

Building a Life

How do you build a life? In essence, it's very simple.

- The person we want to become affects the things we believe.
- The things we believe affect the choices we make.
- The choices we make affect the life we build.

Of course, our beliefs are also choices: we choose what to believe, and we choose what to do, so it might be more accurate to say, "The things we choose to believe affect the things we choose to do." Either way, the basic point is clear: the choices we make about our beliefs are more significant, more fundamental in shaping our lives, than the choices we make about our actions.

Life gives us very few absolute certainties, so most of the time we have to act on the basis of our beliefs. Every belief is a calculated risk, based in part on the evidence we have at hand at the time, in part on the person we want to become, and in part on other, deeper beliefs. All of these can change, but in the long run, the person we want to become is probably the most significant factor for most of us.

We choose which risks to take, and every choice carries risk because life is a risky business. We can, perhaps, choose safety, but there is more to life than always being safe: the choice to avoid risk is dangerous, because it means shutting the door on many possibilities for living fully and joyfully.

Life is not only about the choices we make: random events and other people also affect us, sometimes very deeply. Accidents happen, people choose to help us or harm us, events can suddenly throw us off the course we thought we were taking.

Over the years, people we love will hurt us, people we trust will let us down; some of this will be deliberate, some of it accidental, and some of it because the people concerned were just not paying enough attention at the time. These things happen to us all. Our lives are shaped in part by the things which happen to us, but more by the way we respond: we can grasp opportunities and forgive hurts, we can play it safe and harbour grudges; we can use what we are given, the good and the bad, or we can ignore it; we can choose to respond to events in a thousand different ways.

Jesus shows us a way to live: He shows us what is possible. The question is: do we want it? His life offers a possibility and a challenge. My life is shaped, to a large extent, by the person I want to become – so, do I want to become someone like Jesus?

Do I want to embrace a life of love, the sort of love which values truth, justice and freedom? It may seem impossible, beyond my reach, but that's not the point: the question is not whether I think I can live that way, but whether I want to. And, anyway, if I chose to follow Him, to become like Him, He promises to be with me, to guide and strengthen me. The big question is: do I want that kind of life, or do I want to head in a different direction?

Next steps

This was written by Paul Hazelden as a contribution to the *Strong Foundations* exploration. You are welcome to use it and distribute it how you like, but feedback would be appreciated.

- Is it helpful?
- Would you change anything?
- Would you like to talk about how we can learn from each other about how best to follow Jesus where we are?

You can contact me through the web form at mad-bristol or join the conversation on the *Strong Foundations* site.

- Web form: <http://mad-bristol.org.uk/contact/>
- Strong Foundations: <http://strongfoundations.pbworks.com>

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