

# Willingness

## The Issue of Control

Self-control is a good thing. All other control is questionable. We can only control the choices we make. We can not control things that happen to us or other people.

Willingness to engage in recovery from any destructive or limiting behavior requires that you let go of wanting to control the world around you. It would be nice if we could make others act in the way we want them to. But we can not. We can only control how we respond to them.

You also have to require that your emotions let go of controlling you. For so long they have tried to protect you. But often the way they protected you is no longer needed. Yet, we become very comfortable with those old behaviors. You have to start being in control of your emotions.

Always require them to report to you. Then you can challenge those emotions when the belief driving them is a limiting or invalid belief.

Control yourself - not others.

## Pros & Cons

Your level of willingness is directly related to your interpretation of the consequences of staying the same. Think about why you want to change.

What are the negative consequences to staying the same? What are the positive consequences to staying the same? Remember, all behaviors meet a need, even bad behaviors.

What are the positive consequences to changing? What are the negative consequences to changing? Remember, change would not be hard if we were not giving up something.

## About Pain

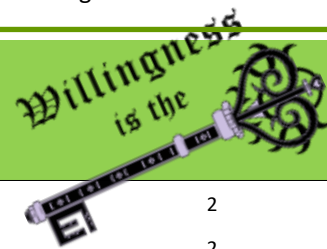
Would it be nice if we did not have to feel pain? Not really. A rare disease called CIPA does not allow its victims to feel physical pain. Yet those with this disease actually die younger statistically because of infections that set in when they can not feel. Feeling pain is necessary because pain is a messenger that tells us something is wrong. Even emotional pain.

Avoiding pain removes our willingness to change. Here are few facts about pain.

- ✓ Psychological pain is normal. Everyone has it.
- ✓ You can learn skills to minimize pain's impact on you.
- ✓ Emotional pain lasts an average of 12 minutes.
- ✓ We can choose our emotions by changing thoughts.
- ✓ Focusing on negative thoughts brings physical pain.
- ✓ Emotions are contagious. Find someone laughing.
- ✓ Pain is a messenger. Find the message / meet the need.
- ✓ Use coping skills to get through highly charged times.
- ✓ Use critical thinking/problem solving skills all other times.

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## Pain or Suffering?

Looking at a thought, problem, etc. rather than from it. Looking at pain is to observe it from a distance without identifying with it. From the outside in. Pain is a messenger to problems that can most often be solved. Even the unsolvable can have closure. Looking at problems from the middle of pain is looking from the inside out. You are trapped inside the pain and therefore feel as though you are suffering. You become a victim to pain.

You can be experiencing a difficult time yet all sorts of other things are well. Focusing on the suffering takes away the joy of the remaining good things in your life because you can only see the sad story you are telling yourself. Are you willing to find things to be grateful for in the middle of pain? Or are you determined to let yourself and the world know how you are suffering because of your trial?

The next time you are struggling with your thoughts and/or emotions, decide to have them vs. buying them. Thoughts have meaning not power. We give thoughts meaning. You can also choose to give thoughts power. Consider the emotion of anxiety. You can think to yourself, "I'm having that anxious feeling again vs. I'm so anxious". When you begin feeling an emotion that threatens your willingness to stay in the game, take a step back and observe those emotions as though you were watching it on a television screen.

"I'm having a feeling that I am anxious" is a statement of observation. You do not have to choose to keep the thought/emotion but can instead look for solutions, again, as if you are watching it on television. We can all see solutions for others when they are deep in the emotion. That is because we are not feeling what they are. When stress from negative thoughts/emotions happen, our thinking capabilities decline. Separating the thoughts/emotions to simply observing it allows us not to "buy" them. We can choose to let them go as solutions are identified and implemented.

"I am so anxious" is a statement of entrapment. You have already chosen to buy the thoughts/emotions and you now own them like an old pair of socks. But they begin to take hold of you and fight for control. Rather than allow them to drift by, you now are victim to their demands. Negative thoughts/emotions typically are not seeking solutions. They just want to be pet and fed. Then they grow in size and become in charge of your world.



## Stages of Change



People typically do not wake up one morning and determine to do things different in their lives. Rather, they most often engage in change because of pain. We learned from the Need Cycle that pain is often the point we realize that a need exists. Unfortunately, many people suffer from pain and still refuse to make changes. Their belief system driving this silly behavior has tricked them into thinking that the negative consequences of one behavior is more desirable than the positive consequences of another.

Change happens in a predictable manner. Keep in mind that all bad habits are learned and therefore can be unlearned as you apply new habits. Like the image of a butterfly emerging from a cocoon, the stages of change has differing levels that lead to your freedom. The stages of change are as follows:

1. Denial - I do not have a problem.
2. Contemplation - Maybe I do have a problem.
3. Planning - I am going to work on my problem.
4. Action - Here is what I am doing about my problem.
5. Maintaining - I need to keep doing the good stuff.

## Denial - Precontemplation

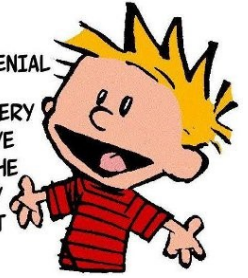
# 1.

NO, NOT ME.  
Pre-contemplation

Have you ever had something that was broken and you chose to use it in its broken state? That is what denial is like. Instead of fixing what is broken, we decide to ignore the problem. This can be for many reasons. Maybe it costs too much to fix it or takes too much time. Whatever the reason, we can get comfortable with broken.

Think about this poem about denial. Each step represents moving to the next stage of change.

IT'S NOT DENIAL  
I'M JUST VERY  
SELECTIVE  
ABOUT THE  
REALITY  
I ACCEPT



Hope is required for  
change.

### Chapter One

*I walk down the street.  
There is a deep hole in the  
sidewalk.  
I fall in.  
I am lost... I am helpless.  
It isn't my fault.  
It takes forever to find a way  
out.*

### Chapter Two

*I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the  
sidewalk*

*I pretend I don't see it.*

*I fall in again.*

*I can't believe I am in the same  
place.*

*But it isn't my fault.*

*It still takes a long time to get  
out.*

### Chapter Three

*I walk down the same street.*

*There is a deep hole in the  
sidewalk*

*I see it is there.*

*I still fall in... it's a habit.*

*My eyes are open.*

*I know where I am.*

*It is my fault... I get out  
immediately.*

### Chapter Four

*I walk down the same street.*

*There is a deep hole in the  
sidewalk*

*I walk around it.*

### Chapter Five

*I walk down another street.*

## Contemplation

# Well, MAYBE.

Contemplation

# 2.

In order for someone to contemplate change, they must first have a small slice of hope that change can actually occur. Without hope for change, most of us would remain in denial. Denial keeps us safe from failure. The thinking goes something like this, "If I do not try, I might not feel bad about failing. But if I try and fail, well that could be detrimental. So I think I will not try." This is how the issue of control can lie to us. We think denial is control when in fact it is only a lie we tell ourselves.

If someone has tried and failed before, hope can be a difficult thing to find. It is one thing to convince someone that change can happen in general. It is another thing to convince them that it can happen for them. To remain in control, we often give up on hope.

The word picture for willingness is open hands. It is a reminder that we are constantly fighting for control. Control can be seen by clenched hands that are tense whereas willingness can be seen as surrender. It is not easy to surrender. It requires humility over stubbornness. People often twist strengths and weaknesses. For example, anger is a protective emotion that comes from its ability to cover a more vulnerable emotion. So, we incorrectly associate anger with strength. When in reality, anger is a weakness because it often causes us to lose control. It is odd how we think we are in control with anger.

Humility, on the other hand, requires the more vulnerable emotions to emerge. We have all had times we felt more in control through the emotion of anger. But we have also all had times we have watched a movie or heard of an incredible story where the person showed unbelievable strength by allowing all emotions to be known, even the vulnerable ones. It takes a stronger person to feel vulnerable emotions and share them. Anyone can be angry. Not everyone can be vulnerable.



George Mueller was a man who started orphanages and changed the world around him through his work. At more than ninety years of age, in a lecture to ministers and other Christian workers, said, "I was converted in November 1825, but I did not come to the point of **total surrender of my heart** until four years later, in July 1829. It was then I realized my love for money, prominence, position, power and worldly pleasure was gone. God, and He alone, became my all in all. I found everything I needed and desired nothing else."

Like us, George Mueller found out that change really can not happen until we surrender conflicting beliefs. What is keeping you stuck regarding your *Big Hairy Goal*? How can you move toward surrender?



## Planning - Preparation

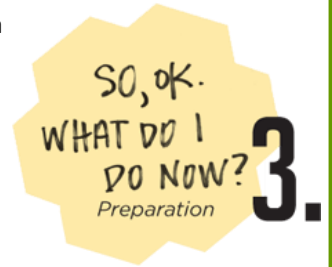
Begin with the end in mind. Identify what success looks like and put it in writing. A goal without a plan is just a wish. Identify barriers you might come across that will end your progress.

### If you are lacking skills:

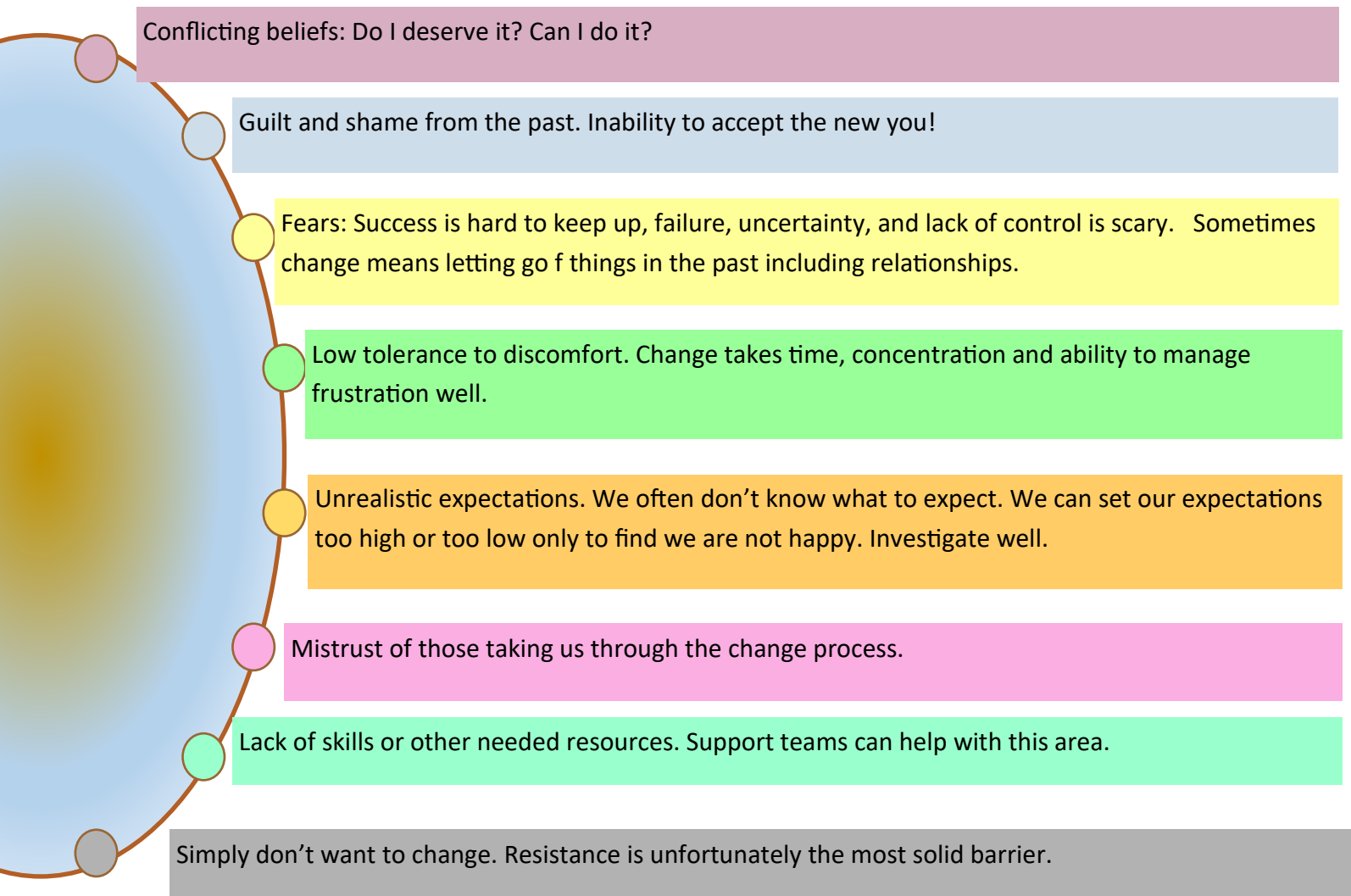
- ✓ Create a daily plan toward goals. Include time and task.
- ✓ Target biggest tasks earlier in the day. We get more tired as the day goes along.
- ✓ Use feedback or tracking. Journaling or tracking systems can improve results.
- ✓ Align all steps to a bigger goal – think Big Hairy Goal. You can have smaller objectives within the big goal.
- ✓ Learning triggers/cues that take you back to undesirable choices.

### If you are lacking other resources:

- ✓ Establish accountability. Having someone to hold you to your word improves results.
- ✓ Create several realistic positive statements and post them where you will see them often.
- ✓ Visualizing achieving goals can help you master the skills needed. Your emotional brain does not know the difference between imaginary and real.
- ✓ Making a routine that will include your goals. Do not put the goals as a separate task. For example, to incorporate exercise, walk to work/school.
- ✓ Write about your success or failure. Read your journal entries to learn from them.
- ✓ Think outside the box. Working to manage depression or lose weight? Work or volunteer in a role that causes you to be active. No need to spend \$\$\$ on gym memberships.



## Barriers to Change



## Action

Change that will last requires a lifestyle change. Making a short-term change is common but you will just find that you are struggling with the old issues again. Make sure you have considered what a lifestyle change looks like regarding your *Big Hairy Goal*.

During this stage you are putting your plans to action. Keep in mind that progress is not always seen right away. Consider the suggestions below from “Life Hack” to help your new habits stick.

1. Commit to 30 days. Your brain needs to get comfortable with your new lifestyle. It will get easier as you move along.
2. Make it daily. Consistency is very important to long-term success. Do not cheat your progress.
3. Start simple. Do not bite off more than you can chew. Baby steps.
4. Remind yourself. Keep a tracking log or notes to make sure you do not forget steps. If you miss a day, jump right back in.
5. Get a buddy. Finding someone to support you, or better yet, someone to join you is a proven strategy for success.
6. Know your triggers / Form new triggers. Know those things that cause setbacks. Create new triggers such as snapping your fingers or saying out loud, “wake up” when trying to get up early. Remove temptations to fall back into your old ways.
7. Grieve losses and find new ways of meeting old needs. Change means giving up old places, people, things or activities. That is a loss and it is helpful to see it as such. Grieve your losses. Then find new ways to meet the needs the old choices met such as talking on the phone while you work out instead of watching television.
8. Be imperfect. Fight the urge to make change perfectly. Allow for setbacks or doing new activities messy. Just give it your best and enjoy it. Laugh at your mistakes.
9. Use “But”. When you find negative thinking setting in, interrupt it with “but”. “I’m no good at this **BUT** if I keep trying I will get better.”
10. Model after someone whose been successful. Ask yourself, “What would \_\_\_\_\_ do in this situation?”
11. Set your goal as an experiment. Withhold judgment until you have had a solid month under your belt. You will be more likely to adopt new things when you have seen success.
12. Visualize. Imagine yourself doing the wise thing and experiencing the benefits of your “WHY”.
13. Prepare for pain. All change is hard. That is why we avoid it. Accept the pain but focus more on the outcomes.
14. Love yourself. See yourself more healthy whether this is physically, emotionally, financially, relationally, spiritually, or any other area of life. Let yourself grow and be kind to you.



I'm not telling you it is  
going to be easy,  
I'm telling you  
it's going to be worth it.

## Maintenance



You've made it! Well, almost. Now that you've accomplished your goal it's time to keep going. What? Finishing means starting? Yes, but remember you're in this for a lifestyle change. There is no turning back if you've done this process well.

To keep yourself on track you must continue in each of the sections above. Don't lose sight of these concepts that you've learned. None of us have ever arrived. That's both good news and bad news. Good in the sense that you don't need to be so hard on yourself. Bad in the sense that you need to be tough on yourself. Keep moving forward – never backward. Consider the following tips to maintaining your new lifestyle.



1. Make sure you're always honest with yourself. The first person we lie to is ourselves. No exceptions with this step.
2. Check in with an accountability person now and then. Support and accountability are different. Look for a coach and track yourself.
3. Fix problems when they're small. If you're doing the first two well, this should be easy.
4. Make good self-care a priority. Remember, all moments of emotional crisis can be traced back to a lack of self-care.
5. Stay in your own lane. Don't be set off by what others around you are doing. If they're going off track, review the steps above to stay on track.
6. Give back to others. Share the wisdom you've learned from your experience. Helping others is a great tool for healing.

## Bad Things Happen to Good People

Something bad has happened and you are looking for the person who is to blame. While it is true that bad things can happen even when we are making wise choices, it is more common that people are looking for someone or somewhere to place the blame, yet they have a role to play in the scenario. You have read in this material that we want to stop blaming others and take personal responsibility. We will examine how to handle bad situations by taking personal responsibility and by looking for the root cause.

### How Could I Know?

Steve showed up late to work again. He began with excuses. I knew they were excuses because he took no personal responsibility for anything. He was pulled over by a police officer after the hood on the car opened while driving and he almost ran off the road. Doing a search, the officer found marijuana paraphernalia in the car and Steve was almost taken to jail. The officer, in his words, is always out to get him. How could he know that this would happen?

I began asking questions and learned that Steve borrowed a friend's car because he hadn't fixed his own yet. The friend is known to use drugs. Steve saw himself a victim of circumstances. Have you known someone like Steve? They seem to experience more than their fair share of difficult situations. But, are such instances really as random as they might think?

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Hopefully you can see at least two ways that Steve did not take personal responsibility. First, he hadn't taken care of his own car. Maybe he didn't have money to do this yet. But, his next choice was to borrow a car of someone he knew used drugs. Not only did he surround himself with troubled people, he should have suspected that there might be signs of drugs in the car.

In the chapter on choices and consequences we covered how we tend to play the lottery when it comes to taking risks. It is true that Steve couldn't have known the hood of the car would pop up while driving. But, he could have guessed that hanging around someone using drugs or using their car could possibly end up bad. There are just too many scenarios that are possible.

Unfortunately, this was Steve's typical day. Steve has made some unwise choices over the course of his life. Pulling out of this kind of lifestyle is difficult at best. Staying seems easier to Steve. What do you think?

then you will call,  
& the Lord will answer;  
you will cry for help,  
& He will say:  
HERE AM I.  
ISAIAH 58:9

### Keep it Balanced

Everything in Balance



Start to pay attention to your reactions when something bad happens. Two extreme reactions are: 1) Taking responsibility for everything even when it is not your fault. 2) Placing blame on anyone but yourself. Everything should be in balance and in this case it is

important to learn where to place blame in order to learn from our experiences. Wisdom is learning from our own or others experiences so that we don't fall into a trap.

If a person's self-esteem is bad, taking personal responsibility can be very difficult, making their self-esteem even worse. Sometimes a person might see no other option but to blame others. It helps them not have to face their own issues. Where are you in this delicate balance?

### Get a Clue

Remember that we can change behaviors by learning new skills. Taking responsibility does not have to take a toll on your self-esteem. If someone is upset with you because of something you did or you are experiencing a trial, take a close look at whether there are things you actually did that allowed these things to happen. Consider these three ideas.

◇ **Is there sin you need to remove yourself from?**

Steve had several activities he was involved in that did not align with God's word. Whenever we move out from the protection of God, we can expect to find trials. Read about Achan in Joshua 7. In verse 10 God is clear that the defeat of all Israel happened because of the hidden sin of one man. There might be some sin you are involved with that seems unrelated to the consequences you are facing. If there is any sin, confess and move away from it immediately.

◇ **Is God stretching you to help you grow?**

God is not co-dependent and therefore can create ways to stretch us to become more like Jesus. God told Moses to stretch out his rod over the Red Sea when the Israelites were being pursued by Pharaoh. He told the Israelites to march around Jericho seven times. He commanded Abraham to offer his only son Isaac. All of these seem to be beneficial. But God's ways are not our ways. If sin is not your issue, it could be that God is stretching you and preparing you for something that you cannot see today. Trust in Him and ask the Holy Spirit to give you strength to move through the hardship. Read James 1:2-4.

◇ **Is God closing a door?**

God may be trying to get your attention to move a different direction. If sin or stretching are not the issue, it could be that God is closing a door. Consider the trial a potential nudge and seek the Holy Spirit for direction. Read Acts 16:6-12 & Revelation 3:7. Do not fight God.

## Set your eyes on what is ahead.

Directions:

- All questions are “behavior” based, meaning that you are rating yourself on what you “do” rather than what you “know”.
- Answer the questions below by rating yourself as follows:

0 - Does not apply to me at all.

1 - Applies sometimes, but not often.

2 - Applies to me often.

3 - I have this one down on a regular basis.

Check the boxes of the behavior you would like to work on during this section.

Pre		Post
	I do not try to control how others think or what they do. I only try to control my response.	
	I do not worry about being right. I can let go of a disagreement.	
	I regularly look at the long-term pros and cons of all options before making a choice.	
	I accept that life has moments of pain. But I choose to learn from pain rather than avoid it.	
	I choose not to suffer from situations and do not let negativity define me.	
	I understand the stages of change and can identify what stage I am in for various scenarios.	
	I know what to do in order to move to the next stage of change and refuse to remain stuck.	
	I believe I have choices in any situation. My choices show I accept that responsibility by my actions.	
	I work to identify barriers to progress by listening to my support network (coach).	

### ***“I Will” Statements***

To get closer to my Big Hairy Goal, “I Will” do the following:

◇

◇

◇

◇

### ***What I Got Out of This Section***