

Controlling our Thoughts

Discussion Materials

Controlling our Thoughts

Truth Chapter 1

“We cannot always control circumstances, but with help and hard work, we can control our thoughts. Our primary focus in life, then, should not be on changing the circumstances surrounding us, although there is nothing wrong with improving them when we can. A much more important challenge in life is to make our mental tapes as truthful as possible so we can maturely handle whatever circumstances come our way.

Lies produce emotional misery.

Truth produces emotional health.

It's as simple as that.” [“The Lies We Believe” by Dr. Chris Thurman]

Comment on the above.

Discussion Questions:

- (1) What is truth? Where does your view come from?
- (2) “Things have to go my way for me to be happy”. Do you feel you agree with, disagree with or are you neutral on this statement?
- (3) “People are basically good”. How do you feel about this statement?
- (4) “I am only as good as what I do”. True, false or neutral? Why?
- (5) “It is my moral duty to meet all the needs of others”. From your perspective is this a religious lie or truth?
- (6) Have you bought into lies in the past that proved to be unprofitable for you? Explain.

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Self Chapter 2

It was Demosthenes who said, "Nothing is so easy as to deceive one's self; for what we wish we readily believe."

"The lies we deceive ourselves with, as Demosthenes suggested, are often what we wish were true. When such lies are brought to our attention, we often deny that we believe them because they seem so unrealistic and absurd. Our actions and emotions, however, reveal that we do believe the lies, and these lies greatly influence the way we look at ourselves, others, and the world around us." ["The Lies We Believe" by Dr. Chris Thurman]

Comment on the above.

Discussion Questions:

- (1) I must be perfect, yes or no? In which of the following areas are you the most inclined to be a perfectionist: job, parenting, relationships, play?
- (2) Unless everyone [or certain people(s)] loves and accepts me, I can't feel good about myself, yes or no? Which group must I try hardest to please: mate, parents, children, co workers, friends, enemies, God?
- (3) Because of pain, it's easier to avoid problems than to face them, agree or disagree? Why?
- (4) I can't be happy unless things go my way, true or false? What's wrong with having it may way?
- (5) Paul writes in the Bible "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation". Is contentment and happiness the same thing? If no, how do they differ?
- (6) It's someone else's fault. Why would someone want to blame another person for his situation? Have you fallen into this lie? How did it affect you?

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Worldly-Chapter 3

Wouldn't it be amazing if all advertisements were true? We'd all love to be admired by others because we drive the best car, cure damaged hair with the right shampoo, and jump like an NBA superstar because we drink a particular soft drink. But, alas, not all advertisements are true. In a childlike way, we want to believe them, but if we do we're headed for disappointment.

Most of us seldom test the validity of the messages swirling around us. And the more we listen and believe, the more needless emotional misery we create for ourselves. ("The Lies We Believe." Dr. Chris Thurman)

Comment on the above:

Discussions Questions:

- 1) "You can have it all." Great family, great job, toys, travel, health, wealth and prosperity. Know anyone like this? Elaborate.
- 2) "You're only as good as what you do." Can we ever be satisfied with this performance based worldly view? What are other sources we get our self worth from?
- 3) "Life should be easy." True or false? How can we best deal with struggles and pain?
- 4) "Life should be fair." What is your experience with this worldly idea? How can one best deal with unfairness?
- 5) "Don't wait." "The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty". (The Bible) Comment on these two views.
- 6) "People are basically good." The history of people interacting with other people is filled with greed, hatred and conflict. Are people basically good or self-interested to a fault? Justify your answers.

Controlling Our Thoughts Marital – Chapter 4

Joe and Carol had a storybook romance. He was handsome and attentive. She was stylish and smart. They became engaged and expected to live happily ever after. Then they got married. And, instead of happily ever after, they were living unhappily all too soon. Where Joe once seemed handsome, Carol now found him vain; where he once seemed attentive, he now seemed possessive. As for Carol, she no longer seemed stylish and smart to Joe, but materialistic and know-it-all. Soon they were fighting in a big way. And have been ever since. Two nice people who were very much in love turned into two unhappy people wondering if they had made a big mistake.

What happened? Nothing that couldn't happen to any couple. Reality moved in. ["The Lies We Believe"]

Comment on the above.

Discussion Questions:

1. "It's all your fault." How do you deal with people who habitually blame others?
2. "If it takes hard work, we must not be right for each other." How do I deal with feelings of discouragement and wanting to give up and get out?
3. "You can and should meet all my needs." Contrast this thought with the following quote from the Bible. "And my God will meet all your needs."
4. Another common view held in the world of marriage is "You owe me." Have you experienced this keeping score and how so?
5. "I shouldn't have to change." Have you felt your spouse would be happier in the relationship if you were willing or able to change? Explain.
6. Examine the belief that your own personal style is the "best" style and that your spouse must think, feel and act like you in order to be right or acceptable.

Controlling our Thoughts Distortion – Chapter 5

When was the last time you blew up over something small? Do you take things too personally? How often do you use the words always and never? Do you base your actions on feelings more than facts?

Be honest. How did you answer those questions? Each one concerns a distortion. We often distort reality. That practice is the foundation for most of our lies. Some of these distortions are quite familiar in themselves, and they foster their own familiar false ideas.

The truth is that everybody falls into these distortions. They're a part of most people's normal thinking. Each distortion, though, contributes to our misery and immaturity and needs to be exposed. ["The Lies We Believe"]

Comment on the above.

Discussion Questions?

1. "Making Mountains out of Molehills" is a form of magnification. How do you deal with people who make situations much bigger than they are in reality?
2. Personalizing other people's behavior or comments is a form of distorting reality. How can we know what to take personally and what not to?
3. "Everything is black or white." This distortion is called polarization or all or nothing extremes. What has been your experience with dealing with this distortion?
4. You let one negative comment or aspect discount all the positive aspects. This is called selective abstractions or "missing the forest for the trees" distortion. How are you at dealing with this distortion?
5. A distortion that keeps the same self defeating behavior such as "history always repeats itself" tell me I can't expect to turn things around. Contrast this with the Bible that tells me I can be a "new creation"?
6. "Don't confuse me with the facts" is an example of emotional reasoning. Are you tempted to listen to your feelings when the facts tell you that you are wrong? How do you justify this?

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Conflicts – Chapter 6

Dealing with conflicts is a necessary skill we need to cultivate if our relationships are to survive. It has been said that conflict is the tunnel to healthy relationships. Cultivating healthy behaviors and avoiding unhealthy behaviors challenges us to control our thoughts and responses.

Comment on the above.

Discussion Questions

1. Be slow to respond to conflict. Or always take the initiative to work out conflict. What course of action do you choose? Why?
2. It's better to gloss over a problem or ignore an issue. Or care enough to lovingly speak the truth. What are you inclined to do? Why?
3. Relationships are always worth restoring. Is this always true or what might be exceptions?
4. Reconciliation focus on the relationship and resolution focus on the problem. How can you benefit from this idea?
5. "Never let the sun go down on your anger"^[The Bible] What is your perspective on this statement?
6. Can we enjoy and value different personalities or is it enough to merely tolerate them? Why or why not?