

The Serenity to Accept the Things I Can Not Change

Nearly all 12-step recovery and counseling programs embrace the serenity prayer. The words to this prayer are seemingly simple yet powerful:

Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,

The courage to change the things I can,

The wisdom to know the difference. (Reinhold Niebuhr)

Many of my counseling hours are spent helping clients to learn the art of surrender and acceptance. Sometimes inability or unwillingness to accept the pains of life keep a person in bondage. These clients relive the trauma of years ago like it is happening today. They burden themselves with "Why" questions which have no answers. They talk constantly of how they would like to have made a different decision. Unfortunately, life does not always allow us to have a rewind button like a DVD movie. Sometimes we must just acknowledge that situations are out of our control, Ouch.

Life deals some horrid blows to some. The list of pains is endless. Some people experience the unimaginable and then another dose of the unimaginable on top of the first. There are people in our community who have had a loved one murdered, who have experienced the death of a child, experienced a life altering disease, divorce, bankruptcy, loss of everything in a flood, inability to have children, handicaps, domestic violence, torture and rapes.

Their lives turned out totally different than they ever imagined. Therapy is needed to help them package their pain. Sometimes the crisis has been so painful they function in a "zombie state" and merely go through the motions of living. They must be taught **how** to live again. Clients must then reframe their tragedy and look for hope in a new dimension. Without "HOPE" clients are in trouble.

Without therapy some become "scab pickers." They constantly pick the scabs off of old wounds and prevent them from healing. They seem to feel that the emotional sore must be constantly bleeding for some reason. These wounds then become **infected** emotional sores. Sometimes this "scab picking" is unconscious. Some people really do not know of any other way to handle the problems and pains of the past and unknowingly pass this pattern of theirs to future generations. Some

unconsciously numb their pains in addictive behaviors rather than seek support to find the root of their issues.

As if the losses and traumas themselves weren't enough to deal with, medical evidence is linking all kinds of physical pains to emotional pains. Even some pharmaceutical companies are taking a look at this connection. Stress actually changes how chemicals are released and how blood flows. Clients are relieved to finally know that there are reasons for their problems instead of being told that it is "all in their head", just because no cause could be found. The list of physical problems associated with emotional pain is extensive. It includes such things as irritable bowel syndrome, weakened immune response, headaches, shoulder and back pain, high blood pressure, peptic ulcers, and sleep problems. Research has found that a prolonged feeling of hopelessness lowers our levels of endorphins and serotonin in the body.

Tragedy, pain, and hardship are inevitable. Often times it is so gut wrenching that our minds cannot conceive what may have happened to us. Linda Haught, a fitness expert at Bob Jones University, reminds us that "one of the best things we can do to promote our own life-long stability is to marinate our hearts with scripture." Additionally, therapy, specialized trauma help, medications, and support groups can help our wounds quit bleeding and begin to truly heal.

May God grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change.