**Did You Really Think You Can Keep That Resolution?**

By Michelle Hipp, LCSW

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will." Romans 12:2

"For as he thinks in his heart, so *is* he"…Proverbs 23:7

The new year often brings opportunities to start fresh and new. God knows the importance of a "fresh start" and that our hearts would deeply desire this "clean slate" reset. It's not a coincidence that faith in Jesus makes us a "new" creation or that His mercies are "new" every morning. Humans were created with an "out with the old and in with the new" mentality, which is why many of us use the New Year as an opportunity to review all the things that didn't go well and then erect a plan of change. This is the time of year when we see people post about the highlights and lowlights of the year while resolving to change undesirable behaviors. These are well-meaning people (myself included) who, through self-reflection and intentionality, have determined change is necessary. However, statistics show that most of us will fall short of achieving our resolutions. We see it firsthand in all the health clubs across the US as they become packed to the gills beginning January 1st and then return to their "normal" operating capacity by March. But have you ever wondered why? Why some people are successful at change, and others aren't?

The problem with setting New Year resolutions is simple: behavior modification without heart transformation is not sustainable. In Proverbs 23:7 (NKJ), we read, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he…This verse implies that our thoughts and emotions will always dictate our decisions and our behaviors. But wait, how do we "think" in our heart? It's simple, this is one area where scripture and science agree. In fact, scripture taught it long before science "discovered" it. Let me explain. Cognitive Behavioral therapy is a type of therapy that helps individuals identify core beliefs. Our core beliefs are sculpted by our upbringing, society, peer groups, and experiences, to name a few. Our beliefs or thoughts always produce emotions, which then lead to behaviors. If we begin by looking at our behaviors without uncovering the thought and emotion that drives that behavior, the newfound change cannot be maintained over a long period.

But don't go canceling your resolutions just yet. There are a few steps you can incorporate to facilitate the long-lasting change you desire.

**First, pay attention to patterns.** These are the things that you do over and over. Increasing your awareness is the first step to a heart change. I always tell my clients, "You can't heal what you hide." If we set a goal to eat healthily in the new year, we must first examine why we aren't. When do you find yourself reaching for comfort food? Are you using food to self-soothe? If so, why?

**Second, renew your mind.** I recently read that we have between 16,000 and 60,000 thoughts daily. I know that range is large, but many factors come into play. One of them is that women tend to have more thoughts than men. As women, our thoughts connect and end up in a big pile. At the same time, men tend to think in compartments. Their thoughts remain separate and don't touch at all. Authors and speakers Bill and Pam Farell said it best when comparing our thinking styles in their book "Men Are Like Waffles, Women Are Like Spaghetti." But probably even more staggering than the number of thoughts we think daily is the percentage of negative thoughts we think. Some 80% of our daily thoughts have a negative bend. If we have 60,000 thoughts a day, our brains focus on 48,000 negative thoughts in a single day. A negative thought will never produce a positive emotion. We can't get good fruit from a "bad" root. We need to renew our minds just as Romans 12:2 instructs us.

**Third, learn to welcome your emotions.** Most of my clients hate this phase, and if you want me to be honest, learning to sit with my emotions was one of the hardest things I've ever done. We need to give them the attention they demand, or they will find another way out, often in the worst situations. "If we don't work out, we will act it out." Think about it. Have you ever overreacted to something simple? If so, examine your history. When you find yourself feeling a certain way, when have you felt this way before? As you begin to peel back the layers, you may find the source of your emotion, which can change the response of your behavior.

**Lastly, turn head knowledge into heart knowledge.** We've read the scriptures about not being led by our emotions (Jeremiah 17:9). We may have even heard Paul instruct us to take every thought captive (2 Corinthians 10:5), but have we put it into practice? Do we really pay attention to the thoughts that we think? Do we take our thoughts and filter them through the word of God? Meditate on God's word, pray daily, and allow His word, which is alive and active (Hebrews 4:12), to transform and heal you.

This year, be sure to make a point of getting curious about why you set the goals you did. Walk through those steps and spend time in intentional prayer, asking God to reveal the true condition of your heart. Believe me, that's a prayer he'll answer 100% of the time.

*Father God, we ask that you guide us into this new year. That we would take time to look beneath the surface of our lives and allow you to reveal the true condition of our minds, wills, and emotions. Teach us to take every thought captive to your obedience and help us increase self-compassion as we learn to sit with uncomfortable emotions. Lord, above all, we ask to be made new in the mighty name of Jesus.*

***BIO*** *– newly married Michelle wears various hats on any given day, but her favorite is Daughter of the King. She lives in the beautiful mountains of South Carolina, where she works as a Child and Family Therapist. She has been a single mother for 18 years and loves to watch God take her most difficult struggles and transform them into passionate purpose. Today, Michelle has joyfully embraced her passion for speaking truth into the lives of others and assisting them in finding and living out their true identity in Christ. She believes we must uncover the lies and labels, identify the root, and replace it with God's truth.*