we are protecting ourselves from pain / hurt / embarrassment / rejection / when in reality, we are making everything worse. Denial is not self – protective it is self-destructive. WHY?
2. The issues in our lives are always progressive. When we deny the issues in our lives they will ALWAYS get worse over time. You will never be able to manage destructive behavior / thinking / attitudes – they will manage you!

3. The secrecy (self-protective behavior) always intensifies the struggles. When you are the only one dealing with your issues, they seem much more powerful and overwhelming. Secrecy only increases the control of the issue.
4. Nothing ever gets better until we embrace reality...no matter how ugly it may be. Nothing is transformed in a state of denial.

Can you agree what denial is and can you see some denial in your own life?

III. Accept What Denial Does

A. The negative effects of denial

- Denial in any area of your life (marriage / children / work / specific behaviors or attitudes / thinking – has an assortment of negative effects.

Hosea 4:6 “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...” (NASB) Not embracing truth – reality is destructive.

- Denial Acronym

1. Disables our feelings

- Denial tells us to ignore our feelings...to hide our feelings. It’s really not that bad. It’s going to be OK. We deny the pain we’re in. God created our feelings like warning lights on your car. “Check Engine”! When we ignore our feelings, bad things happen.

2. Energy lost

- A major result of denial is anxiety. Anxiety causes us to waste our energy. It takes a lot of energy to deny our feelings and work hard at covering up so others don’t see who we really are or how we really feel. This is why so many people are tired all the time.

3. Negates growth

- How can we get better / how can we grow forward until we admit what is holding us back. Some people are emotionally stunted / relationally / spiritually stunted. WHY? Because they live in denial in these areas therefore their growth has stopped. This is how a 50 yr. old can behave like 12 yr olds.

4. Isolates us from God

- Secrets and denial keep us from intimacy with God. Explain Gen. 3 and Adam and Eve. (Hiding and Blame) The first thing they did was hide from God. The second thing they did was deny their responsibility and blame someone else.

5. Alienates us from relationships

- Denial causes us to avoid getting too close to people because they may discover our secrets. We assume that if people really knew us they would reject us. Therefore, we only allow people to get so close. We sabotage our own relationships.

6. Lengthens our pain

- Denial allows our issues to remain so they fester and get worse. I already talked about the progressive nature of our issues. Left to themselves, they destroy our lives. This is also why we tend to be more aware of issues in our lives as we get older. They've had more time to fester.

So what do we do?

B. Our positive response to denial

1. We must make a full commitment to truth...God's reality.

Eph. 4:25 "Stop lying to each other; tell the truth, for we are parts of each other and when we lie to each other, we are hurting ourselves." (LB) Living in denial is just another form of lying (to ourselves and others.)

John 8:32 "And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." (NLT) A commitment to truth leads to freedom.

2. Before we can ever step into God's grace, forgiveness, and healing, we must first step out of our denial. We must be willing to embrace where we're really at in life. I really do need change!
3. Life change is God's plan for every person. *Phil. 1:6 "And I am sure that God, who began the good work within you, will continue His work until it is finally finished..." (NLT)* We have a responsibility to cooperate with Him.
4. God wants every one of us to admit to the reality that we need Him to change our lives. We ALL have issues in our lives that need to be transformed. None of us are exempt.
5. Can we all drop our masks for the next 8 weeks and embrace what God has in store for us? God wants to heal your life / your marriage and relationships / break the bondage of your past / the slavery of your addictions / transform your thinking.
6. Can we make some decisions today to move away from our denial and into God's reality? Can we ask God to show us any area of our lives where we are not embracing truth? Can we together embrace God's process of transformation?