

“Do You Want to Be Healed?”

Jesus asks this question in John 5:6 to the lame man by the pool. We’ve heard the story, and we’ve probably thought: What an odd question. Of course the man wants to be healed, right? Yet, this paralytic had come up with all kinds of excuses as to why he couldn’t get into the healing waters of the pool that would make him well. It reminds me of the story in Mark 9:24 when the father of a demon-possessed boy exclaims to Jesus: “I believe; help my unbelief!”

I work with eating-disordered clients. Sufferers of eating disorders are notoriously ambivalent about change. They truly want something better, but it’s hard to let go of that security blanket. It’s as if their plea is this: “I’m willing to change; help my unwillingness!” Venturing into the murky waters of the unknown is scary. There is a grieving process that must take place as one says goodbye to that which provided a sense of safety, an identity, predictability, and a feeling of control. A favorite quote of mine is by author and theologian Kent Nerburn who says, “No amount of security is worth the suffering of a life lived chained to a routine that has killed your dreams.” That is exactly what an eating disorder does. It kills the desire to fulfill one’s God-given purpose.

My belief is that a person with an eating disorder is not (as is commonly believed) a person who is vain; he or she is a person who is in pain. The illness, paradoxically, relieves that pain while creating all sorts of other problems. Sentiments uttered by my clients (and, as a former sufferer, by myself) sound something like this: “I want to get better, but I am so afraid of what that might mean.” A healthy part exists within each of us that wants healing, but an eating-disordered part, or an addicted or enslaved part that is bigger and terrified of change is in charge.

Clients have to believe that what we as counselors have to offer is better than that to which they are clinging. This is quite difficult to believe, and we have to help their unbelief! Furthermore, we have to motivate them to become willing to change. We have to coax them into the unfamiliar, and they must trust us to lead them on that journey. Galatians 5:1 tells us that “it is for freedom that Christ has set us free.” I want my clients to understand that while their resistance to change is understandable, they are not free. Author Marilyn Ferguson writes, “Ultimately we know deeply that the other side of every fear is a freedom.” When we realize that we are not free—that we lack the freedom Christ died for us to experience—then we truly *do* want to be healed.

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