

## What You Believe Is Important

By Ken Karacsony

BELIEFS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE in shaping our world view and perspectives about a great many things. What we believe influences our thoughts, feelings, and even our behavior and the stronger a belief is held, the greater the potential impact it will have on our lives. I know that in my personal life, the core Christian beliefs I embrace greatly influence the choices that I make and have a tremendous effect on how I live my life. My faith has helped me overcome many challenges I have faced over the years and motivates me to live a holy life that is pleasing to God.

What you believe about your situation will influence your ability to overcome challenges in your life. When you believe that you can accomplish a given task, regardless of the degree of difficulty, you are apt to tackle that obstacle enthusiastically and with great determination. Countless studies suggest that we will pursue behaviors or activities that we embrace with a positive attitude while avoiding those activities that we believe are likely to fail (Johns Hopkins University, 2011). This is common sense as most people will undoubtedly agree.

Words have the power to either heal or destroy and the tongue is a powerful tool when used lovingly. This is true for parents and for anyone who holds a position of authority, such as government officials, teachers, pastors, counselors, and many others.

*Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.  
The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the  
spirit. (Proverbs 12:18; 15:4)*

For those struggling with addiction, what they hear from people around them is extremely important. Unfortunately, in addiction recovery programs today, attendees are often told that they have a chronic illness that is beyond their control and ability to overcome. They are taught that their behavior is involuntary and compulsive; and that addiction is overpowering. Since they trust those facilitating the program, they naturally believe that these falsehoods are true. Similar destructive myths are reinforced by those in government, teachers and educators, and even leaders within the church.

Programs that promote addiction folklore unknowingly encourage failure despite their good intentions. I have heard of recovery program facilitators instructing attendees to stand up in front of a group of people, strangers in many cases, and profess that they are powerless to control their addiction. They are told to repeat this lie again and again until they eventually believe that it is true. This practice is terribly unfortunate and destructive. There is absolutely no therapeutic value in reciting a lie of this magnitude because it does not promote recovery. On the contrary, it teaches self-defeatism.

Jeffrey Schaler made a similar point in his book, *"Addiction Is Not a Disease."* He concluded that telling addicts that they have a disease or sickness is not only patently false, but it is just about the last thing we

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should tell them because they will simply give up rather than fighting to overcome their addiction (Schaler, 2009).<sup>1</sup> I agree.

When individuals struggling with addiction believe that they are already defeated, as many are taught to believe, they are not likely to change their situation because they think meaningful change is impossible. This creates a sense of helplessness and those who believe that they are helpless will ultimately behave in a helpless manner. Some refer to this as *Learned Helplessness* because there is strong evidence to support the idea that people can learn helplessness if they perceive that their situation is hopeless (Cherry, 2009).<sup>2</sup>

While some have spent a great deal of time and effort studying the theory of *Learned Helplessness*, the concept is really a matter of common sense that does not require hard, scientific evidence to understand. Feeling helpless has devastating consequences for someone who is struggling to recover from alcoholism, drug abuse, or other addictive disorder. Unfortunately, some recovery program facilitators may actually be encouraging helplessness because of a flawed view of addiction. It is obvious that when we tell addicts that they have a compulsive, involuntary behavior, they will lose hope and exhibit clear signs of helplessness. They will lack motivation to change their current circumstances as well.

In order to defeat chemical and behavioral addiction, it is necessary to reject false beliefs that lead to a sense of helplessness. By believing that you have control over your situation, through the power God has given you in Christ, you will push through adversity and ultimately succeed. This is not wishful thinking, but an expression of your faith in the new life that God has given you through Christ's atoning sacrifice. You died with Christ and have been raised to new life and are no longer a slave to sin (Romans 6:5, 6). You have been completely set free from your former way of living!

Many Christians believe that addiction is an unbeatable foe. This is understandable since this is exactly what they are taught by people they trust – such as doctors, politicians, psychologists, and church leaders who have bought into this lie. Believing that you will not prevail can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, so it is important to take this thought captive and subject it to the word of God.

*We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5; emphasis added)*

Recovery will require that you reverse the negative thinking that presently holds you hostage to substances, food, or alcohol. Your situation is not hopeless because you are not helpless. You have the power to change your attitude and actions because you are a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

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<sup>1</sup> Schaler, Jeffrey A., PhD., 2009, *Addiction is a choice*. Carus Publishing Company.

<sup>2</sup> <http://psychology.about.com/b/2009/06/08/learned-helplessness-psychology-definition-of-the-week.htm>.

As a Christian, you have what I refer to as *Christ-Efficacy* because you can accomplish all things through Christ's strengthening. Since God lives in your heart, you can triumph over life's many obstacles; including addiction. You are not destined to a life of treatment, meetings, and constant struggle with temptation. You must look beyond your present situation and seek those opportunities for change that are available to you in Christ.

You must live by faith in God and His promises while exercising your God-given ability to overcome. Those who come to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him. Faith is a requirement for every Christian and essential to full recovery:

*And without faith it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)*

David exercised this kind of faith when he encountered the great Philistine Goliath (1 Samuel 17). As he approached the giant on the mountain of Socoh that overlooks the valley of Elah, David overcame the odds and conquered his foe with a sling, a few rocks, and faith in God. He was confident of victory before stepping onto the battle field because he knew that God prepared the way for success. Even though he did not see God physically standing beside him, David was certain that the LORD was truly at his side. His faith was described by the author of Hebrews in the following text:

*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. (Hebrews 11:1)*

As a Christian, you do not walk by sight alone, but by faith in God. Faith should be an extremely motivating and powerful influence in your life. As Christ explained, a person of faith can move mountains:

*I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, "Move from here to there" and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." (Matthew 17:20; emphasis added)*

When we exercise faith, we are able to leap over life's hurdles. If you lack faith, that's okay. Ask God and it will be given to you because He "rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

God loves you very much and gave His one and only Son to set you free from sin. The promise of a new life in Christ applies directly to you because you are a child of your Father in heaven. Dismiss the great many lies about addiction that are popular today but contrary to God's revealed truth. Rid your mind of them completely or they will cause you to stumble. Believe you can succeed and you will!