

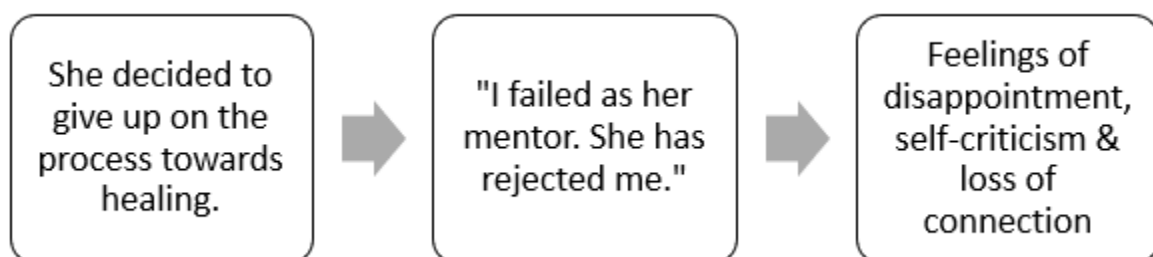
Perspective is reality.

This concept is well-known and versed among most mental health therapists favoring the Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) model. It points to the idea that every human experience is interpreted through mental filters and, many times, those filters are negative. These filters are called cognitive distortions and a few popular ones are catastrophizing, fortune-telling, all-or-nothing thinking, overgeneralization, minimization, and discounting the positives.

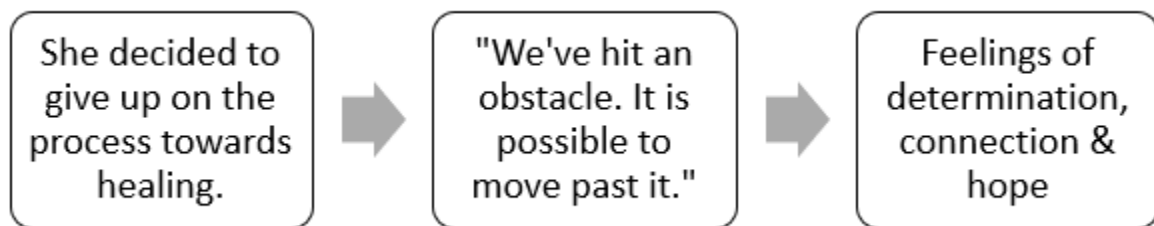
Our thoughts are incredibly powerful - having the ability to change our mood and behaviors – especially when the person is mostly unaware of them. Lack of self-awareness is quite problematic because the way we think is the way we live. A simple way to describe the power of our thoughts is through using the ABC model:



Here's the central idea: the activating event has no meaning in and of itself. Only one's personal belief of that event attaches the meaning. Let me use a personal example to better explain. I once mentored a teenager who was battling some trauma. During one of our meetings, I asked her permission to help her process through a particularly painful memory. She rejected my help. Within seconds, I experienced feelings of rejection and disappointment as I struggled to understand. If I was to use the ABC model to process this situation, it would go a little like this:



The meaning I assigned to the event is one of failure which led to negative feelings that limit connection and created a litany of self-accusations. If I were to assign a different meaning to this event, however, the consequence or mental outcome could be completely different:



Notice that in both scenarios the feelings are in a cause-and-effect relationship with the belief I have towards the event. Feelings are a byproduct of the beliefs or messages internalized and our feelings often dictate our behavior. Consequently, when we cultivate positive thinking, we consistently make good choices.

In Deuteronomy 6:5 we read the command “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” which Jesus reiterates in the New Testament (see Matthew 22:37-38, Mark 12: 30, and Luke 10:27). Notice the three ways we are to love God: with our heart (feelings), soul (reasoning/mind), and strength (behavior). These three parts comprise the human essence, and so when talking about personal health, we must intentionally integrate all three areas. Because one’s thoughts hold so much power, it is especially important to pay careful attention to our perspective of ourselves, our experiences, and our relationships.

Another analogy which shows the power of our thoughts is that of the tree. At the roots of the tree we have what are called core beliefs. Just like the roots of a tree provide nourishment and therefore determine the health of the leaves and fruit, so the core beliefs nourish our sense of self. Core beliefs are messages we have internalized so deeply, they are often hard to identify or eliminate and they often come to us as young children or through trauma. An example of a core belief is, “I don’t deserve good things.” That message travels up through the trunk and influences every other thought that passes through our brain (such as, “If they really knew me, they wouldn’t like me”). These thoughts permeate through the leaves and fruit which symbolize our feelings and behavior (resulting in feelings of isolation, frustration, and anxiety which leads to making decisions that push others away or feed the negative emotions).

When negative thoughts run amuck, we are more likely to engage in self-sabotaging behaviors like engaging in addictions, misplacing blame, mistreating our bodies, and avoiding authentic connection with God and others. The enemy knows the power of our thought life, using our negative thoughts as his main weapon against us. Most of the battle between good and evil occurs in the mind which is why I think Paul advises in 2 Corinthians 10:5 to “take every thought captive to obey Christ.”

How is your thought life affecting your overall well-being? Here are some tips to aid in your self-assessment:

1. Start with prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to shine light in those areas where negative thoughts are most powerful.
2. Reflect on the last time you had an intense emotion like shame, anger, fear, or sadness. Use the ABC model to help construct a clear picture of the experience.
3. Connect with a spiritual mentor or therapist to help you process through the negative thoughts, stripping their power through finding healthier, more truthful alternatives in Scripture.

There is hope. Our heavenly Father understands our struggle and has promised to provide all we need to have victory. Yes, we all have walls, but we have also been given weapons which “have divine power to demolish strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:4)! Let’s get smashing, ladies.