



Season 3 | Episode 38

How to Make Changes That Last

Dr. Tim Lane

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Crystal Keating:

I'm Crystal Keating, and this is the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast. Each week we're bringing you real conversations about disability and finding hope through hardship and sharing practical ways that you can include people living with disability in your church and community. Be sure to subscribe wherever you listen to podcasts or find us at joniandfriends.org/podcast.

Is there an area in your life that you want to change, but you don't know how? A behavior or negative thought pattern you've tried to stop, but just can't seem to do it? Is there a relationship you want to repair, but despite your best intentions, nothing seems to make things better?

In other words, do you want to change, but feel stuck? Well, Dr. Timothy Lane, Founder and President of the Institute for Pastoral Care is joining us to discuss some of the key steps toward lasting change.

Welcome to the podcast, Tim.

Tim Lane:

Thank you, Crystal. Appreciate the invite.

Crystal Keating:

You've authored many books on Christian living, including, *How People Change and Relationships: A Mess Worth Making*, I love that title. And *Living Without Worry: How to Replace Anxiety with Peace*.

And today we're focusing on the key concepts from your book *Unstuck: A Nine-Step Journey to Change That Lasts*. Yes, let's get unstuck, and I think it's a timely conversation for the kind of biblical guidance we all need, which recognizes that the path to lasting change can only be found, first and foremost, by growing in our relationship with Christ and being empowered by the Holy Spirit. So as we think about finding freedom from the habits and patterns that keep us stuck, where do we begin when we are talking about the change process? Help us understand that.

Tim Lane:

Sure. Yeah. I think most of us start with the problem or the symptom, and that's not necessarily inappropriate because that's what you're experiencing. That's what you're dealing with, and most of us are just trying to cope. Can I get out of bed tomorrow morning? Can I face the day? I'm struggling with anxiety, I'm feeling sad. I've experienced some kind of suffering and I'm just having a hard time coping. And so that can be the place that gets us reaching out for help, and even beginning to ask the question, is it possible to change? And so I don't want to minimize



that, but I think when the Bible talks about change, it really puts it within the broader context of, first of all, understanding where we've come from, and that is that we are image bearers. And prior to the fall, we were flourishing as human beings. And what happened obviously is something happened to completely bring that into question.

Now, thankfully, not absolutely completely, we still have the vestiges of the image of God in us. But when the Bible talks about change, it's really saying it's a bigger story of restoration. That God wants to restore us even beyond our original dignity in the garden, and that ultimate restoration is pointing in the direction of conforming us into the very likeness of Jesus himself.

So that's the broad vision that scripture places before us even before it begins to point out, all right, here's a particular problem, here's a particular symptom. It's all about restoration.

Crystal Keating:

That is such a good paradigm in which to think about life's struggles because I think, for me at least, I tend to think, okay, I just want this to stop. I just want to feel... I don't want anxiety. I don't want to feel sad. Let's just move on, instead of thinking about God's bigger intention of restoration.

Tim Lane:

Well, and the important thing about that is it may be God's very design to use the struggle to move you in that direction. So that weakness and that vulnerability is actually a place where you experience God's grace, and you know that you're dependent and you need him.

We often talk about with my clients, perhaps what you're going through isn't a breakdown, but a breakthrough. And I don't say that insensitively. Hopefully I've won their trust at some point, but how is God wanting to use this struggle? Not just so that you can get rid of it, but how does he want to use it to actually conform you into the likeness of Jesus?

It's a very different paradigm than just a symptom relief. And I'm all for symptom relief, but I'm actually all for something even grander and more glorious than that, and that is that God is really doing something quite remarkable in us that he wants to conform us into the very likeness of his son.

Crystal Keating:

And those are the hopeful words we need to hear when we're in the depths of a true breakdown, that God is with us through it and that we're not going to remain here. We can move forward. How do we become mindful of the areas in our life that need changing, especially when we may be in a season of suffering and feel a deep sense of hopelessness, possibly due to a disability or a new diagnosis, chronic disease, or even a long term struggle with a relationship or pattern of sin?

Tim Lane:

Yeah, and this is where I always emphasize that God has created us in his image. He's a social God: father, son, spirit, and therefore we are social beings. It is no surprise that the place where we often find the most insight into ourselves is through others.

It can be painful, but I will tell you, my wife and I just celebrated our 32nd wedding anniversary and we have four grown children, two grandchildren, and within the context of that family, guess what God has done? He's not only encouraged me through these people, but he's also



helped me see many, many areas in my life that need work, that need to be changed, where I need to grow. And so hopefully the insight that others have about our blind spots or about our struggles, that wisdom and insight is used compassionately to come alongside us. They're not weaponized to be used against us. And that's why a safe community is so important.

Crystal Keating:

And I think, even just as Joni and Friends talks about, we talk about friendship and how God uses friendship in all of our lives and the lives of people with disability to bring about the kind of change and comfort and love that he intended for the church to have, so I appreciate that approach.

Well, what are some of the common mistakes people make when trying to change? I mean, maybe even like I said, I just want it to stop. I just want it to go away.

Tim Lane:

Yeah. I think oftentimes we typically will focus on a behavior. This is not a good behavior. I need to stop doing that, and I need to start doing this, so we can lapse into behaviorism, and we can also just want symptom relief. I want this to stop because it's painful or it's hurting me or hurting another person, and so we can typically just focus on the surface. I think that makes sense at one level, but we want to go deeper and that's the challenge. It's how you go deeper and who you go deeper with in terms of understanding what's driving those behaviors, and how does God meet us in his grace and compassion in terms of our suffering that we've experienced, but also our sinful responses to our circumstances, and that is the challenge. Knowing how to skillfully help another person or ourselves to go a little bit below the surface.

And that's precisely why I wrote *Unstuck*. I wanted to give people just a practical way of thinking about what are the steps along that journey that enable me to go below the surface and do that without turning inward and getting morbidly introspective and depressed? How do I do that in a way that's actually life giving and helpful and produces change and fruit that's grounded in the gospel?

Crystal Keating:

Yeah. And in your book, you use so much scripture that helps to point us to the Lord and to others and the process of transformation, really, in what God's doing, and we can't do that without the Holy Spirit. How do we change especially in light of understanding our identity in Christ? I mean, isn't that so key to understanding our ability to change?

Tim Lane:

That's oftentimes the missing piece. In, obviously, secular views of change, we can learn a lot from those views, but that idea of a personal God who is intervening and coming alongside of us is not prominent. And unfortunately, you find that also in a lot of Christian literature about change. And so what I do is I really focus on identity in Christ, but I try to break that down and say, there are Christians out there who have heard identity in Christ so many times that they just glaze over when they hear it. And I like to talk about it in this way, and this may sound a little technical, but I like to talk about experiential union with Christ. And that's all about relationship and the Holy Spirit working in us so that we actually are experiencing and identifying with who Christ is and what he's done for us-



Crystal Keating:

I love that.

Tim Lane:

...in his life, death and resurrection. We are united with Christ. The Bible uses marriage metaphor to talk about that because it's deeply personal. And what we do sometimes is we just say, well, I need to believe this truth, or this doctrine. So even a wonderful doctrine like justification. If I just believe the doctrine of justification that I'm forgiven and counted righteous, then that should help me change.

But that doctrine isn't just intended to be an intellectual concept. It's intended to remind us and help us understand what it means to be in relationship with Christ. Adoption is another one of those wonderful doctrines. But you look at those key doctrines and it's all about, well, how do I experience my relationship with Jesus in light of those truths that enables me to actually converse with him personally, interpersonally, as I'm going about my day? And I'm functionally living out of that union. I'm experientially living out of that union.

Crystal Keating:

I love that, because it goes back to that relationship. I heard growing up, Christianity is not a religion, it's a relationship. And so when I became a Christian, I thought, how do we experience the nearness of God? If the nearness of God is our good, and that walking with Christ means that he's our closest friend, what does that look like? And how does that impact change?

When I first became a Christian, I knew I was forgiven. I knew I was justified. I knew God loved me, but I was a mess. And I thought, how do I change? How do I move from who I was to who God is calling me to be? And so even when we think about our personality, how do we look at the difference between our God-given personality and areas of weakness that needs spiritual growth such as I have, and especially had when I became a new believer. How do we look at that?

Tim Lane:

One of the chapters in the book is focused on personality and our hardwiring. So all of us have a personality and we're hardwired. Just broad categories, some of us are people oriented, some of us are more task oriented. Some of us are more extroverted, some of us are more introverted. Those are some of the very, very basic categories of personality. And then there are many nuances within that, but we're all hardwired in terms of our DNA and the way our brains are structured. And so there are certain things about me that are just never going to change. And my wife is not going to become an extrovert. I'm more task oriented, my wife is more people oriented. That has been the case since I've known her for 35 years. But what sanctification does is it takes those personality strengths, it works along the contours of our God-given personality so that I'm growing in wisdom. So I'm an extrovert, but guess what? Not every situation or conversation calls for an extrovert.

And sometimes the most godly thing that I can do is just to be quiet and to observe and to listen. For my wife, not every situation calls for an introvert. Sometimes she needs to, with courage, speak up and do that obviously in a loving way, but to challenge potentially, or to give her input and her advice.

So our personalities are hardwired, but wisdom, that's what growth in grace does. It helps us to govern our personalities in a way that bless other people. The language today is emotional intelligence. The language of scripture is wisdom.



Crystal Keating:

I just love that. That's a good distinction. And some of our circumstances... Our personalities are hardwired, but even our circumstances are not going to change when we think about people living with disabling conditions. Unless God does a radical miracle, Joni will always be a quadriplegic. Or a spouse who's maybe unwilling to change, or a child or a friend who won't consider forgiving us. So in what ways do our circumstances affect our ability to change?

Tim Lane:

That's one of the key chapters in the book, it's chapter four and I talk about the importance of being aware of life-shaping experiences. The blessings that you've experienced, but also the sufferings and hardships that you've endured, and knowing that about yourself. I break it down really into four parts. Understand you, that's kind of your brain and your body. That would be a great example of your body. One of my children was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis in her early teens. That is a bodily form of suffering that impacts her, and we don't minimize that. It's a form of suffering I should pay attention to and she should be aware of. But think about that...

Also, gender. That's another category sometimes that we don't think about when we think about people and what's shaped and influenced them. Think about your baggage or your history. Your event history, your relationship history, your religious and moral upbringing, things of that nature. The terrain of your life, your age and stage of life, things that you've experienced, your current work situation, current family situation, the bigger ticket items that are on your plate in the present. And then the weather, your triggers. What are the things that trigger you that then cause you to respond to life in ways that aren't helpful?

And so all of that is just so important for understanding your vulnerabilities and susceptibilities. I grew up in a military family and I moved probably 10 times growing up. Well, that shaped me. And there have been positive things, and there have been difficult things in that experience. My wife, she grew up in the same house all of her life. Those are two different experiences. So I think people understanding who they are is very, very important in calibrating and understanding how the grace of the gospel then begins to intersect into that person's life or into your life as you think about what change looks like.

Crystal Keating:

Yeah. That's good. Knowing ourselves well and knowing ourselves well in community, which you mentioned before. So, when we think about community, how can the church be more proactive in encouraging and assisting people to make real long-lasting changes in their lives? I mean, what role do other Christians play in that journey?

Tim Lane:

I think, first and foremost, it's how are we handling the Bible in church? When the scriptures are used to teach, is it just dissemination of information, or is the Bible being used in the way that it was designed to be used as a means of grace?

The Bible is not an end unto itself, it's a means to an end. And that means to an end is that the Bible ultimately is to connect me relationally to Jesus. So here we are, we're back to experiential union with Christ. So how are we using the Bible? And how are we modeling the way the Bible is intended to connect us to Jesus as a means of grace?

Relationships, they're another means of grace. Are we appreciating and experiencing how another brother and sister in Christ can be a means of grace to me? They can point me to Christ.



They can come alongside and encourage me. They may say, I need to challenge you about something that I'm concerned about in your life. How does the Lord's supper, the sacrament of the Lord's supper function as a means of grace? As I feed on these, bread and juice, how do I take that and understand that I need to be nurtured spiritually by Jesus and his life, death, and resurrection? It's life in community, but it's also understanding how the means of grace are intended to connect us more vitally to our relationship with Christ.

Crystal Keating:

We were just having a discussion this morning about the power of God's word to remind ourselves the Bible is meant to point us to a person. It's meant to point us to the savior. One of my friends said it's like being injured and going to the hospital and then seeing the sign for hospital and going up to the sign and saying, thank you, you saved me, and hugging the sign rather than going straight to the hospital where you can get the care. To know that the Bible is pointing us to our great God and to a relationship.

Tim Lane:

That's a great metaphor for thinking about that. We miss the relationship because we mistake the Bible for the end, rather than the means to the end.

Crystal Keating:

Yes. Well said, well said.

Well, as we close, do you recommend a good Bible verse that points us to the Lord for meditation or even memorization to help someone get unstuck? And where can we buy your book?

Tim Lane:

So you can get it on Amazon, it's *Unstuck: A Nine-Step Journey to Change That Lasts*. I wrote it to be very accessible. People can also get a free workbook on my website timlane.org, and if you go to the resources tab, it'll give you the chance to download a free study guide workbook that goes along with *Unstuck*. But you can get it at Amazon or the Good Book Company.

In light of what we're talking about in terms of experiential union with Christ, I thought I'd end with Hebrews 4. This really captures, I think, real encouragement for all of us who are struggling and wanting to grow and change. And here's what the writer of Hebrews says.

"And he says, since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses..." So he's compassionate and he understands us, "but we have one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin." And then here's the experiential union with Christ. "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace," that's relationship, "that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Crystal Keating:

Those are beautiful words about our wonderful God we serve, a tender and compassionate savior.



Tim, thanks so much for joining us on the podcast today. You are an encouragement and a wonderful counselor. Congratulations to you and your wife for so many years of marriage, and we're excited to dig a little deeper with your book Unstuck. Thanks so much for your time today.

Tim Lane:

Thank. You too, Crystal. I appreciate it very much.

Crystal Keating:

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