



Full Circle

Where Behavioral Health and Spirituality Meet

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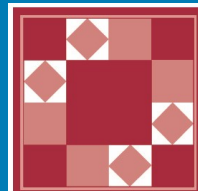
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Full Circle is a publication of Penn Foundation's Pastoral Services Department.



Why Is It So Hard To Change?

By: Rev. Carl Yusavitz, Director of Pastoral Services

"I do not understand my own behavior; I do not act as I mean to, but do the things that I hate. Though the will to do what is good is in me, the power to do it is not; the good thing I want to do, I never do; the evil thing which I do not want – that is what I do."

(Paul's Letter to the Romans 7: 14-24, paraphrased by Gerald May, author of *Addiction and Grace*)

Although St. Paul is referring to sin here, I sense that what is underneath his frustration is something we can all relate to - the difficulty of changing our behavior. Why is change so hard? It seems like we want it and fight it at the same time.

Think for a moment of something you would like to change, but just can't. People in recovery here at Penn Foundation have taught me that you cannot think your way out of a situation that you've behaved yourself into.

So, if you want to change, then, it's not enough to think about it. You need to "behavior" your way out of the situation you want to change.

Of course, this is easier said, than done. Why? Well, depending on your view of human nature, it sometimes looks like our natural defenses can also prevent us from changing. For me, this is both good and bad news,

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"Change is never easy, you fight to hold on, and you fight to let go."

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The Spirituality of Change

I sit in my chair preparing a class on the Spirituality of Change, and my mind wanders to the signatures in the back of my high school yearbook. It's signed by teenagers who often assume the entire world locates itself within the halls of their own high school frozen in time and space.

Who you are begins and ends at 17 so they write in the yearbook, "Love ya... don't ever change."

Don't ever change. Depending on who you are high school, this feels like some place between rapture, relief, and a slow interminable death sentence.

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since our defenses against change can work both ways. Our defenses limit our pain, but they can also limit our joy.

Another reason why it is so difficult to change is because change always involves some kind of risk and risky behavior normally carries negative connotations. However, unless we take risks, we can never change.

In my ministry with people struggling to change unhealthy and dysfunctional thinking and behaving, the following questions have helped me stay focused:

- ♦ What are you afraid of losing?
- ♦ What's the worst thing that can happen to you?
- ♦ What are the chances that the worst will happen?
- ♦ How do you know this?
- ♦ How can you limit your losses?

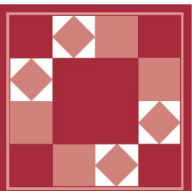
The "Serenity Prayer" also helps me keep things in perspective. This popular prayer, like the Lord's Prayer, is very practical and concrete. Born out of the turmoil that Reinhold Niebuhr experienced in his own personal, the prayer begins with acceptance before moving to change.

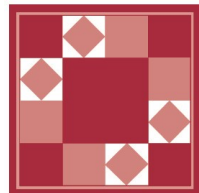
**Lord, give me the courage
To accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.
Amen!**



On a practical level, then, change involves:

- ♦ weighing our options,
- ♦ acknowledging our fears
- ♦ deciding to do something about it
- ♦ being realistic about what we can tolerate if we change
- ♦ lining up BOTH cheerleaders and critics to help us change
- ♦ learning to look back and say to yourself – "That was then, this is now"





The Spirituality of Change Cont'd

Little did I know back when I was clinging to the hope that things wouldn't change, that change is the one constant and the only way of not drowning in the sea of change is to learn how to ride its waves.

Yet, I'd not been given surfing lessons. No one told me this about the life ahead of me. And no one ever prepared me for the paradoxically exciting and frightening reality of an evolving universe.

Positive thinking and pushing the discomfort of change on the back burner only generates more pain. At some point, we have to fully accept the reality that things won't ever be the same so we can free up enough energy to step more fully into and unfolding future.

No one tipped me off that people would move and die and my view of the nature of God would change radically as I faced the shifting sands which threatened to pull me under like quicksand. No one told me I'd experience fluctuating periods of light and darkness, certainty and doubt, and faith, agnosticism, and atheism.

The very statement, "No one told me," reveals the reality of a human longing to be offered a playbook by a benevolent authority who knows the terrain well.

In this world, the rules are clear. The path is well worn. The benevolent Someone is out there, outside of you. Questions of meaning are defined by beliefs and doctrines rooted in the experience of someone else who supposedly knows a lot more than you do. Whether the belief is in your religion, your family, or the political system or even in your own ability to control things (ha!), Mother Change will knock you to your knees.

An illness is diagnosed. A job is lost. A marriage dissolves. We have a crisis of faith. We learn something we'd never considered. Or perhaps the pain of addiction marks our door with its scarlet letter, and we begin to hide from our neighbors or even more isolating, we hide from ourselves and spiral into the fear, anger, and panic.

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Timing, of course, is very important. If you do not risk changing when the time is right, you may be forced to change when you are least prepared for it. We just went through something like this in a smoking cessation policy in our of our Penn Foundation programs.

What we learned in that process was that people need to believe that they can change before they will actually take steps to change.

So, accept what you need to accept about yourself. Change what you can. And may we all have the wisdom to know the difference!

“Timing, of course, is very important. If you do not risk changing when the time is right, you may be forced to change when you are least prepared for it. “

10 Great Quotes about “Change”...

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.” **Barack Obama**

“Your life does not get better by chance, it gets better by change.” **Jim Rohn**

“Human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives.” **William James**

“For the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself: 'If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?' And whenever the answer has been 'No' for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something.” **Steve Jobs**

“If we don't change, we don't grow. If we don't grow, we aren't really living.” **Gail Sheehy**

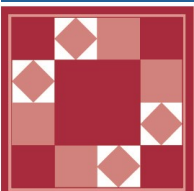
“All great changes are preceded by chaos.” **Deepak Chopra**

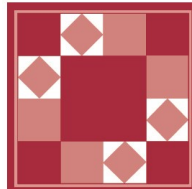
“Very often a change of self is needed more than a change of scene.” **A. C. Benson**

“I can't change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination.” **Jimmy Dean**

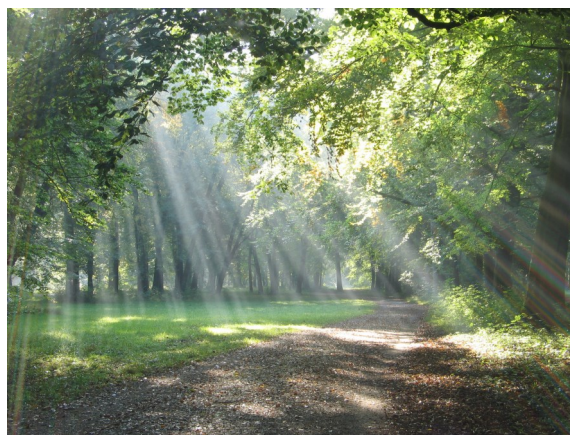
“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” **Margaret Mead**

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world.” **Mahatma Gandhi**





We so resist change. Yet, the nature of reality is one in which inevitable shocks are inserted into a system and which rattles our world of stability. Depending on our ability to be receptive and open to the reality of change, this can be a painful gift or disaster.



Developmental psychologist James Fowler wrote about what happens when we face crises in meaning due to life circumstances in his book *Stages of Faith*. He discovered that our ways of making meaning and finding a sense of purpose is reorganized, refined, and reordered when we experience the inevitable seismic shifts.

Fowler interviewed hundreds of people and compiled compelling and poignant narratives and began to see patterns of change. Change was always accompanied by something that produced a break in conscious awareness in which something *shocked* the system into new ways of thinking.

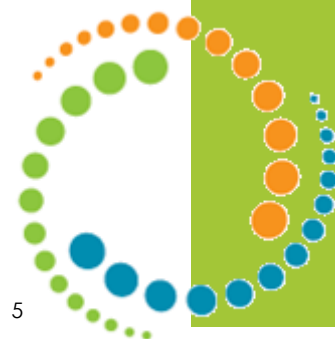
Pain breaks us open. It invites us to press into the questions more deeply. What we do with this pain is one of the roots of the spirituality of change.

As we press in more fully, we claim the hidden parts of ourselves that had long gone to sleep as we were attempting to conform to the dictates of the culture. This is the time of awakening.



We begin to walk a new path, sing a new song (yes, your choices in music may even change), and we stop hiding behind who we used to be.

- Leslie Hershberger, MA



Tips for Making Lasting, Positive Changes

Make a plan that will stick.

Your plan is a map that will guide you on this journey of change. Think of it as an adventure! When making your plan, be specific. Write everything down, and ask yourself if you're confident that these activities and goals are realistic for you. If not, start with smaller steps. Post your plan where you'll most often see it as a reminder.

Start small.

After you've identified realistic short-term and long-term goals, break down your goals into small, manageable steps that are specifically defined and can be measured. At the end of the week, you'll feel successful knowing you met your goal.

Change one behavior at a time.

Many people run into problems when they try to change too much too fast. To improve your success, focus on one goal or change at a time. As new healthy behaviors become a habit, try to add another goal that works toward the overall change you're striving for.

Involve a buddy.

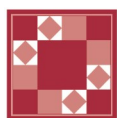
Whether it be a friend, co-worker or family member, someone else on your journey will keep you motivated and accountable.

Ask for support.

Accepting help from those who care about you and will listen strengthens your resilience and commitment.



Tips courtesy of the American Psychological Association.



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