

THE CAPACITY TO FACE - LEARN – GROW

SECOND SERMON: HEALTHY LIVING FROM GOD’S TOOL BOX FOR LIFE

Text: Isaiah 40:21-31

INTRODUCTION:

A mother was preparing pancakes for her two sons, Kevin 5 and Ryan 3. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Their mother saw the opportune moment to teach a moral lesson. So she said – “If Jesus were setting here, He would say, “Let my brother have the first pancake, I can wait.” Kevin thought a minute and said to his younger brother: “Ryan, you be Jesus.” And as we share today from God’s toolbox for life – that’s exactly the tool we need; to be Jesus in facing our life’s problems and learning from the experience and challenge they bring.

By God’s own Spirit, we have the capabilities to face problems, learn, and grow through our daily challenges and experiences. When you think about it, what else is this life all about? In the first sermon of this series, those present were visibly struck when we said, it’s time we realize that there is no such thing as a Utopia existence to be found here on earth. The response of the congregation was one of both realization of that truth with agreement and surprise. I could see on the faces the question, “What then is life all about if it isn’t for us to creating our best possible Utopia?” Well, life is about the reality of constant problems, challenges and experiences and our learning through them how to live more effectively and in better health in relationship with God and by applying God’s revealed truths to those problems and situations. We do that as we live as Christ taught us to live.

Today, we focus on our need to have a strong personal perception in our own capabilities to face problems and learn through challenges and experiences. Take a brief look at the chart that is in your bulletin and remember that we are talking about the tools that each of us need to be resilient in our living. There are three strong perceptions that we need have and four strong skills we need to develop. The first strong perception is personal capabilities for facing problems and learning through challenges and experiences.

Now then, the word perception is key here. How you perceive has to do with what you believe to be true. Modern psychology is just beginning to understand this. It’s only taken a little over 2,000 years, but we’re getting there. Remember Sigmund Freud? Freud said that the greatest motivating factor in humans is the will to pleasure. The human will to pleasure, says Freud is what controls our behavior. He shared that over 120 years ago and it was thought to be a great discovery.

As psychology developed, Adler came along and said the greatest force in human behavior is the will to power. Give me power, power, power. If I just had enough power I could have all that I wanted and need in life. Seems that some names come to mind who really bought into that kind of thinking: Hitler, Lenin, Stalin . . . and the list goes on. While the will to power does effect

behavior, it doesn't fully explain the motivation behind all behavior.

Then came Psychologist B.F. Skinner who says all behavior has a cause with a responding effect. Though his School of Behaviorism, Skinner would explain our lives in terms of stimulus-response. That is, something happens (problems come along) and we react or respond. He demonstrated this with animal experiments. Animals, he discovered respond out of habit or instinct to a stimulus. However he found humans, respond to stimuli out of their beliefs. When a stimulus comes to the attention of a human brain, it passes through a belief system that produces a menu of possible responses. The individual selects a response from their belief system and acts on it.

Beliefs and perceptions go hand in hand.

Contemporary psychologist Victor Frankl, who survived the German prison camps, says the deepest truth of human existence that motivates our behavior is the will to meaning. That is our behaviors are based on the meanings, the perceptions, the beliefs that we have. Wow, we've come a long way in 2000 years to finally begin to understand just what Christ taught. That is, "as people think in the heart, so are they." "As people perceive themselves in their hearts, so are they." The King James Version of the Bible put it this way: "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he."

The words of Christ make it clear that behavior results from the beliefs one has within.

Finally, modern psychology has come to understand the role of perception in human behavior. And what is perception? Perception is simply belief. What you believe to be true impacts what you do, what you chose, how you behave and live. What you perceive and believe determines how you face life, what you are learning, and if you are becoming healthier or not. If you think (perceive) you can, you will. . . If you think (perceive) you can't, you want. What stands between us and our capabilities are our perceptions of whom we believe we are and what we believe we can do. As we as people perceive in our hearts, so we are.

You see perception (belief) is key to your attitude, your motivation, and your behavior. Let's illustrate this. Before you found yourself in Christ, that is came to believe in Christ, you had a perception about yourself and your destiny. At some point in time you came to realize you were a sinner, one who was powerless over sin and your behavior reflected that belief. Your destiny was a disastrous end and your worth was low. Now that you, by faith, are in Christ, you perceive that your destiny is wonderful, that you are of great worth to God and capable of living a life of overcoming sin. What changed? Your perception, your belief in who you now are in Christ Jesus. And, your behaviors are in processes of being changed as you increase in knowledge and understanding of who you are and as your belief system grows and changes.

I want to give you three B's that will help you change your beliefs and your life. The three B's are: BELIEFS BEHIND BEHAVIOR. If you want to change your behavior you need to identify the beliefs behind your behavior. Key to growing healthier is getting to the beliefs behind our behavior and establishing those beliefs in the Truths of God.

What keeps or holds us back from getting healthier? The beliefs behind our behaviors. Often it is the Perceptual Prisons from false beliefs we have had in the past. Yes, we live in prisons that keep us from growing healthier, that keep us in stuck states, where we don't learn through the experiences and challenges. This happens because we're believing a lie, living by an untruth. Such living limits our capabilities to grow healthier.

How do we change this? BBB: get to the

Belief

Behind

Behavior and bring that belief into agreement with God's truth.

If one believes they are not of much worth, bring that belief into agreement with the reality that you are worth the price that Jesus Christ paid to purchase your salvation. If one believes that they cannot overcome a habit or a condition, bring that belief into agreement with the fact that you "can do all things through Christ who strengthens you." If one believes they are living under some condemnation, bring that belief in agreement with the truths in Romans 8, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

If one believes that they are a slave to things of the flesh, bring the belief in agreement with, "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption." If one believes that suffering in the moment, be it physical, emotional, spiritual, or relational is unbearable and of little value, bring that belief into agreement with the truths from Romans 8: "For I am persuaded that the suffering of the present are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us."

You want to change your behaviors to be those that produce health for you in body, mind, spirit, and relationships, bring those behaviors into agreement with the truths of God, and believe those truths. Your actions will follow your beliefs.

Our text for today from Isaiah 40:21-31 illustrates the truth about Perception Prisons and the control of false beliefs in our lives. Amazingly, this text could come right from the headlines of today's newspapers or from network TV breaking news. You see, the People of Israel have been in exile in Babylon having been conquered and taken in mass to live in captivity. Babylon, what nation in our world today is located where ancient Babylon was? That's right Iraq. Get the picture? Living in bondage, under a Tyrant and the Israelites had developed a false perception prison belief system. They had come to (think, perceive) believe that they were abandoned by God - Forsaken - Incapable of having God's Grace and Empowerment. (Have you been there - lived in that prison?) They believed there was not hope. They believed that the bullies of Babylon could not be defeated. Their beliefs and self-perception had them locked in unhealthiness.

But God breaks into their perception prison experience with rhetorical questions that offer change for their belief system, and their behaviors. God's word comes to them asking perception questions, belief questions:

Have you not known?

Have you not heard?

Has it not been told you from the beginning?

Listen to this passage from The Message, the text in our modern language:

“Have you not been paying attention? Have you not been listening? Haven't you heard these stories all your life? Don't you understand the foundation of all things? God sits high above the round ball of earth. The people look like mere ants. He stretches out the skies like a canvas, yes, like a tent canvas to live under. He ignores what all the princes say and do. The rulers of the earth count for nothing. Princes and rulers don't amount too much. Like seeds barely rooted, just sprouted, they shrivel when God blows on them. Like flecks of chaff, they're gone with the wind. So - who is like me? Who holds a candle to me? Says the Holy. Look at the night skies: Who do you think made all this? Who marches this army of stars out each night, counts them off, calls each one by name - so magnificent! So powerful! - and never overlooks a single one?”

Are you getting this Israel? Are you and I getting the points (beliefs) behind these questions from God? Believe in the God of power and strength who sits above the earth - the One who is over all of space, all of the universe. In view of recent events, as we hear these words about the God who call all the stars into place and by their names, we pause a moment to realize that the seven Columbia space travelers were in God's hand too, as they were lost to their families and us in their recent return from space.

And the message to the Belief System of the People of Ancient Israel in Babylon was that the God of the Universe, who created all, who calls stars into place each night and calls them by name, is also the God who brings down princes and rulers, like stubble in the wind. The words of God call out to Israel and say, Believe in the God who Believe in You.

Listen further to the reading:

“Why would you ever complain, O Jacob, or, whine, Israel, saying, “God has lost track of me. He doesn't care what happens to me”? (Sound familiar - ever think or say that or ever believe it is so and act on those false beliefs?) “Don't you know anything? Haven't you been listening? God doesn't come and go; God lasts. He's Creator of all you can see or imagine. He doesn't get tired out, doesn't pause to catch his breath. And he knows everything inside and out. He energizes those who get tired, gives fresh strength to dropouts. For even young people tire and drop out, young folk in their prime stumble and fall.”

If Israel believes in these truths from God, just imagine how it changes their belief in their capabilities and the available capabilities of God that are beyond themselves to help them face, learn, and grow through the challenges and experiences of life. Imagine how your own beliefs in God's awareness and abilities to provide for you can empower and enable you to change your

behavior and life. God Lasts, God energizes those who get tired. God rejuvenates, is able to give fresh strength to the dropouts. Do you hear it? Do you believe it? God offers to you and to me, in all of life's problems: Energy, Fresh Strength, New Insights, to face the challenges and experiences, learn from them, and grow through them.

God didn't promise us a life without problems, but to teach us and empower us in life. The God of all power and strength, never tires, but glories in giving power to the faint and strength to the powerless.

Does that truth and belief in it, not unlock the perception prison doors of our unbelief and give us the belief that we are capable of living in a world of problems, in a life-long school of learning, overcoming the challenges, learning from the experiences by faith and with confidence in God who is for us?

Listen the final portion of this passage from Isaiah. It is a familiar verse:

“But those who wait upon God get fresh strength. They spread their wings and soar like eagles. They run and don't get tired, they walk and don't lag behind.”

For centuries, humanity was awe struck by the ability of eagles to fly high and soar through the skies. We tired all we could invent, just to know the wonder of soaring above the troubles of life. Oh to just take wing and fly. Because some believed and gave form to their beliefs, finally came the day in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, when Orville and Wilber Wright, for just a few seconds, flew through the air. Over 100 years latter, our astronauts have a view from space that would make an eagle jealous.

Believing you can - you will and the familiar closing of Isaiah 40 is God's promise to all who will believe in committed and continuing faith in God through all the issues of life. “But, those wait upon God get fresh strength, they spread their wings and soar like eagles, they run and don't get tired, they walk and don't lag behind.

To “wait for the Lord” is to have confidence - faith, to believe, to perceive with commitment to God's commitment to you. You have reason to be hopeful. You have more than you need to believe in the God who believes in you. The God who calls you to freedom and health, is the Creator of all, who calls out the stars, whose strength knows no limits - who gives that strength to you and me when we are weak and powerless and who gives those who wait the power to fly.

Mother said, “If Jesus were here - he'd say, “I'll wait.”
May our waiting upon God change our beliefs and our lives.

Prayer