

**Title: New Normal!****[Slide 1]****Text: Esther 8-9****Making Changes****“Lost and Found”**

Any of us who have ever tried to lose weight knows that we often find ourselves caught up in a tricky game of “lost and found.” The pounds go; the pounds return. Repeat cycle.

A few years ago I made an effort to lose some of the pounds that had accumulated on my body over the years. I worked at it and eventually lost 20 pounds. Hurray!

Then came a big question: What do I do with my old clothes that are now a bit too big for me? Do I throw them out? Or do I save them *just in case*. *Just in case what?* Just in case I gain the 20 pounds back, that’s what. Losing weight can be a game of “lost and found.”

I’ve been there before. I lost weight for some reason or another. Then I found it. And the pounds I found always seemed to bring along a few friends. So what would make this time different?

**The Transformational Cycle:****[Slide 2]**

Robert Quinn explains that when we make a big change in our life – something that actually *transforms* us – we do so as part of a cycle: the Transformational Cycle. The cycle has four phases:

- Initiation: Making a fresh start
- Uncertainty: Finding a new direction
- Transformation: Discovering a new identity
- Routinization: Making change stick

In my battle with those “lost and found” extra pounds, I discovered that losing the weight was not the end of the process. I had to find a way to

make the change stick. I had to *really* lose those pounds—lose them so effectively that they wouldn't find me again.

### **Making Changes:**

At the beginning of this series I asked you to write down a major change that you are facing or working on right now. It might be something that you have dreamed of doing for a long time. It might be something that is forced on you whether you want it or not. You might already be right smack in the middle of dealing with this change.

Think of all the work you have done, or are doing, to see this transformation happen in your life! What a shame if you were to achieve a moment of transformation, only to see the change melt away and be replaced by the "old normal."

God certainly does not want to see us start the transformation process, only to return to our untransformed former selves! Paul writes:

### **[Slide 3]**

*2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV*

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*

No going back to the old ways here! No holding on to the old clothes of our former life. God produces change that sticks.

### **Pursuit of a New Normal**

#### **Risk:**

The pursuit of a New Normal begins with *risk*, the same kind of risk that came with working through uncertainty and stepping out into a new identity. The process doesn't suddenly get easy, just because we had a breakthrough! We have to be just as brave and just as focused as we learned to be earlier in the process.

We see Queen Esther take this risk in the immediate aftermath of the great victory over her arch-enemy, Haman. With Haman gone, both she and her cousin Mordecai were safe and ensconced in power. But what about the many thousands of fellow Jews who were still living under the death

sentence that Haman had wrangled out of King Xerxes? The threat was still present. The transformation that Queen Esther had brought about was still in its infancy. It could be wiped out by a return to the old normal!

Queen Esther pours herself into moving from Transformation to a New Normal by once again throwing herself at the mercy of the king:

**[Slide 4]**

*Esther 8:3-4 NIV*

*Esther again pleaded with the king, falling at his feet and weeping. She begged him to put an end to the evil plan of Haman the Agagite, which he had devised against the Jews. Then the king extended the gold scepter to Esther and she arose and stood before him.*

Once again, she put her life on the line to save her people. She would not rest until her victory was anchored in a New Normal!

The same is true for you and me. Establishing a New Normal takes the same degree of commitment as making that initial Transformation – maybe even more! In some ways, it was easier for me to lose a few pounds than to throw out my old jeans!

**Define the New Normal:**

The next thing that Queen Esther does is *define the New Normal*. She says to the king:

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*Esther 8:5 NIV*

*"If it pleases the king," she said, "and if he regards me with favor and thinks it the right thing to do, and if he is pleased with me, let an order be written overruling the dispatches that Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, devised and wrote to destroy the Jews in all the king's provinces."*

The king orders her and Mordecai to do just that: write a new order that defines a New Normal:

**[Slide 6]**

*Esther 8:8 NIV*

*"Now write another decree in the king's name in behalf of the Jews **as seems best to you**, and seal it with the king's signet ring – for no document written in the king's name and sealed with his ring can be revoked."*

It's *her* job to define what her Transformation will look like going forward!

When God brings about a change in your life, He does the same thing: He gives you the job of deciding what the New Normal will be. Only *you* can decide what your New Normal will be.

After I lost those pounds, I had to think hard about what I would do next: Would I go back to my old way of eating, or would I incorporate the changes I had made into my diet from now on? When I stepped on the scale and saw that I had "found" five of the pounds I had lost, would I just decide that those five pounds would be part of the New Normal? Or would I bear down and lose them again? It was up to me.

It's the same whether you are learning to forgive someone, breaking a destructive habit or addiction, finding the courage to face a tough new phase of life, or pursuing a long-held dream. You must define the New Normal!

### **Fight for the New Normal:**

In Queen Esther's transformation, there was no way to undo the evil plot Haman had devised to kill the Jews. It was "written in stone," as it were. So she wrote a new edict that gave the Jews the right to defend themselves anywhere in the empire. She specified the exact day when the Jews could fight their enemies – the very day Haman had chosen for their extermination.

### **[Slide 7]**

*Esther 9:1-2 NIV*

*On the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> month, the month of Adar, the edict commanded by the king was to be carried out. On this day the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, but now the tables were turned and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them.*

**[Slide 8]**

*The Jews assembled in their cities in all the provinces of King Xerxes to attack those determined to destroy them. No one could stand against them, because the people of all the other nationalities were afraid of them.*

The New Normal only comes with a fight! You will fight to make your Normal the New Normal. I've had many a battle over a bag of potato chips or the urge to have an extra snack in the effort to live in my New Normal. The same is true when we're learning to make forgiveness our New Normal. Old wounds will act up. Our sense of justice will be activated. We'll want to go back to holding that grudge or seeking revenge. As Lucy Cunningham tells us: "It's a faith fight!" But it's worth every bit of struggle.

**Memorialize your New Normal:**

Every year Jews all around the world celebrate the day of that tremendous victory with the festival of *Purim*. The festival gets its name from the word *pur*, which means "lot." Haman had cast lots to choose the day for the extermination of the Jews. The first festival was commanded by Mordecai and Queen Esther, and it became a lasting part of Jewish culture.

**[Slide 9]**

*Esther 9:26-28 NIV*

*(Therefore these days were called Purim, from the word pur.)...the Jews took it on themselves to establish the custom that they and their descendants and all who join them should without fail observe these two days every year, in the way prescribed and at the time appointed....*

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*...and that these days of Purim should never fail to be celebrated by the Jews – nor the memory of these days die out among their descendants.*

In this way, the transformation begun by Queen Esther and Mordecai became forever anchored in Judaism. They made the change stick.

**[Slide 11]**

How will you memorialize the good things that God does in your life? How will you not only anchor the change, but celebrate it and pass it along to

others? One good way is to share with others the good news of what God has done. Put a momento on the mantle or on your desk or bureau – something that reminds you that you are not the same person you once were.

And most of all: Say “Thank you” to the God who made it all possible!