



AWAKENING THE POWER WITHIN YOU (Enjoy Your Everyday Freewill Life)

Self-Enrichment and Inspirational series ...

“Life is all about making choices. Your life is a result of the choices you make... if you don’t like your life, it is time to start making better choices, and always do your best to learn from the bad ones. Chance and change begins with choice.”

Have you ever noticed how often people say the words “*have to*”? Have you noticed how often you say them? Here are some frequently heard “*have to*” statements:

- “I have to go to work tomorrow.”
- “I have to visit my parents.”
- “I have to take my kids to the zoo this Saturday.”
- “I have to prepare dinner for my spouse.”

I am sure you have said those statements at one time or another. I have! Here’s the truth: you don’t have to do anything if you don’t want to. That’s how free you are. Of course, there will be consequences if you choose not to do something that you need to do.

Now, why all the fuss over the words “*have to*”? Here’s the psychological-truth: When we say the words *have to*, we lost sight of the truth that we do everything out of choice. In other words, we have free will. We choose to do whatever we do. The bottom line to all this is critical if you want to be mentally and emotionally healthy. A ‘*have to*’ attitude toward life makes you a bitter victim while a ‘**choose to**’ attitude makes you a healthy victor of life!

John was a classic example of how a ‘*have to*’ mind-set can destroy you. He was tremendously bitter about his marriage with Jane, because he felt that he had to marry Jane as she was pregnant with their child toward the end of their senior year. John did not feel ready for marriage, his values is against abortion but felt under duress to marry Jane for the sake of the baby. He married her carrying busloads of resentment toward Jane, as if his choice to marry her was all her fault.

During one of my sessions with John, he said, “I had to marry her, I had no choice!” “Objectively speaking, that isn’t really true, is it?” I asked. “What do you mean?” he shot back. “I’m not the kind of person to ask a girl to have a baby out of wedlock, much less have an abortion.” “Nevertheless, those were some options available to you, weren’t they?” I pressed on. “No! They weren’t. I couldn’t have asked her to do those things. They were not options for me.” John retorted.

“Look, John, I think I know where your bitterness and resentment are coming from. It seems to me that the bitterness you are carrying around the way you got married has to do with your refusal to see that you did have choices, both before Jane became pregnant and afterward,” I suggested. “Prior to Jane’s becoming pregnant, you both made the choice to be sexually involved, and also chose not to make certain she couldn’t get pregnant. When she became pregnant, you both had some choices even then. Because of your values, abortion and adoption were options you were not willing to choose. So, you chose to get married instead. You and Jane had choices.” I replied. “By not being willing to admit this and take responsibility for the choices you made, you now believe that you were forced into marrying Jane by circumstances. And because you believe that you had to marry her, you resent her. You blame her, and you blame the circumstances you found yourself in, rather than take responsibility for the choices you made all along the way that helped create those circumstances.”

John started to squirm in his chair, “What would you have done if you were in my shoes? Would you have felt that you had a choice?”



“The truth is, you had some options open to you, even if they didn’t seem like options. You made the choice that **best fit your values** – what you believed to be right. Your wife didn’t make you marry her. The circumstances didn’t make you marry her. You chose to marry her!” I said this last statement with an exclamation mark in my voice – I wanted to make it stick with John.

“If that is true, how is it supposed to help me with the bitterness I feel about the whole thing?” John responded. “If you accept responsibility for choosing to marry Jane, your bitterness toward her will ultimately make no sense. What would there be to be bitter about?” I said, “To be emotionally healthy is tied to allowing the truth about all this to take precedence over how you feel about it and giving the truth enough time to do its job in your soul. The truth is, you chose to marry Jane even though you didn’t have to. She is not to blame for your choice. She owes you nothing for the decision you made. Your feelings of resentment are real, but you don’t actually have a legitimate reason for being bitter toward her. These truths need to become a lot more important than how you feel right now.”

One of the most difficult tasks we face is that of taking responsibility for how we feel and how we act. The natural human bent is toward blaming other people or things for the unhappiness we feel and the actions we take. Yet, blaming somebody or something outside us for our feelings and our actions is a cop-out.

This was the struggle underlying John’s bitterness over his marriage to Jane. John did not want to take responsibility for the choices he had made, so he fell into a ‘*have to*’ mind-set that made it easy to blame Jane and the surrounding circumstance. Once he had convinced himself that he had to marry Jane, he was able to build up a mountain of resentment and bitterness toward her, as if she were the enemy. Doing that only added more problems to his real problem, and causing ripple effects to his child as well – growing up in a bitter and resentful environment.

The unwillingness to accept responsibility for one’s own problems is a primary reason that consultation or counselling doesn’t work for some people. People who are stuck with bitterness and resentment in their lives are people who claimed to have done everything they could to deal with the problem, and nothing helped! The truth of the matter is that they didn’t really do anything of substance to face the problem responsibly. The beginning point of every life’s challenges is to admit that we have problems and to accept responsibility for solving them.

As in John’s case, he concludes “I didn’t have to marry Jane, I just chose that option because it fit who I am and what I want to stand for the best.” “I guess I’ve been using her as a scapegoat. I just didn’t want to take responsibility for the choice I made. I suddenly feel like a real coward hiding behind my wife for all the problems, using her as a shield against being responsible.”

More than a few of us walk around with hundreds of ‘*have to*’s’ dominating our thoughts and, much like John, feel pretty bitter toward people, work, and life in general. We feel like victims, not victors. The truth we all need to see is that we don’t have to do anything. Seeing this leads to greater acceptance of personal responsibility for what we choose to do in life and, consequently, a lot less bitterness and resentment. Now, try out the following statements and see how they feel:

- “I choose to go to work. Given my strengths, I am going to contribute a much more meaningful and purposeful job.”
- “I choose to visit my parents and share some family time with them.”
- “I choose to love my children and spend more quality and bonding time with them.”
- “I choose to be happy in my life and count my blessings with what I have.”

If these statements have the ring of truth to them, you are on your way to living a healthier life. If they don’t, you have a lot more work to do – but keep working, it will be worth your while.



Growth-work –

For the next week, I want you to keep a record of all the times you tell yourself you *have to* do something. For example, let's say someone at work whom you despise his character (a gossip, but yet, someone you need to work closely to get things done) asks you to have lunch every week.

A faulty self-talk would be: I have to have lunch with him, or it may offend him. I can't really say no, even though that is what I really want to say. Why do such people always exist in my life?

Emotional and Physical Response: Tense physically; feels irritated and fear-driven; avoid running into him at work; blaming your life and who you are not (being assertive); getting distracted at work.

A 'Choose To' Self-Talk: I don't have to say yes, as there are no obligations to having lunch with him. I can tell the truth that I already have lunch partners. So he can always join us if he preferred. I could thank him for asking me to have lunch with him – it is a compliment to have been asked. I could try to eat with him now and then, like once a month, just to show some courtesy and interest. Whatever I do, it is my choice.

Emotional and Physical Response: Less tense; feel calmer; more at peace; able to manage the working relationships much better; able to focus on getting the job done.

The thrust of this assignment is to help you fight your '*have to's*' with the truth that you always have options, the freedom to choose from among them, and responsible for what you decided to do. I encourage you to prove this truth in your life as often as you can. In the process, you will see more clearly than ever before that you don't have to be a victim in life or put up with the emotions that go along with things you hate to do. Remember, you are about as free in life as you think you are. It's not in others nor in a circumstance; it is all in your mind, the choices you make, and the responsibilities toward the decision you take.

"Today I choose life. Every morning when I wake up I can choose joy, happiness, negativity, pain... To feel the freedom that comes from being able to continue to make mistakes and choices - today I choose to feel life, not to deny my humanity but embrace it." Kevyn Aucoin

"And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" John 8:32

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