

The Power of an Incorrect Thought

As a counselor I often utilized cognitive-behavioral therapy, which consists of a primary focus on belief systems and the influence those beliefs have on our emotions and behavior. Quite often I say to a client: “Your present emotional issues are probably not caused by your current situation, but are more likely a symptom of a deeper wound that has its root in a false belief system that’s the product of a past experience.”

The way we perceive any given problem impacts how we feel emotionally, which can influence our thoughts and then our beliefs, and if our core beliefs are false, or distorted, then we will be in bondage. Cognitive-behavioral therapy helps us to identify the incorrect thoughts, and often distorted thinking, that triggers negative emotions and too often, destructive behavior. It is often these very thoughts from which we want to be freed.

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We can confess our views, we can offer our opinions, but we live by what we believe — truth or fiction. Some of those beliefs have been locked up for years and therefore, continue to hold us in emotional bondage.

If consistent exposure to rejection occurs during a vulnerable childhood period, those beliefs can easily develop into incorrect and negative patterns of thoughts and feelings. More often than not these “automatic thoughts” are spontaneous and enter the mind instantly, sometimes triggered by a visual or mental stimulus or circumstance.

Resolving present emotional pains must begin by identifying the memory that holds the false beliefs, that trigger the negative emotions, and impact the response and behavior.

As an example, Bill has a history of strong feelings of inadequacy, inferiority and insecurity. Those core beliefs automatically trigger deeply held negative emotions of failure, weakness and anger for Bill. Over time he has developed a belief system that when he is not in total control in a relationship, he feels totally out of control in that relationship, and anger has become his learned response.

Bill’s beliefs have become what the Scriptures refer to as strongholds:

....for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:4-5¹

So, how do we move Bill from his core beliefs that are faulty, ending in forms of explosive emotions and destructive behaviors, to a renewed core belief system that is based on truth and results in constructive behavior?

So truth is a major part of the answer. As Christians we are called to renew our minds — a biblical challenge that gives us the responsibility of changing the way we feel and act by changing how we think and believe.

....and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. John 8:32 ¹

Telling ourselves the truth and learning to believe it is a process, especially when it comes to personal values, self-worth, and identity. Changing some of our deepest core beliefs can build an emotional strength and security that will result in positive and constructive behavior in the years to come.

It all begins with identifying and working to change our deepest held core belief systems by exchanging them with truth.

¹ New Revised Standard Version