

## Which stage of change are you in?

I believe that all of us are either in a state of change or are in need of change. There was some research conducted through Tufts University which helped to illustrate the stages of change. I like to apply it to the counseling process because it helps me to know how best to encourage healing growth in people. The Bible addresses that we are all constantly to renew our minds, depart from sin, strive to be more like Christ and press on to win the prize. These are only a few of many Biblical teachings that would validate our continual need for changed lives through action. Prayerfully consider where you may be in the following stages.

**Precontemplation:** Precontemplators have no intention of making changes in their lives at the present. This may be because they feel that their situation is hopeless, God doesn't care about them or because perhaps they have tried to change and were unsuccessful. They often use denial and defensiveness to keep from moving forward.

*Strategy:* Such individuals need help in seeing themselves as God does. They are desperate for hope. When I encounter this person, I try to get them to attach to my hope and faith. At times, when they can see hope through another person, they are more inclined to move forward. They don't feel so alone.

**Contemplation:** Those in the contemplation stage are aware that they have a problem and have begun to think seriously about doing something about it. However, it is very easy to get stuck in the contemplation stage for years. Traps include the search for absolute certainty. Some wait on *the voice of the Lord* forever before they will take action. It is a classical subconscious strategy among Christians to rationalize not making needed changes in life (e.g. "I am waiting for the Lord to tell me if my marriage is even worth working on.") Many enter counseling in this stage.

*Strategy:* Contemplators need some reality therapy. They need to realize that a decision not to change is still a decision which will reap consequences. When I am able to show them clearly the consequences to where their indecisiveness is leading, they often can begin to move through their fears of change.

**Preparation:** Most people in this stage are planning to

take action, but often need help. They have begun thinking more about the future than about the past. They either start seeing clearly the potential of positive consequences as a result of change or they fear the negative consequences which could accompany the lack of change. Both are good motivators. Both are reinforced scripturally.

*Strategy:* Preparers are ready to develop a firm, orderly plan of action. They are easy to motivate once they make their intended change public (i.e. to the counselor, to family, to the church etc.).

**Action:** Here we can observe the individual clearly and purposefully modifying belief systems, attitudes and behaviors. This is the busiest stage of change.

*Strategy:* People in the action stage need to apply their sense of commitment and conviction to the change. *Countering* is extremely important. Put off the old and put on the new (Ephesians 4:22-24). For every negative behavior, attitude, thought that you put off (stop doing), you must put on (start doing) a positive counter behavior or thought (e.g. instead of raging at your spouse or child when they do something wrong, give them a hug and tell them you love them). Lots of encouragement is needed in this stage.

**Maintenance:** Often far more difficult to achieve than action. Maintenance can last a lifetime. Or may only be needed for that first year until your new healthy actions (or inactions) become habitual.

*Strategy:* People in maintenance must employ the same strategies as those in the action stage: commitment, countering, modification of the environment and healthy relationships, to name a few.

**Termination:** The problem no longer presents unmanageable temptation. This particular cycle of change is done, and you are preparing for what God has next for you.

Take heart. Each victorious change you work through makes you stronger for the next.

*May God richly bless you in the new*