

Changing Our Hearts by Changing Our Minds

By Whitney Stager, M.S.

Many clients come into therapy with the expectation that the therapist will change their spouse or child to see things or do things “their way”. They might say something to the effect, “How can you get my _____ to see it my way (i.e. the “right way”)? This sets many couples and families up for disappointment.

Counseling is not a place where magic happens. A therapist cannot wave a wand to change people. They have to want change. And more importantly, they have to be willing to change themselves.

In her book, “The Power of a Praying Wife”, Stormie Omartian talks about how her favorite three-word prayer for her husband, “Change him, Lord” never seemed to work. Finally, she realized that God wanted to work on changing her heart first. After some soul searching, her new prayer was, “Change me, Lord.”

Deep down, we know that we are only in control of our own behavior. However, it is easier to look at another’s behavior and want to change them first. The Bible gives us many examples of this weakness. “Why do you notice the splinter in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘let me remove that splinter from your eye’, while the wooden beam is in your eye?” (Mt 7: 3-4)

The attitude of wanting to change others tends to hinder change instead of encouraging it. When we come to accept the fact that we cannot change others, then the real growth starts! We can be open to thinking of ways to change our own behavior. This, in turn, takes the pressure off the other person to change. Taking the pressure off of others to change may actually give them the space they need to examine their own behaviors.

What a difference switching the focus from “them” to “me” makes! This seems so simple, and yet it is very difficult for all of us (myself included!) to do. Whenever we feel tempted to change others, let us examine why we feel that way. Then, we can work on changing ourselves instead. It can start with a simple prayer, “Change me, Lord.”

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