

6. Cognitive Story

What are you Believing?



God has given us minds to think. We are rational beings. However, much of our thinking has been distorted and corrupted. We spend a lot of time working for things that we believe others will admire us for having, like smart kids, lovely clean homes, fast cars, slimness, beauty, sports ability, etc. Yet do you really love others that have these?

Could we not be spending time and money for little return? We don't love people for what they have but for how they love us, so why on earth are we killing ourselves to look good? It hardly seems worth spending time and money for a fleeting moment of approval.

Ephesians 4:

v. 17 -You must no longer live in the futility

of your thinking'

v. 18a - darkened in their understanding

v. 18b - separated from the life of God because of ignorance

v.18c - due to the hardening of their hearts.

Futility meaning:

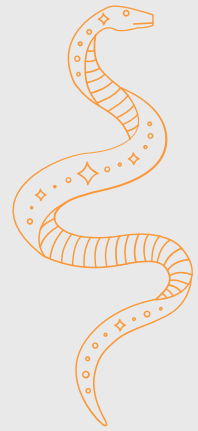
Useless, going nowhere, doesn't work! Unclear, lacking in knowledge.

Not depending on the Spirit and Word.

Unbelief, wilful self-reliance, and conceit.

We fail to pay attention to the person who knows the worst about us, yet loves us the most, rather paying attention to things and other people. We need to understand how our thinking is wrong, or distorted, so that we can put it right. It's interesting, that it was the mind that Satan attacked when he tempted Eve.

He planted the seed of doubt about her own mind by asking - **"Did God really say?"** Then he planted doubt about God's benevolence using exaggeration **"You must not eat from any tree?"** followed by an accusation that God was withholding vital information from them **"You will not surely die"**. He then entices Eve with apparent, new, useful information - **knowledge of good and evil, which sounded good and seemed logical**. She could see that the fruit was good food, pleasant to look at with apparent properties for gaining wisdom!



'The God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. For God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness", made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge, of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.'

2 Corinthians 4:4

That was the beginning of foolish thinking and the belief that I can gain life and happiness in my own way, apart from God.

So, to this day, the gentiles are separated from God because of their ignorance, (Ephesians 4:18), **lack of knowledge about their need of God or that He can and is to be depended upon.**

Ignoring God's call and His love is the root cause of where we have gone wrong. It is at the point we deviate from His word of truth and turn to our own wrong thinking to making life work is where our problems start.

This is our fundamental wrong thinking: **"I can make life work without God", "I can live apart from God."** Our foolish thinking came as a result of the fall. Even we Christians, still have many areas of our lives, over which we stay in charge.

Rather than trusting God for results, and obeying his word, we become pride-filled by being self-willed (my way), self-centred (I want), self-righteous (judgmental, critical of others) or self-sufficient (trusting in our own assets and accomplishments).

There are many scriptures we 'judge' as not really applying to ourselves with statements like, 'I can't believe God forgives me because I don't feel forgiven'. We use emotion and reason to judge God's word.



Proverbs 3:5-7 tells us how to become dependent beings says: **"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil."**

Whatever we give **authority to in place of God's Word we make gods or idols** in our lives. We listen to other voices and allow them to have control over us. These voices from the past may be on the thrones of our minds. They are;

- Parents, teachers, peers.
- My own opinion
- Other people we look up to.
- The world system, our culture and Satan.

We often observe other people to see how they make life work and what they have regarded as vitally important then follow their behaviour. Like the dad who shouts, and we all obeyed him as children. Therefore, when situations are not going our way, we resort to shouting. Perhaps he often said, "You must try harder and do better" so we are seldom pleased with anything we do and feel guilty in case we could have done better. We learn in two ways:

1. **Observation of others.** As a child experiences this world, he forms mental images of it. This image is gained mainly from significant people in his life, his parents, siblings, teachers, and culture. They give him a distorted picture of what society regards as important like status, age, wealth, intellect, education, sport, beauty. Eventually their message is adopted, and he now believes the same. We observe, contemplate and form an opinion.



Some of the images of our own world may be pleasant, but there are many profoundly painful ones. Dr James Dobson says, "All of us suffer from inferiority."

2. **Painful events** and hurts impress mental pictures upon our minds that are left there long after the event has passed. The person then learns to respond, not to the word but to his picture of the world.

His Picture: People Hurt you
His Response: I will trust no one



Children also try to control their world by taking blame for situations ("If I caused it maybe I can fix it," is better than "You caused it so I can't fix it.") It's to do with independence from God. If a painful event is not under my control, I feel helpless. If it's my fault I can do something about it, for example a child whose parents' divorce may believe "I wasn't loveable enough to make them stay together". A child who is sexually abused may say, "I'm bad, only worth using, so I must have deserved it."

Have you ever listened to what you're thinking? How many words do you think go around your head in one minute? Do you answer yourself? (That's normal!) We talk to ourselves. Some of our thoughts are unprompted. They are like birds that land in a tree, they simply arrive. Other thoughts are attitudes or impressions. They are like 'senses' without words, and if you are not sure what they mean you need to ask yourself what you are believing. You may feel uncomfortable or upset by a remark and not sure what is wrong. When asked what you feel you may find that you believe that you are inferior to others present.

Some thoughts play repeatedly like audiotapes in our minds. Below is a list of tapes you may be playing to yourself. Identify the ones you believe to be true. It is important to identify and correct wrong thinking. One method is the ABC Theory discovered by Dr Albert Ellis and is now known as Cognitive Therapy. This establishes the link between thinking and feeling.

A – The **ACTIVATING** event

B – The **BELIEF** about the event

C – The **CONSEQUENT** emotion.

It is not what happens to me that makes me feel the way I do, but what I believe about the event that gives rise to the feelings I am experiencing.

A - I sent a text to a friend but had not received a reply.

B - I believe 'They haven't bothered to reply, so they don't care.'

C - Emotion = anger, depression.

Truth – My friends phone was stolen



Knowing the truth caused the feelings to change. When I realized that they hadn't responded to my message the anger changed to acceptance.

In John 8:31-32 Jesus said, **"If you hold to my teaching, you really are my disciples, then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."** This concept has been taught in Scripture for years.

The greatest hindrance to knowing God could be the mind. In 2 Corinthians 10:4 we learn to not fight with people but renew our minds. The weapons of our warfare are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have **DIVINE POWER TO DEMOLISH STRONGHOLDS**. We **DEMOLISH ARGUMENTS AND EVERY PRETENTION** that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we **TAKE CAPTIVE EVERY THOUGHT** to make it **OBEDIENT TO CHRIST**" - obedient to truth.

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SOME TAPES YOU MAY BE PLAYING TO YOURSELF

1. I should help everyone who needs it.
2. I am inferior.
3. God doesn't love me.
4. I am too bad to be loved.
5. It is terrible when things go wrong.
6. Self-discipline is hard to achieve.
7. Strong people don't ask for help.
8. Anxiety is dangerous.
9. My childhood will always affect me.
10. I need to be sure in order to decide issues.
11. I must look after No. 1.
12. There must be a perfect solution
13. Making a mistake is terrible.
14. It is better not to tell people my problems.
15. People will let me down.
16. Knowing 'why' is essential to my peace of mind.
17. I should never upset anyone.
18. If I am criticized, I must be a bad person.
19. Other people are a threat to me.
20. Deserve to be punished for my mistakes.
21. I am wrong if a person is hurt by my words and actions.

22. There are ways in which I am defective as a person.
23. It is better to keep my thoughts to myself.
24. People should trust me.
25. People must love me if I am to feel good.
26. People should be condemned when they do wrong.
27. I must do everything perfectly or I will not feel good.
28. People ought to follow the advice I give.
29. Possible is the same as probable.
30. I ought to do better... I ought to do better.
31. I can't change what I think.
32. Christians must never get upset.
33. I must never show weakness.
34. What's the use? Giving up is the best policy.
35. I must never tell people how [feel, they might dislike me.
36. The more I please people, the more they will like me.
37. It is terrible if people don't like me.
38. I am unattractive.
39. I have no talents.
40. I will never be any good.
41. I must get what I want to be happy.
42. I can't stand it if people don't like me.
43. I am stupid.

44. I can't do anything right.

45. People don't like me.

46. I'm lonely.

47. I'm sick.

48. I'm miserable.

49. I'm poor.

50. I'm uninteresting.

51. I'm a loner

52. I'm nervous.

Thinking Errors

1. Filtering

Taking the negative details of a situation/yourself and magnifying them while ignoring the positive aspects.

2. Polarised Thinking

Things are black or white, good or bad. You have to be perfect, or you are a failure: there is no middle ground. You use words like "always" "never".

3. Overgeneralization

Thinking that if something bad happens once it will repeatedly happen or will happen in other situations. Also believing that if you mess up once, you are likely to do it again, and give yourself a global label i.e., incompetent, stupid.

4. Internalising

Thinking that bad things that happen are automatically due to you rather than also considering external factors.

5. Catastrophising

You expect disaster. You hear about a problem and start 'what ifting..' 'What if tragedy strikes?' 'What if it happens to me?'

6. Mind reading/ jumping to conclusions

You believe you can tell what people are thinking and why they act the way they do. In particular, you are able to tell how they feel about you.

7. Should(s) You have a set of ironclad rules about how you and other people should act. You make your preferences into laws. People who violate the rules anger you, and you feel disappointed when you don't meet your own expectations of yourself.

8. Emotional reasoning

You think that what you feel must be true automatically. You feel stupid, therefore you are stupid.

9. Being right

Believing that you are deficient as a person and so cannot afford to make mistakes and therefore, defend yourself and your behaviour at all costs.

10. Predicting the Future - Fortune telling

Predicting negative outcomes for you based on insufficient evidence.

11. Magical Thinking

Thinking the solution to our personal problems depends on changing or improving our circumstances or by trying to think positively. Playing "if only" games

12. Labelling

You identify yourself / other people with your / their shortcomings so if they or yourself fail — failure; steal — thief; silly behaviour — stupid.

* These have been adapted from "Feeling Good Handbook" by Dr David Burns published by Penguin Books (Permission from William Morrow and Co New York).