

# Getting the Trash Out of Your Head

Why should you never write with a broken pencil? It's pointless. What do you call a fibbing cat? A lion. Hello, my name is Mary Amesbury and welcome to the third lesson in this series on Easing Anxiety Through Faith. Today we will be looking at renewing your mind from the lying that you are doing to yourself.

Much of the anxiety that we face finds its roots – not in actual circumstances or in other people – but in what we tell ourselves. We will act on what we believe – even if what we believe is completely untrue. God wants our thinking to be based on reality rather than on bad fiction. He is, after all, the God of Truth.

*“Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom” (Psalm 51:6).*

What kinds of things are you anxious about? For me, I tend to be anxious about doing a good enough job. I fear failure and I give my critics way too much real estate in my head. I have this drive to try to make my critics – especially the religious ones – approve of me. There are self-righteous religious people who hold to strict rules and try to make everyone else around them hold to the same standards. They insinuate that if you were a truly spiritual person, you would have the same standards they do. They are modern-day Pharisees. It was a huge revelation for me when I came to the realization that Jesus didn't try to appease the Pharisees. He healed on the Sabbath even when He knew that there were Pharisees watching who would condemn Him. He rebuked His critics. He didn't give that kind of people power over Him. I want to be more like Jesus.

Often, we will challenge the good thoughts in our minds, but nurture and continually repeat the self-condemning ones. This will lead to a continued pattern of anxiety in your life.

What is the antidote to this source of anxiety? Renewing your mind.

*“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2).*

As a follower of Jesus, you have the right and the obligation to speak to yourself kindly and truthfully. The wrath of God against you has been fully satisfied. Your heavenly Father does not condemn you and He doesn't want you condemning and shaming yourself. You are His beloved child. Yes, because we are all fallen, finite and fallible the Holy Spirit will need to correct us when our attitudes or actions are out of line; but that correction is done in love and for our profit. If we feel shamed and belittled, that voice is not the voice of our Savior.

This is important. We were made with great care and great love by our Creator. It absolutely matters what we think about ourselves. We often say things to ourselves that we would never say to another human being. Harboring negative thoughts about ourselves creates anxiety and insecurities but it also affects our relationships with others **because we believe they also think negatively about us** whether they actually do or not. We conduct our relationships based on our own insecurities. We even convince ourselves that **God** is harsh, critical and never satisfied with us and we can't be convinced that it isn't true.

These are ways of thinking that are not based on reality. Psychologists call these cognitive distortions. Some categories of dysfunctional thinking are:

1. **Emotional reasoning** – I feel it; therefore, it must be true. “I feel bad; therefore, I am inadequate.”
2. **Shoulds/perfectionism** – I should never fail; I should be better than that. I should have accomplished “X” milestone by this point in my life. I am such a failure.
3. **Mind reading** – Assuming that someone is thinking negatively about you without really knowing their thoughts. For example: “She thinks I’m stupid. She’s right, I am stupid.”
4. **Overgeneralizing and labeling** – You assign a negative label to yourself, or others based on an isolated incident. For example: “I said the wrong thing. I’m always such a jerk.” “That guy bumped into me. He’s so self-absorbed.”
5. **Focusing on the negative; ignoring the positive** – “I got a C on my organic chem test. I’m such a failure. It doesn’t matter that I got all A’s in English. English is easy.”
6. **All-or-nothing thinking** – “My boyfriend and I broke up. All men are losers.” Or “My friend and I can’t agree on politics. Therefore, we shouldn’t be friends anymore.”
7. **Catastrophizing** – Jumping to the worst-case scenario when something uncomfortable happens. “I messed up that report at work. I’m sure they are going to fire me.”
8. **What ifs?** – Anticipating all the bad things that could possibly happen and refusing to be satisfied with reasons why it might be OK.
9. **Jumping to conclusions** – making assumptions with little evidence
10. **Rejecting positive contradictions to your negative thoughts** – Declaring irrelevant any evidence to the contrary of your negative assessment “But you don’t understand the real issues. There is more at stake.”
11. **Personalization** – always ascribing the blame to yourself even when you had little to no control over the situation.

Do you recognize your own thinking in any of these statements? I do. But God desires that we speak truth – especially to ourselves.

*“Let the words of my mouth **and the meditation of my heart** be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer” (Psalm 19:14).*

We can rely on the Holy Spirit to adjust our thinking to what would be good for us and what would please Jesus.

*“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).*

Spiritual victory comes when we tell ourselves the truth about ourselves and also when we tell ourselves the truth about God. The Bible is our source for both. What God says is true. What you tell yourself or what other people tell you may not be truth.

Ephesians 4:21 says “...***the truth is in Jesus.***”

What does God think about you? The truth is that God loves you with a relentless love both when you are performing well and when you are not. There is nothing you can do to make God love you more perfectly than He already does. And there is nothing you can do to make God think less of you and quit loving you. His love for you is not based on your performance.

When you received the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior and became a child of God, He permanently removed you from the “unworthy” category. Your Creator is grieved when His beloved children feel like failures who will never measure up. You are forever secure in Him. When you sin, He will correct you as a father, but He will never again condemn you. Satan is the accuser of the children of God; not Jesus.

The Bible says in Romans 8:1 “*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*” The Lord Jesus gave us His righteousness when He redeemed us. When God the Father looks at us, He sees the righteousness of Jesus.

Claim your rightful position as a beloved child of the Everlasting Father indwelt by God the Holy Spirit. “*Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*” (1 Corinthians 3:16). Refuse to give weight to the self-condemning thoughts. When you sin, own up to it, repent and then count yourself forgiven and move on. You have been redeemed. God’s word and work is greater than your doubts.

#### **Tips for renewing your mind:**

1. Believe that you, yielded to the Holy Spirit, **can** change the way you think. You are not hostage to your thoughts. We have to fight against the false stuff in our heads and fill that space with what the Wonderful Counselor declares about us.
2. To keep our minds stayed on truth requires that we are in the Bible on a regular basis. “*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*” (Hebrews 4:12).
3. Become convinced that condemning thoughts are not from God (Romans 8:1).
4. Identify your unhelpful thought patterns. Pay attention to what you are telling yourself and evaluate whether it is true.

5. Replace lies with Biblical affirmations. Speak to yourself with the same grace you would give a cherished friend.
6. Reinforce the truth by memorizing relevant Scripture or posting Scripture where you will see it repeatedly during the day.
7. For those areas where you struggle, use a concordance, and do a thorough review of what the Bible says about that subject. Write down pertinent verses and review them for however long it takes for the Holy Spirit to adjust your thinking to the truth. Often the process will only take a few days. If you slip back into the old patterns of thinking, review the verses again until your thinking is renewed. Don't give up. (Psalm 94:11-13a)

God loves you and He wants you to live and thrive in the Truth. That's all for now. Good for you to stick with this and listen to the end. May the Lord bless you in your pursuit of wholeness and joy.