

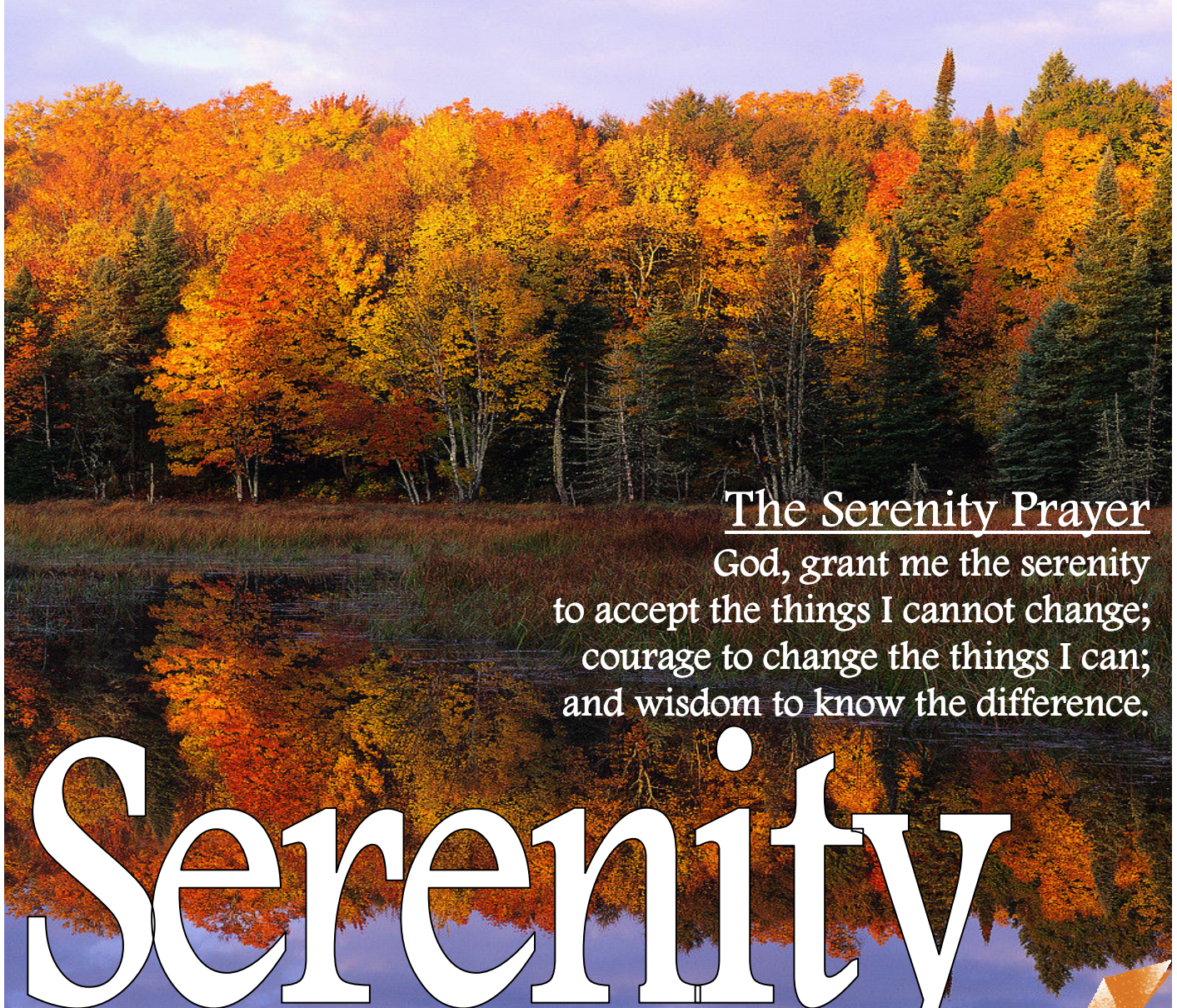


THE BARNABAS LETTER

A Newsletter from The Barnabas Center; A Nonprofit Counseling, Training & Teaching Ministry

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The Serenity Prayer

God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

Serenity

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By Wendy Osborn

Wendy is married to Chris and mother to Ella (8), Sarah Kate (10) and Savannah (12)

Improved Vision

changing the things i can

I have problems with my sight. I don't wear corrective lenses, and the doctor at my most recent eye exam said my vision had improved since my prior evaluation. Still, the reality is that I often don't see clearly. Sometimes I see things that aren't there; sometimes I see things distorted. There are even times when I completely miss things that I'm told are right in front of my face. It's like I'm looking through a fog, or closer to reality, the dirty mirror that my children forgot to wipe clean.

I relate deeply to Paul when he spoke of this in the 13th chapter of 1st Corinthians: "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror, then we shall see face to face." You see, it's not the eyes on my face that need attention, but rather the eyes of my heart. The eyes that surmise the events of my life and translate them into attitude, disposition and outlook are the ones that need attention. The eyes that lead me to love or withdraw, to praise or grumble, to rest or panic – these are the faulty eyes.

The root of my distorted vision is fear. I find it easier to focus my attention on fearsome "what ifs" and troubling possibilities, than to peacefully rest in the arms of the One who calls me His beloved. I can easily get caught up living very afraid: of not measuring up, of not being desirable, of being left alone, unprotected and rejected. Simply stated, I can be one miserably myopic and frightened girl.

When I live according fear, life can get pretty desperate. I assume that no one else is looking out for me and that I must be the strongest, most capable person in my world. I fall for the lie that I am responsible for making all my relationships work. I tend to live reactively, determined to keep my world safe and myself free from hurt. I have a hard time waiting when life seems to be wilting.

Several years ago, some friends began to notice this pattern. There were seasons they would experience me "fighting the good fight" well, and periods that they watched me descend into desperation, convinced my life was a hopeless mess. Some days I stood when circumstances fell apart, and other days I fell apart. In certain moments I could take a hurt from my husband in stride, and in others I was convinced his behavior spoke volumes about my lack of value. The sense of rejection left me either paralyzed with despair, or obsessively driven to restore our relationship and repair my standing.

It became evident that I had to make changes, but I was terrified. My distorted perceptions made **False Evidence Appear Real**. But when I realized my struggle with fear meant I couldn't rely on what I saw and interpreted, I wasn't sure how to operate. Relying on others to help me distinguish between God's truth and my

terror felt overwhelmingly vulnerable. I found it hard to rely on others to see what I couldn't or to have faith for me - faith in what God was trying to accomplish.

I needed help. I needed reminders of truth. I needed God Himself to show up and give me His vision for my life.

So I waited. And wrestled. Against my mind.

And God worked. Wonders. In my soul.

THE COURAGE TO CHANGE

This way was vulnerable and would possibly leave me exposed and alone. Mercifully, God sent faithful friends to pray with and for me, compassionate friends to hold my hands, and discerning friends to listen to help me unravel reality from lies. These wise friends pointed me to deeper and unchanging truths, and gently called me back to a place of confident rest.

I had to face the reality that while I couldn't change life's circumstances, I could change my response to it. This meant I had to reckon with those deeply rooted fears that declared God wasn't really *for* me.

With trepidation, I embraced just enough courage to make major changes in my life. I accepted that these fears were bigger than my ability to control them: my mind had been affected by evil so I needed help to slow down and think soberly when I became afraid. Encouraged by a few dear friends, I wrestled through the shame that tried to tell me I was deficient for needing chemical help, and accepted medication to slow down the responses of my central nervous system.

Once my mind could slow down and think more soberly during unsettling circumstances, I was able to recognize when my

"At the root ... is fear. I find it easier to focus on fearsome "what ifs" and troubling possibilities, than to peacefully rest in the arms of the One who calls me His beloved."

fears were distorting reality, causing me to see life incompletely (or at times, altogether incorrectly). To refute the lies and fears I regularly encountered, I began a constant infusion of truth into my mind on a daily basis. I began memorizing and meditating on scripture, posting meaningful hymns and treasured verses all over my house, and carrying them in my purse. I would often fall asleep repeating a comforting truth that eased my anxieties.

I also had to lay down illusions of control: that I could orchestrate my life to avoid pain, make myself desirable enough to be un-leavable, or coerce others to stay with me. I had to embrace the part of my faith that says I can never be truly alone.

I had to choose trust, a restfulness in God's goodness. I had to choose love, for myself and for others, especially when it was obvious that neither of us was perfect or deserving of love.

I had to re-focus on creation, the cross, and redemption on a regular basis: God is making all things new. And that remained true even when I could not see anything that suggested so.

I had to choose hope - hope that comes from living by faith and not by sight.

VISUAL CUES

Years into the journey, I bought a ring that says "Fear Not" to wear on my right hand. I wanted, when I am alone -- a way to remind myself that I had an option besides fear-based thinking. I needed a visual cue to redirect my thoughts on days that I found myself feeling uneasy. This ring has served me well as a tangible token of my protected position and as a sweet companion to my naturally fearful heart.

In September, for my 40th birthday, my

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husband gave me another ring to join the first. In bold letters all around the band, this new ring simply says "Beloved." It is the most precious of all my gifts this year. It is a symbol of how deeply my husband knows the aches of my heart, and how he longs for me to find rest. It is a signal to look upward rather than outward for my identity. It is an Ebenezer for my journey, a tangible representation of what is most deeply true – that I matter enough to have been called by name by my maker, that I will never be forsaken, that I will be held tightly in the fiercest of storms, and that I am promised a future life where tears and fears don't exist.

These two rings sit opposite my engagement ring and wedding band. A glance to the left reminds me that my husband has vowed to hold my hand and a look to the right reassures me that God Himself has promised to hold my heart. A reminder of commitment to our marriage vows sits on one hand, and a message of "Fear not, for I am HIS beloved" adorns the other. I am well aware that though my husband grasps my hand, there are days he crushes my heart. But I am learning to rest in my ultimate belovedness, especially in those times. I am growing in the courage to choose to trust the things that are most true, even when my perception occludes my ability to see them.

And I am finding that as I turn my eyes towards Jesus, He is refining the vision of my heart in lasting ways. God is giving me corrective lenses for the deeper perceptions out of which I live. His prescription for my heart is glasses of truth, to help me see things as they are from His perspective. His adjustment of my focus offers me the ability to look up to Him, rather than to those around me, for my value. His repair of my depth perception helps me to say with Paul, *"Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal weight of glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."* (2 Corinthians 4:16-18.)

PERFECT LOVE CASTS OUT FEAR

Through this process, God has shown me that He is my only truly safe place. He gave glimpses of His perfect and intentional love for me. His perfect love that casts out all my fear. He convinced me that it is okay to trust Him - in all things, at all times, with all of my life. He calls me to look, not in the mirror and not into other's eyes for their feedback, but directly into His gaze. He asks me to see my reflection in *His* eyes. He longs for the satisfac-

"He calls me to look, not in the mirror and not into other's eyes for their feedback, but directly into His gaze. He asks me to see my reflection in *His* eyes."

tion and delight I see there to bring deep rest to my weary, striving soul.

Turning in faith to Him, rather than focusing on my disappointments and agendas, has been a long and challenging process for me. It still takes courage to truly believe that God's eyes see differently and far more than mine, and that they have grander purposes. It takes faithful boldness to close the eyes on my face and open the eyes of my heart to the hopeful possibilities of a Father who delights in me. It requires me to believe that He has loving hands that long to do good work in me. But it gets a little bit easier whenever I consider the high cost He paid to make this transformation possible.

As I look to the cross, I remember there is more to the story than can be seen with the naked eye. I see redemption: the ugly death of Friday followed by resurrection on Sunday. The eyes of Jesus closing in death, only to open up new life for me. The voice desperately crying, "Forsaken!" promising, "I will never leave you." The arms that were nailed to the cross stretching out to cover my shame. The legs, broken to hasten His death, being agile enough to chase my wandering heart. The heart that bled overflowing with love for me - His daughter.

I have begun to believe that my heart, so broken by sin, sorrow and fear can become a beautiful new creation as well. His glorious light shining through the cracks and crevices not only lights my own way, but casts beautiful patterns of illumination into a darkened world where many others are laboring under the weight of the same fears. These glimpses of His splendor are undeniably real and are the only lasting realities. They represent the truth of the hope He offers and the glory that one day we will all see face to face.

By Tamea Bock

Tamea is married to Bill for 28 years. She is the mother of Natalie (16) and Sara (23).

And the mother of William still.

Accepting The Things I Cannot Change

The words from the doctors fell hard on my heart, "We suggest you take your son off of the ventilator by Saturday. The tests show there is nothing more we can do." William's cancer had filled the sac around his heart and was infiltrating his lungs with fluid. The ventilator had relieved the agony of his struggle to breathe. He was sleeping peacefully connected to more tubes and monitors than I could imagine, even after watching his 10 year old body go through the rigors of the last 5 and a half months of leukemia treatment. The call of my life was to bring this boy and our two girls into this world and keep them safe, nurturing them until they were on their own. They trusted me. William trusted me and I could not stop his pain and suffering and death.

On that Saturday we held our only son as the life slowly, undramatically ebbed away. He had aged before us in the past 5 months, from a lively, hilarious, intelligent, handsome 9 year old to an elderly-like, bald, weak little man. So tragically counter to the early morning of his birth when he was new, warm and precious in my arms. "William, your name means "resolute protector"", I reminded him from time to time in his life. I had pictured a strong young husband, a strapping brilliant caregiver and loving father. The brutality of what God was allowing did not fit any preconceived notion for my child, my life, my God. There would be no miracle. What would happen to us as a family? To our marriage? To my identity?

Now eleven years later, to write about God's serenity is more about describing His *severe mercy*. I railed at Him in the beginning and sometimes wandered the

house when I was alone, crying aloud, "I'm so lost." God seemed silent at times, but somehow never shocked about my confusion and deep emotions. I was surrounded by a church family, neighbors, and friends that creatively and tirelessly cared for me. The Barnabas Center counseled us and counseled again. Our daughters went back to school. My husband went back to work.

Serenity meant acknowledging a "new normal". Before William's death, life had been understandable and stable, now reality left me with a different framework of what life entailed. Our family dynamic was forever changed. I was no longer the mother of three, but a mother of two. My husband and I grieved differently and at different times. Our girls faced their own pain and loss without William. And God's Person-hood was now outside the formula and predictability I had placed on him. It was more appealing force life into some miserable track in which I could still exhibit control rather than reconfigure the whole system.

Several choices pulled at my soul. The thought of getting uber busy with a good cause or church work played on my mind. It was a pleasant, pain-deadening (yet tiresome) place of being productive and looking noble and healthy. Everyone would then happily agree that I had "gotten over it". On the other hand, I craved the sheer pleasure of being sequestered away from everyone.

There would be no uncomfortable conversations about William, no telling the story over and over, no explaining how we were getting along, no watching his playmates grow up. And lastly, there

“The brutality of what God was allowing did not fit any preconceived notion for my child, my life, my God. There would be no miracle. What would happen to us as a family? To our marriage? To my identity?”

was the very attractive option of becoming bitter and resentful, hard-hearted - numbly living from one day to the next. Serenity could not possibly mean looking squarely at the pain, finding it unbearable, and accepting my inadequacy for the task of life ahead. There had to be another way. Dealing with the inner and outer adjustment was terrifying.

I could relate to C.S. Lewis as he says in *A Grief Observed*, "No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear." The greatest fear was the question of God's involvement. There had been suffering in my life before, perhaps not on this scale, of course, and control had earned my survival. Certainly, when I could not be in control at those times, I knew God had been. Now I feared He was impotent to act. He was the God of the universe, for goodness sakes! He could've cured William with a word, a breath, a thought. He had not. I felt at risk of losing more than a child.

Somehow in God's providence, even in all of the above sidetracks, the truth of the Garden of Gethsemane and crucifixion presented itself. Other glimpses of God's love broke through, as well. The desperation of Jesus in the garden shouted validation at my own questions and longing for some other way to God's glory. He had asked the Father, too, for a plan B. Yet He was reminded that there would be no authenticity to his life if the Father agreed. I did not want to muddle through life, half alive, half dead, dishonest with myself, running. As Jesus submitted, the Father sent gracious care to Jesus in the garden and shored him up for what lay ahead. He was doing that for me each day after William's death and would continue to do that forever, if I kept my heart open to receive it. I was beginning to believe he cared for the heart of a mother. On the cross, rationing each word between gasps, Jesus gave his friend, John, the care for his mother, Mary. This scripture spoke clearly to me, the Savior who knew the suffering of his own mother knew my suffering too, and would stop at nothing to care for me.

God revealed his serenity by offering freedom from the tight control over life that I had once held (My family will argue I am still holding on to that one!). When an instant of joy and laughter would come after so many dark hours, I was able to embrace it --hungrily. The profound draw I have to be a people pleaser and always appear spiritually "together" began to lose its power. I lost

the energy to live that way as God blessedly stripped the futility and superficiality of it away.

Serenity came slowly and painstakingly for me. Accepting the fact that I could not change or control the fallen world involved a fair amount of kicking and screaming. (As William would say, a time of putting on sack cloth and ashes!) There is a great deal of lovely Scripture about beauty out of ashes, doing a new thing, life after death, heaven. One of the most potent for me, though, is Jesus *gently* leading those that have young (Isaiah 40:11), and it shows that he really loves and moves on behalf of the unique person of who I am. The kicker was grasping his personal, carefully-timed recovery for my spirit.

Recently, I was searching for a quality children's book to give as a baby shower gift. I ran across the *Princess and the Pea*. It is the classic tale of a test for the true princess: could she feel a tiny pea under a multitude of thick blankets and prove her true identity as princess? The shop I was visiting actually had displayed with the book a beautiful handmade doll laying on a stack of small, multicolored blankets, in a white princess bed. Naturally, I dug around under the mini mattresses for the pea. It was there, a precious crocheted, green pea! Like me resting on layers and layers of heartache, God penetrated my heart with the slightest, yet most powerful communication of himself. He had already equipped me to be aware of his faithfulness from times past, it was not a matter of me making anything happen, but simply to lay there and rest.

The remainder of the Serenity prayer speaks to what serenity is meaning for me as I continue to experience the "pea".

*"Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;*

*Accepting hardships as
the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
as it is, not as I would have it;*

*Trusting that He will make all things right
if I surrender to His Will;
That I may be reasonably
happy in this life
and supremely happy with Him (and my
William) Forever in the next.
Amen."*

"Serenity could not possibly mean looking squarely at the pain, finding it unbearable, and accepting my inadequacy for the task of life ahead. There had to be another way."

"God penetrated my heart with the slightest, yet most powerful communication of himself. ... it was not a matter of me making anything happen, but simply to lay there and rest."

By Roger Edwards:

*a counselor and teacher at The Barnabas Center. He is married to Jean and they have seven children. Roger has started a blog!
<http://actuallyalive.wordpress.com/>*

Powerful/Powerless

the wisdom to know the difference

This past spring, the recession put me into an austerity mood. I decided to tighten my belt.

Thus began a process to trim my household budget and well, one thing led to another. I shopped for less expensive life insurance, which required a physical exam, which revealed that my cholesterol levels were high, which meant personal changes. Hmm... in order to trim my budget, I'd have to start by trimming my waistline. And - I am happy to say - I did.

In a mere 6 months, I lost 20 pounds. I feel better, I walk better, I even stand still better. Yes, I like it. But it makes me wonder, "Why I didn't do it earlier?" You see, it isn't exactly true that I lost the weight in 6 months - actually, I'd been 'trying' for over 2 years (maybe more). But I didn't get serious until the cholesterol report.

Before that, I made a series of chronically failed decisions. In the morning, I decided to cut sweet tea. But then just before lunch, I reversed myself (stressful morning). I decided on a running program but went for a walk instead. I decided, "No desserts at pot-lucks!" Then someone told me that Betty had brought pecan pie. Yes, I was a decision machine. But my belt remained tight where it was.

In theory, I know I make my own decisions. But in practice, it seems that stress, pain or my appetites drive my behavior. This disturbs me and begs a crucial question: "Who, exactly, is in charge of myself?"

Slowly I began to make decisions. I cut back on the tea. I eliminated

chips. I began to walk more regularly - then the running - one decision at a time. I was looking to lose myself - but I see now, that in reality, I was taking myself back. I gained more than I lost.

Now the task is to maintain - not just the weight loss - but possession of myself.

The Realm of 'Me'; I Am Powerful

Think about that: the 'possession of myself'. I am granted personhood. What an astonishing gift - the most basic grace. I, of all people, have been granted a 'me'. I didn't do anything to deserve it. I just woke up one morning and there I was. And so, on and on, every morning thereafter.

With a 'me', you can do all sorts of things. You can choose a favorite color. You can build an idea into a dream (or a dream into an idea). You can taste sweetness in a melody, a joke or an apple. You can bid your awareness in any direction, through time or into the heart. You can even choose your attitude - from grumpy to grateful - to guide your day. Or even your life.

Yes, a 'me' is a powerful, powerful gift. With it, you can do a lot, if you maintain possession.

What's more, no one can take your 'me' from you. Others can hurt you, control things around you, make it hard for you, but even then, under it all, you remain yourself. You are still in charge. You still choose how you will respond. This ability (call it 'response-ability'), no one can take away. No one can stop you from lov-

"What an incredible gift. I, of all people, have been granted a 'me'. I didn't do anything to deserve it. I just woke up one morning and there I was."

ing... or hating. That choice is yours and yours alone.

The gift of response-ability brings real freedom. I can take myself in any direction. Exhilarating! I decide who and what I will be. Despite my circumstances, I can live the way I want. Stressful mornings don't mean I have to be overweight. Hurtful relationships don't mean I must become bitter. Everyday, I choose. Will I love? How? Who? I control myself. Self-control is the same thing as freedom.

Historically, I've shunned self-control. It seems restrictive and punishing. But the exact opposite is true. Every time I embrace it, it bears good fruit, everything from adding muscle to overcoming bondage. Self-control is the good fruit of the Spirit. It regains my most precious gift – the possession of myself.

God has given me 'me'. This is the basic miracle of my life. What will I do with this astonishing gift? Will I shrink back from its dizzying freedom? Will I refuse the joy of self-rule, giving control of myself to lesser masters? Or will I gratefully take possession and gently lead myself into life-giving practices and passions?

May God grant me the courage to change the things I can.

The Realm of Others; I am Powerless

Yes, by decree of God, I am granted self-rule. Within the 'realm of me', I am an independent king – rich with choice and will. But outside the small 'realm of me' is the much larger 'realm of others' (inc. the Other). In that outer realm, I am not independent and rich at all; I am dependent and needy.

Inside, I control all decisions, but not so in 'the realm of others'. For example, if I wish to love someone, nothing can stop me. But if I wish someone to love me, I am powerless. I can make 'me' love you, but I cannot make you love me.

I can lose weight, get in shape, develop wit and intellect – but I can't force someone to want or accept me. Who hasn't experienced this disappointment with a parent, friend or lover? We want their acceptance and love, sometimes desperately. We are willing to go great lengths to please them. But they are their own; they decide who they will love and how

much. They too, are free. Yes, I am powerful over me, but powerless over you.

May God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change.

Powerful and Powerless

When I lost the weight last spring, it was an empowering re-discovery of self-possession. But along with the thrill came a strong reluctance to fully embrace my newfound freedom. If I can lose weight – what other areas of my life could I change? What about conflict-avoidance, procrastination, grudge-holding, people-pleasing, escapism? When I thought about these, I had to ask, 'Do I really want to admit that I have the power to change?'

Odd. I so freely discard the responsibility I'm given, but so arrogantly lust for the responsibility I'm forbidden.

I have the whole situation reversed. On the one hand, I pretend that I simply can't help it when an unkind word slips out of my mouth or an extra brownie slips in. But then on the other, I somehow assert that I can perform well enough or argue persuasively enough to force the world to accept me. I have it backwards. I believe I can control others but not myself.

I am like my father Adam, who thought himself strong enough to become God, but too weak to refuse a snake. I too, have reversed God's design.

I must come to terms with my powerful/powerless design. I am specifically made for a wondrous purpose. I am made for love.

On the inside, I am an independent king. No one can stop my love. However, on the outside, I am a dependent beggar. I cannot coerce love. My design makes it possible for me to experience real love. Since real love cannot be forced, only a king can grant it; since real love cannot be bought, only a beggar can receive it.

Thus I am made to exchange love the only way it can be exchanged - as a free gift. My dignity (and happiness) is rooted in this complimentary and beautiful blend of powerful/powerless.

May God grant me the wisdom to know the difference. And to delight in the difference.

“if I wish to love someone, nothing can stop me. But if I wish someone to love me, I am powerless. I can make ‘me’ love you, but I cannot make you love me.”

“On the inside, I am an independent king. No one can stop me from loving. However, on the outside, I am dependent beggar. I cannot make anyone love me. Thus I am made to exchange love the only way it can be exchanged - as a free gift”



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• UPCOMING OPPORTUNITIES:



Date(s)	Event	Facilitator(s)
November 10 & 12, 2010 December 8 & 10, 2010	Intentional Intercessors — Come and pray with us for the ministry at Barnabas for one hour once a month. Wednesday evening 5:30pm and Friday morning 6:30am	<i>Barnabas Staff and Friends</i>
Tuesdays at 7 beginning Jan. 18	Healing Hearts —A 14 week group for women who have experienced childhood trauma. It provides a biblically-based, confidential context where women can wrestle with difficult realities related to their harm. Beginning and Advanced Groups.	<i>Lisa Ould</i>
Tuesdays from 6-8:45pm Groups begin Feb. 1, 2011	Honor's Program for Men —A 14-week small group where men who struggle with sexually addictive behavior come together to lay a solid foundation for relational recovery. Beginning and Advanced Groups.	<i>John Pierce Kurt Zuiderveen</i>
Tuesdays from 6:30-8:30pm Groups begin Feb. 1, 2011	Journey of Men - A 14 wk small group for men exploring questions like: "Why am I so angry?", "What does it mean to be a Godly husband, father and friend?", "Who do I trust?" and "What is healthy male sexuality?"	<i>Barnabas Staff</i>
Thursdays from 6-8pm Groups begin Feb. 3, 2011	Healing Hearts —A 14 week group for women who have experienced childhood trauma. It provides a biblically-based, confidential context where women can wrestle with difficult realities related to their harm. Beginning and Advanced Groups.	<i>Meredith Spatola Lauren Petters</i>
Thursdays from 6-8pm Groups begin Feb. 3, 2011	Real Beauty: Uncovering Your Struggle with Food, Body Image, & Appearance - A 10-week small group for women to better understand your story as you hear from and are encouraged by others whose journeys are similar to your own.	<i>Lauren Petters</i>
Feb. 4-5, 2011 Richmond, Va.	Barnabas Training Basic — This two-day, biblically based seminar (Friday night & Saturday) helps you understand others by gaining a biblical understanding of your own heart. Includes teaching on a biblical model of people and an interactive small group experience. <i>Location: West End Presbyterian Church</i>	<i>Barnabas Staff</i>
February 5, 2011 9am-1pm	Untangling the Knot: half day seminar to help lay leaders, pastors, and others to learn how to help someone through a sexual addiction or sexual betrayal.	<i>John Pierce</i>
February 12, 2011 9am-3pm	I Do, Now What?! Learn how to overcome struggles in early marriage. Navigate tough issues such as sexuality, arguments about in-laws, and the stress of finances.	<i>Kurt Zuiderveen Meredith Spatola</i>
Mondays from 6:30-8:30pm Groups begin Feb. 28, 2011	Barnabas Training Level One : An extension of Barnabas Basic, group participants will improve their care giving skills through practice with a partner in the group.	<i>Pete Bondy Meredith Spatola</i>
Mondays 4-6pm or 6:30-8:30pm Groups begin Feb. 28, 2011	Barnabas Training Level Four —for graduates of BT Level 2 this small group allows participants to present and experience real life care-giving scenarios & receive feedback.	<i>Pete Bondy</i>
March 4-5, 2011 Westminster Presbyterian	The Blessing —A look at the life of Jacob for insights into marriage. We will ask the questions: Where do we look for our Blessing? Do we receive it from marriage or give it?	<i>Palmer Trice Roger Edwards</i>