

Believing Is Seeing (Elko, Kevin)

Jim Wallis, who is working to help people overcome poverty and discrimination, has the best definition of the word “hope” I’ve ever come across. He says hope is “believing in spite of the evidence and then watching the evidence change.”

So, you must enter every endeavor with belief. In fact, you must first choose to believe before you even begin. It sounds silly, but it is almost believing in belief. You have to believe that your belief will make a difference. Everywhere you look these days, faith and belief are missing. They have been replaced with hesitation and uncertainty and anxiety. And yet, to believe mobilizes and overcomes and motivates and creates an impact. Belief provides its own momentum.

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It was Steve Jobs who once said, “Those who are crazy enough to think they can change the world usually do.”

Likewise, words of encouragement and love and hope can stay with you and penetrate—and lift you up. Winston Churchill once said that sometimes words are more than just words; they are real, they are action, they create something and do something.

Perhaps the biggest question in this regard is: what outlook, what attitude, and what words, am I going to offer to the world, what words am I going to release into the life of another person? Words that are negative and cynical, that are cruel, that do damage? Or am I going to offer words of life and blessing, words that encourage and inspire, words of hope?

Scott Peck, the eminent psychiatrist who wrote the best-selling book *The Road Less Traveled*, uses the concepts of immaturity and maturity similarly to my use of thermometer and thermostat. He writes, “. . . it seems to me what characterizes most immature people is that they sit around complaining that life doesn’t meet

their demands. . . . But what characterizes those relative few who are fully mature is that they regard it as their responsibility—even as an opportunity—to meet life’s demands.”

What words would set an overall new course for your life? What words would help to redefine a new direction? What if you were to choose a small selection of words and phrases and repeat them periodically throughout the day, things like: “I’m a person of worth.” “I’m a child of God.” “The world has need of me.” “My life is filled with possibility.” “I choose hope.” “I can make a difference.” “My smile can make someone feel better.” “Today is a new adventure

“In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity,” by Albert Einstein.

“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalm 27:1)

Sometimes though, the thing you are being asked to do, or asking of yourself, is downright difficult. Just psyching yourself into a can-do attitude is not enough. You then not only have to tell yourself, “I can do this,” but also tell yourself how you can do this: “I can do this because I will learn how to do this.” Or, “I will practice until I am able to do this.” “I will get help to do this.” “I will work hard to be able to do this.” “I will work harder than I have ever worked in my life to do this.”

Nothing is as destructive to us as fear. Fear of failure, fear of loss, fear of rejection, fear of change, fear of death; the list of things we fear is pretty endless. If something could possibly go wrong, no matter how remote it may be, we can be, and often are, afraid of

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It’s only too late if you don’t start now.

I heard someone say that one of the widest gaps in our human experience is the gap between what we say we want to be and our willingness to do what it takes to get there. We have to do more than just say that we want it, whatever it might be. We have to say we believe and train ourselves to actually believe; believe we can accomplish it, believe that it is worth the risk, believe that we must take some action, believe that we should do it now.

His words remind me of that great quote of George Bernard Shaw: "I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. Life is no 'brief candle' to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for a moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to the future generations."

Do it now.

The German writer Johann Goethe put it much more poetically: "Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it; boldness has genius, power and magic in it."

The reason seems to be that if we think it's going to be hard, we are more realistic about what we are facing, and we begin to try and understand what it will take and what we must do, step by step, to achieve it.

I heard someone talking about the secret of instant success, and he said that the secret is usually years and years of hard work.

"We don't have the luxury of choosing our circumstances, but we can always choose our attitude."

What I learned in that year can be summed up in one word: ownership. Here is another phrase I say to myself and speak into my life now: "The best year of my life will be the year I take ownership of every problem in my life."

I spend a lot of time on the 23rd Psalm. I go through very slowly.

It was not his position that made him great, it was his disposition. He was able not just to get through the setbacks and failures and suffering, but to use them as periods of insight and learning and growth. These episodes led to a greater depth

of being, a greater understanding and wisdom and maturity, a broadening and strengthening of his character, which would be just the preparation needed for the long and bloody struggle for national unity that lay ahead.

In each one of us there is a capacity for resilience, this ability to bounce back from adversity, the emotional toughness and strength of purpose to continue despite the obstacles. It is the ability to grow and build character and think in a new way when adversity comes, to follow a different direction if necessary. It is having a toughness about you, the grit to keep moving forward and never give up, the disposition to see everything as an opportunity. It is training yourself to see that something didn't happen to you, it happened for you. It is taking ownership of your problems and of your life.

On one trip, they trekked out into the English countryside to see an ornate little church they had heard about. Over the entrance are these words: "In the year 1653, when all things through the land were either demolished or profaned, Sir Robert Shirley, Baronet, built this church, whose singular praise was to do the best things in the worst of times and to have hoped them in the most difficult."

"You are the same today as you'll be in five years except for two things: the books you read and the people you meet."

The only exception is if we are with a negative person because we want to help that person become healthier in some way. We don't let them bring us down; we try to build them up. "He gave hope to hopeless people," is a great sentence to have as a goal.

We have been talking about the power of faith and belief throughout this book. Believing in your inner voice, for example, and believing in the capacity to visualize your future, believing in the power of your purpose. Certainly, the concept of belief is indispensable when we talk about God and religious thought. The thing is that when most people talk about belief as a religious idea, it is usually belief about an objective statement or set of facts that they think, or believe, is true.

Sometimes when you care too much and try to control everything, it places too much pressure on you and interferes physically and mentally with what you could

do if you just let go a little bit. My friend was able to relax but, at the same time, swing more powerfully because she knew that it didn't all depend on her, that a certain percentage of the game was beyond her.

What I am encouraging you to do was stated as a powerful theological concept many years ago by Saint Augustine, when he famously said, "Work as if it all depends on you, and pray as if it all depends on God." When we are bold and disciplined with our thoughts and actions, positive things begin to happen. I hope you have discovered this already as you have put elements from the first five chapters into practice. But just as important is to be bold and disciplined in trusting God and turning more of your life over to this higher power, because good and positive things begin to happen then, too. As numerous people have told me over the years in one way or another, "It just seems like when I pray, God works. When I pray, coincidences begin to happen."

The power comes when we are bold and proactive in deciding on our behavior.

I have said that prayer at times but my prayer now, which is similar, is, "O God, I'm not looking for blessings to come into my life; I'm looking to be a blessing. Please make me a blessing today." I get on my knees and say this prayer every day, and something always happens

Repeating the Prayer of St. Francis can help us find this in ourselves: Lord, make me an instrument of your peace, Where there is hatred, let me sow peace, Where there is injury, pardon, Where there is doubt, faith, Where there is despair, hope, Where there is darkness, light, And where there is sadness, joy. O Divine Master, Grant that I may not seek so much to be consoled as to console, To be understood as to understand, To be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, It is in pardoning that we are pardoned, And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

I've never read a word of Ray Bradbury but somewhere I came across this quote: "Looking back over a lifetime, you see that love was the answer to everything." Love was the one thing, regardless of whatever else was happening all around me and whether I was aware of it or not, that was all the time at work—creating, hoping, healing, making all things new.

A reporter from The New York Times writes that one of her favorite party games is to ask a group of people this simple question: What is your oldest and most cherished grudge? She says that, without fail, every person unloads with shockingly specific, intimate details about their grudge. Career slights (intentional or not), offhand-yet-cutting remarks, bitter friendship dissolutions—nothing is too small or petty to be remembered. One of her favorite answers to this question came from a friend whose grudge stretched back to the second grade. A classmate—he still remembered her full name and could describe her in detail—was unkind about a new pair of Coke bottle-thick glasses he started wearing. Her insult wasn't particularly vicious, but he'd been quietly seething about it ever since. This reminded me of a woman I heard about who was well into her 80s and still remembered the day when she was five and her father gave the biggest ice cream cone to her sister.

I heard of a Jewish man who moved to the United States after World War II and became very successful at what he did. He had been in Auschwitz and had lost most of his family, but he was known as a man who had been able to forgive. Someone asked him once, "How can you possibly forgive the people who did that to you and your family? How are you able to forgive?" And the man said, "I was coming to America. I was coming to a new country. I wanted to start a new life. And I didn't want to bring Hitler and the Gestapo with me to my new life, so I forgave them and left them behind

Forgiveness is really for the person who is forgiving, not the offender. It's about freeing yourself. It doesn't mean that what they did is okay now or that you have to like it. It doesn't mean that you have to become their friend or reconcile with them. All of these things may occur, but they are not the primary functions or outcomes of the action of forgiveness.

There is a classic way of illustrating what happens to us when we can't forgive: holding onto our grudge is like drinking rat poison and waiting for the rat to die. I've also heard it expressed elsewhere as like burning down a house to get rid of the rat. Whatever the metaphor of the grudge, it seems that the rat is always the image of the wrong that gnaws away at us. Failing to forgive is more destructive of us, in other words, than the other person.

The phrase I often use is “So what? Now what?” I first used it with the University of Alabama football team a couple of years ago.

“So what?” means you are facing the reality that the door is closed and there’s no going back.

But if you face up to that fact, you enable yourself to begin to ask “Now what?” Now that the door is closed, what am I going to do?

You have to believe in your future; I can’t say this often enough, even if you don’t know just exactly what it is. You have to believe that, if this, whatever it is that has disappointed you, is not the future, something else will be. You have to believe, as they say, that if one door closes, there must be a window open somewhere. You have to find out what it is. You have to go in search of it. You have to sail away from the safe harbor and into the deep waters.

You have to believe that this is true of your life. Wherever you are presently, there is a future for you. It may seem like you are starting off in the worst place possible to reach a particular destination, maybe even to reach any destination that is worthwhile. You are nowhere, you feel, as you begin. And yet from where you are now, you can go anywhere. You have to be willing to boldly claim that!

But what I didn’t expect was that the first thing mentioned, the very first thing, was to “Stay Curious.” “Asking questions and discovering new things keeps you engaged with the world and with other people,” the expert interviewed in the article said. Studies reveal that this has longevity benefits because it provides community and hope for the future. Being interested in other people and other things takes us out of ourselves and reminds us that we are part of something far greater than just us and our current circumstances. We are more open and begin to experience what the future might hold when we are curious.

Paul “Bear” Bryant, the famous former head coach of the University of Alabama football team, used to tell his players and others, “Call your Momma, because I sure wish I could.”

But I pray there has been someone who lit up when you came into a room, who encouraged you and invested in you, who created a sense of expectation about what your life could become.

None of us has probably been in a situation quite like this, but what is our response, who comes to mind, when we ask ourselves: Who has encouraged me when everyone else was saying I should quit or it couldn't be done? Who believed in me when no one else did? Who has planted words of confidence and expectation deep into my mind and heart?

There is a power in recognizing that we complement each other in our efforts. To have the possibility of going from above average, or even average, in what you do alone to invincible when you're with someone else is no small thing. We have the ability to raise each other to new heights.

As someone has said, "None of us is as strong as all of us." I agree wholeheartedly with this statement. In fact, I think you could take out the word strong and put any number of words in its place: smart, talented, brave, determined, resilient, daring. There is strength in the numbers that combine to reach for any great thing. None of us is as hopeful as all of us.

The greatest gift you can give someone else is the gift of hope. Hope provides meaning and a future, no matter what the circumstances may be around us right at that moment. Therefore, resolve to give someone hope. Give everyone you meet hope in every situation you can. We probably wouldn't be where we are now if someone had not given us the gift of hope.

Robert Louis Stevenson, the writer of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *Treasure Island*, wrote, "Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds you plant."

To create lasting value with one's life is the most significant thing one can do.

Providing hope, encouraging others, planting seeds that will flourish and grow, influencing people who will go on to influence others, giving your life away to ensure that someone else has the tools to create a life that has value—these are the surest ways I know for what you do to last forever.

Abraham Lincoln near the beginning of the long, grinding conflict of the Civil War to keep the country united and make it free for everyone: “The struggle of today, is not altogether for today— it is for a vast future also.” We must perceive what we do in the same way.

When we believe in our impact, we begin to help the dreams of others come true.

“The Paradoxical Commandments”: People are illogical, unreasonable and self-centered. Love them anyway. If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives. Do good anyway. If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway. The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway. Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway. The biggest men and women with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest men and women with the smallest minds. Think big anyway. People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs. Fight for a few underdogs anyway. What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway. People really need help but may attack you if you do help them. Help people anyway. Give the world the best you have and you’ll get kicked in the teeth. Give the world the best you have anyway. It’s the rare person who can live up to these commandments because it involves continuing to build and fight and pursue and give regardless of what you are getting back. Nevertheless, I encourage you to try to be that rare person because sometimes what you get back when you live this way is a changed and liberated life.

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“Oh Lord, I’m not looking for blessings to come into my life, I’m looking to be a blessing. Please make me a blessing,” each day for a week and see what happens.