

*Part 1*

**PREPARATION**



## INTRODUCTION

# CLEARING AND TAKING BACK YOUR GROUND

*Her desert will blossom like Eden,  
her barren wilderness like the garden of the LORD.  
Joy and gladness will be found there.  
Songs of thanksgiving will fill the air.*

—ISAIAH 51:3

**E**VERY YEAR MILLIONS OF us make New Year's resolutions. We solidly resolve to eliminate every bad habit, eat healthier, exercise more, spend less, and generally become *better* human beings.

This is a perfect system because it gives us yet another opportunity to tell ourselves that next week, next month, after the holidays, and with the New Year...we will suddenly be different! We don't have to be different today.

For many of us, the resolution exercise is quite inspiring and lasts at least one week.

Then we sink back into the old ways of thinking and doing. The commitments we made are abandoned for another year. I know this because the gyms are packed on January 2. You can't find a parking space or get near a machine! (Be patient, the parking lot and the locker room will clear out in seven to ten days, and you'll have the place all to yourself.)

I also know this because I've done it too. (And I bet you can relate.)

Why don't these heartfelt changes "stick"? Why can't we get the

traction we need to move forward in our lives and create positive change?

Perhaps, in part, it is because we try to plant good things on top of garbage heaps. For real and lasting change to occur, we must clear the ground and turn the soil. Before we can plant what is good into our lives, we must remove the stumps and stones.

We shouldn't expect to wake up one bright morning and be magically *different*. When we go to bed on the last night of the year, we will not miraculously wake up with new habits and disciplines! That is just ridiculous.

Preparing the ground is backbreaking, not-so-glamorous work. It requires that we dig below the surface. It requires that we realize that enduring change (and the most beautiful gardens) always grows from the inside out.

## ROOT BOUND

*Beliefs that limit you*

**A** ROOT-BOUND PLANT HAS RUN out of room to grow. The life-giving root system becomes so confined and twisted that it cannot bring nutrients to the vine. The same can happen with our *roots*, which are the beliefs that bind us to our current condition and shape our future.

A story that illustrates this is of a farmer who plants a large field of pumpkins. Early in the season, he walks through the rows inspecting the new crop. The pumpkins are just beginning to appear on the vine.

Thrown off to the side of the rows is a glass jar. As an experiment, he places one of the tiny pumpkins (still on the vine) inside the jar. When he returns a few weeks later, the crop is flourishing! The pumpkins have grown so much... with the exception of one. The pumpkin inside the jar has grown to fill the glass. It has completely conformed to this prison and simply run out of room to grow.

What happened to that pumpkin also happens to people. What we believe about ourselves, others, our future, and even our past will shape our growth and influence our results. If we want to grow, we must learn to break the glass of self-limiting beliefs.

*If what we believe about ourselves and what we believe about our future possibility are contained in a vessel that will not allow us to stretch and grow, we become root-bound.*

Picture yourself holding a glass jar containing your current life—a life conformed within that glass jar of your own beliefs about...

- Yourself and your abilities
- Your future and your possibilities
- Other people
- Life situations and events

As you continue reading you will learn to break the jar of self-limiting beliefs and free the roots of your potential.

It is easy for the roots of belief to become twisted and tangled. When they do, our relationships and results suffer. Unbinding the roots is a four-step process:

1. Identify the beliefs that limit you.
2. Understand how those beliefs are impacting your results and relationships. (Understanding the impact will motivate you to make the changes necessary.)
3. Exchange self-limiting beliefs for empowering ones.
4. Identify beliefs you want to add to yourself. These are possibilities you may not have considered until now, but they are possibilities. (And they can be yours.)

### **IDENTIFY YOUR SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS**

This is a deeply reflective exercise, one that will ask you to reach below the surface and confront deep-seated and long-standing assumptions. You will discover things about yourself you have not known, and you will understand yourself and your relationships better than ever before. There are no *right* or *wrong* answers here. This is a little excavation, a little exploration, and a whole lot of reflection.

Journaling is a great tool for this exercise. If you are not keeping a journal now, this is a marvelous reason to begin. Think of this as your

personal *blog*. The entries mark your journey and become *memorial stones* you place along the way. (By the end of the exercise I hope you are absolutely hooked on the idea of blogging or journaling. It is one of the best ways to process what you discover on your journey.)

An easy way to capture and catalog your beliefs is to draw a line down the middle of a page, creating two columns. Label the first column *Empowering* and the second column *Limiting*. Now you are ready to find the beliefs that drive your life and shape your future.

### **WHAT YOU BELIEVE BECOMES YOUR TRUTH**

Positive beliefs empower you. They lift your head. These are the beliefs that make you resilient and give you the courage to press on even in the face of adversity.

As Noelle Nelson cites in an article for *Futurist Magazine*: “Beliefs are the bedrock upon which all experience is built. Your success depends on the beliefs you hold. What you believe determines how you go about things, whether you seek out one type of situation or another, and what you are or are not willing to try. Beliefs that in the past wouldn’t have held you back nowadays will.”<sup>1</sup>

It will not surprise you to learn that the most successful people are also the most hopeful and optimistic. Their beliefs empower, energize, and embolden them. These people hold life events in that context—they evaluate what happens (even failure and hardship) differently.

Negative beliefs, on the other hand, limit you. They are the *lies* you tell yourself about yourself, about others, and the future. The big problem—the root-bound problem—is that the lies you tell yourself actually become your truth. This is what author Brian Tracy calls the “Law of Belief.” Whatever you believe, with feeling, becomes your reality.<sup>2</sup>

This is not a new discovery. It has always been so. And it is so with you. You believe some things about yourself, others, your past, and the

future that simply are not true. They have become true because you have believed something and you have acted on it. Robert K. Merton, a distinguished sociologist and Columbia University professor, was first to call this the “self-fulfilling prophecy.”<sup>3</sup>

What do you believe about yourself, your finances, relationships, spiritual life, and health? What do you believe about your career and your future? These beliefs are writing the story of your life.

What you believe about yourself and your possibility need not be true. If you believe it, it is true for you. You will consciously and unconsciously move in that direction. Whether it is a belief about your job, finances, health, relationships, or any other important area of your life, you are steadily moving in the direction of your thoughts. Indeed, there is a prophet inside of you predicting the future.

Think of it this way: Beliefs bear thoughts. Thoughts bear words. Words inspire behaviors. And behaviors give birth to results.

The results you are getting right now, in every area of your life, reflect what you believe! If you want a new result, you must get a new belief.

I have been collecting and cataloging beliefs for some time. I find them in letters and e-mails. I listen for them as women tell me their stories. If you and I were speaking now, I would love to hear your story, and I would listen for the beliefs that are summarizing your past and shaping your future.

Here is a peek at my collection. Do any of these resonate with you?

<b>Empowering Beliefs</b>	<b>Limiting Beliefs</b>
I am learning and growing every day.	I am too old to start over or learn new things.
I am beautiful.	I don't fit in.
I like myself.	It is very important for others to approve of me.
I do many things well.	I am not very talented.



<b>Empowering Beliefs</b>	<b>Limiting Beliefs</b>
My future is full of possibility.	If I expect too much, I'll be disappointed.
I try new approaches.	I can't afford to take any chances.
I am a valuable resource to my employer.	I am just one small person in a huge company.
I can make a real difference for others.	People will take advantage of you.
I have accomplished many things.	I haven't achieved anything of real importance.
I can profit even from failure.	Failure is not an option.
Opportunity is waiting for me.	I am afraid of the future.
It is important to take care of myself.	It is selfish to take care of myself.
I have many options.	If I blow this opportunity, I don't know what I'll do.
I believe my future is secure.	There are no guarantees in life.
I expect to be successful.	I don't deserve to be successful.
I am blessed.	Good things don't last.

There is a remarkable difference between these two lists, and I guarantee there is a huge difference in the results they inspire. As you read on, you will see how beliefs on both sides of this table impact our behaviors and, ultimately, our results.

But first you are ready to discover the beliefs operating below the surface at your roots.

Begin by listening to what you say *to yourself* and what you say *about yourself*. These thoughts and statements reflect what you believe about you—who you are and what you are capable of. For example when you say, “I can’t,” “I’ve never been good at...,” or “I am afraid...,” reach behind the words to find the belief and write it down in the limiting beliefs column.

When you think, “I can,” “I am getting better at...,” or “I am excited about...,” capture the beliefs in the empowering column.

As you gather your beliefs, you will probably find some *outdated self-perceptions*. Perceptions become outdated when you have changed or grown, but you don't recognize it. When you look in the mirror or reflect on your life, you still see the *old you*. When you talk to yourself or about yourself, you tell an *old story*. The old story draws you in and shapes your decisions and your expectations.

Outdated self-perceptions also occur when you suspect a positive change is really a temporary condition. A good example is the weight-loss *yo-yo* many women ride. (Like a yo-yo, we move up and down on the scale and in our dress size.) One woman explained it to me this way: "My closet is not arranged by seasons; it is arranged by sizes! I have everything in there from a size 6 to a size 16!" That's not only expensive and space consuming—it is also unhealthy and exhausting!

Here's where a faulty belief system comes into play. I can punish my body with some strange fad-of-a-diet and lose the weight. The problem is, as I slip victoriously into my size 6, I am still thinking like a size 16!

I am not a size 6 in my own mind. I am a size 16, posing like a 6. I am an imposter! Even as people tell me how great I look, I am terrified of losing my victory. I know that I am one cheeseburger away from riding that scale all the way back up!

In this example, I cannot hold on to my success because I don't really expect to. There is a part of me that fully expects to gain the weight back. In fact, I don't throw away the larger sizes because I expect to wear them again. And that is exactly what happens.

As one woman put it: "I believe I can lose weight, and I believe I can gain weight. I just don't believe I can maintain my ideal weight." (And until now in her life she has been absolutely right!)

Outdated self-perceptions are just one example of self-limiting beliefs. There are others, and I encourage you to find every limiting belief that is operating in your life. In the pages to come you will learn where to look for them and what to do once you find them.

Notice, for example, what you say and believe about your future.

Questions like these will help you isolate what you believe is in store for you:

- What do you say and think about the future?
- What do you expect as you begin a new day?
- What are you bracing yourself for?
- What are you afraid will happen?
- What are you worrying about?

### **CHECK YOUR GLASSES AND UPDATE YOUR FRAMES**

Do you believe the future contains amazing possibilities for you, or are you frightened of what the future may bring? If we walk in fear of the future rather than in confidence, fear becomes the lens through which we look. With that perspective, we will naturally respond to the perceived threat, not the opportunity of a situation.

*Problems are magnified when you look through glasses of fear.*

A woman wrote to me recently asking for advice about a challenging job situation. In her midfifties, she worried that she could not keep up with new technologies and processes. The theme of her letter was absolute, crippling fear. She was afraid of failing, of being fired, of not having the skills to find a new job, and ultimately of losing everything she had worked for.

Keep in mind, none of this had actually happened—she was just afraid that it would. She had managed to thoroughly *catastrophize* the situation. Like a snowball rolling down a hill, her fear was growing and building momentum. It was, in fact, overtaking her. Through the lens of fear, every change at work looked insurmountable, any word of correction sounded like judgment, and the smallest mistake felt like complete failure.

She ended her letter by asking, “What can I do?”

My answer was fairly straightforward. “You must change what you believe about yourself and your future and evict fear from your life.”

Once you have identified what you believe about you and your future, investigate what you expect from and believe about others. These are important clues to help you manage relationships and understand your responses.

In my book *Designed for Success*, we explored how we limit relationships and results by the labels we place on others. Once I label you, I will look for and notice everything that lines up with that label, and I will dismiss or ignore what does not. I will search for and validate what I already believe is true.<sup>4</sup>

Let’s say I have labeled you as “Defensive” based on our past communications. Today I need to speak with you about something. It’s not a big deal, but I know you will make it a big deal, because that is what you do. As I approach you, I see the word *DEFENSIVE* tattooed in giant capital letters across your forehead. (For good measure, I mentally underline that. Now you are DEFENSIVE.)

Physically, I brace myself for your defensive response. (That’s fair. We’ve been here before, and I’m not an idiot.) As I approach you, my heart beats faster, my body is rigid, and my facial expression probably reflects my expectation (“This is going to get ugly”). My brow is furrowed, my jaw is tight, and if I am able to force a smile, it will be through tightly clenched teeth!

What does all that look like to you?

You might say it looks like an attack, and in that case your natural response will be to defend.

We have our discussion, and it does become confrontational. I walk away thinking, “That woman is so rigidly DEFENSIVE!”

Everything I expected from you has come true—not because you are defensive, but because I acted on my expectation that you would be. I reached in and pulled that behavior out of you! (It’s a pretty neat trick, isn’t it?)

It is absolutely true. What you believe about and expect from

others you will search for and even reinforce. In the example above, if I want to change the pattern of my communication with you, I must remove the negative label. The communication cannot and will not change until the label or the expectation does.

Take a moment to assess the relationships in your personal and professional life.

- Are some relationships showing signs of strain?
- Are there people you have trouble communicating with or getting results from?
- What are you expecting from these people?
- What do you believe about them?
- How are those expectations and beliefs reflected in your voice, tone, and posture?
- In what ways are your expectations becoming self-fulfilling prophecies?
- How are your beliefs limiting your relationships and your results with others?

As you work through these reflective exercises, you may find the *Limiting* list growing longer than the *Empowering* list. If so, celebrate! That means you are locating what is holding you back, and you are one step closer to moving those obstacles out of the way.

The beliefs operating in your life were planted by you, by others, and by your experiences over time. Through this exercise you have seen how they have taken hold and how they have promoted (released) or stunted (confined) your growth or personal potential.

You are not finished with your lists! It is time to exchange your

self-limiting beliefs for ones that will empower and infuse you with hope and expectancy. In this process you will need to be patient. This exchange will not happen magically or instantly. It is a process that will unfold as you read on.

### **JOURNALING EXERCISE**

Locating the self-limiting beliefs is the first step to unbinding your roots. That is the excavation. Once you have done that, take the time to reflect on how these assumptions help or harm you. Explore the impact they have on your life. Review your list and ask yourself:

1. What behaviors do these beliefs invite?
2. How do they push me forward or hold me back?
3. What do these beliefs cause me to think about and focus on?
4. How do they make me feel?
5. How did I acquire these beliefs?

When you take the time to answer questions like these, something very important will begin to happen. At a very conscious level you will understand your responses, and that empowers you to make the changes you would like to see. You recognize the beliefs, understand their impact, and purposefully work to create a new context for yourself.