

From the October 4, 2009 Issue

Mezuzah Your Universe

“Easy believe-ism” is like “easy childbirth.” Both are phrases that would never be uttered by someone who knows what they’re talking about. I’ll admit that “believing the gospel” sounded easy to me once. But then I actually tried to do it. I am now finding that repentance is the most exhausting, gut-wrenching experience in the world.

This is because so much of our thinking/feeling/behaving arises from core beliefs that are so deeply entrenched in our mind, we aren’t even aware of them. But as Jesus says, the fruit we produce is a flawless indicator of what is inside us. In other words, we can discover what we truly believe by looking at the behaviors our beliefs produce.

Consider some examples:

<i>This fruit/behavior...</i>	<i>...can result from this core belief</i>
Overachievement	I am not acceptable (so I must work to become acceptable).
Consumerism	I am not complete (so I must fill the emptiness with stuff).
Pornography	I am not loved/desired (so I must settle for illusions).
Violence	I am not safe (so I must do unto others before they do unto me).
Unresolved anger	I am powerless to change my situation (so I am a victim, and it is someone else’s fault).
Substance abuse	I have no control over the sources of my pain (so I have no choice but to medicate the pain).

As I have joined in the Holy Spirit’s mission to transform me by renewing my mind, I have found the Twelve Step tradition helpful. In particular, I have found help in the practice of affirmations. Here’s how it works.

First, identify a behavior that has caused problems for you. Then reflect on the behavior and the thoughts/feelings around it, and write out several possible core beliefs that could be getting expressed in that behavior. I find it helpful to write out these beliefs in the form of “I am not” statements (See above). Most if not all of these statements will be false, and you may notice that several of them result from bad theology you didn’t know you believed.

Next, craft several short statements that contradict the false beliefs. For me, this often entails “I

am” statements that contradict the “I am not” statements. Make the list as long as you can. For example, here is a list of affirmations that could be made in response to the behaviors/beliefs listed above:

I am accepted. I am acceptable. I am worthy. I have the right to exist. I belong here. I am embraced. I am included. I am adopted. I am complete. I am whole. I have everything I need to be happy. I am full. I am rich. I have abundant life. I have a good life. I am content. I am loved. I am lovable. I am desired. I am longed-for. I am sought-after. I am delighted-in. I am beautiful. I am wanted. I am important. I am safe. I am protected. I am worth protecting. I am strong. I am capable. I am able to change this situation if I choose to. I am responsible for my own feelings. I am able to create a good life out of the situations I am given. I am worth healing. I have options. I hurt, and that is okay. It is okay to need help.

Read through your list of affirmations out loud, and pay attention to which ones get a reaction out of you. Your body may react with tense muscles or burning cheeks. Your mind may respond with “Well that’s DEFINITELY not true!” What’s happening is that your body knows what you believe, even if your conscious mind doesn’t. When you say things you don’t believe, your body gets tense; it’s the principle behind ‘lie detector’ tests. So circle the statements you have these strong reactions to. Those will be the best affirmations for you to work with repeatedly. As you do, you will find these reactions decrease. And eventually, you will find your real beliefs (and desires and behaviors) actually changing. Repeating affirmations is a simple brute-force method for eroding old neural connections and strengthening new ones.

The ancient Hebrew tradition calls this “Mezuzah.” It is a practice for impressing the truth upon one’s mind. Your new “I am” statements “are to be upon your hearts... Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6.6-9). Any Jewish household’s doorway will have a mezuzah on it, a bit of Torah artfully displayed. This is a tradition we can learn from.

Be creative with your mezuzah affirmations. Find ways to weave these uncomfortable statements into your life so that your eye will see them, your ear will hear them, your mouth will speak them, and your mind will repeat them. Put them on index cards on your bathroom mirror, and on sticky-notes on your computer monitor. Repeat them out loud to yourself during your commute to and from work. Write each one 100 times on a chalkboard (of if you prefer, type them in an email message to yourself). And do it every day, even weekends.

Repetition is how your old core beliefs were drummed into you. Repetition is how new gospel core beliefs will be forged.

Repentance (re-thinking your thoughts) is hard. I’ve got a lifetime of it ahead of me. And I keep finding new puddles of toxic waste in my soul, poisonous core beliefs I wasn’t even aware I had. But as the Holy Spirit helps me open my mind to believing the truth about myself, I am finding streams of living water.

~ John Stonecypher