

How to develop the mind of Christ

A-B-C

EVENT

SELF-TALK

REACTION

The A-B-C model teaches that how we think about an event is just as important as the event itself ("As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he"). When our "self-talk" is irrational or unrealistic, it creates physical and emotional strain internally and problems in our interpersonal relationships.

ATTITUDE

By Charles Swindoll

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think, say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company... a church... a home.

The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we embrace for that day. We cannot change our past... we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play the one string we have, and that is our attitude... I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it.

And so it is with you... we are in charge of our Attitudes

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Please rate how you feel about each statement below on a scale from 1, strongly disagree, to 7, strongly agree. Please let your ratings reflect how you really feel, not how you think you should feel. Try to avoid using the neutral (4) response.

1
strongly
disagree

2

3

4
neutral

5

6

7
strongly
agree

- _____ 1. I must be perfect.
- _____ 2. I must have everyone's love and approval.
- _____ 3. It is easier to avoid problems than to face them.
- _____ 4. Things have to go my way for me to be happy.
- _____ 5. My unhappiness is externally caused.
- _____ 6. I can have it all.
- _____ 7. My performance determines my worth as a person.
- _____ 8. Life should be easy.
- _____ 9. Life should be fair.
- _____ 10. I shouldn't have to wait for what I want in life.
- _____ 11. I often make mountains out of molehills.
- _____ 12. I often take things personally.
- _____ 13. Things are black or white to me.
- _____ 14. I often miss the forest for the trees.
- _____ 15. I often reason things out with my feelings rather than the facts.

Marital Lies We All Tell Ourselves

1. "All my marital problems are my spouse's fault."

The "all your fault" lie is basically the message that "I have my act totally together and you are a complete mess. If it weren't for you, we would be getting along fantastically." The fact is no one has his act totally together. All of us have flaws, and the flaws make our marriages less than fantastic.

2. "If our marriage takes hard work, we must not be right for each other."

Marriage is very hard work. Any marriage that has achieved intimacy through the years has been worked on. The moment marriage isn't easy or smooth a lot of couples begin to think, "we must not be right for each other." As strange as it sounds, hard work in marriage often suggest you married the right person.

3. "My spouse can and should meet all of my emotional needs."

Another unrealistic notion is that a spouse will completely, totally, consistently, and wonderfully meet all of our emotional needs (such as attention, acceptance, approval, affection, affirmation, comfort, encouragement, respect, security, support, understanding). There is nothing wrong with having emotional needs – we are made that way. All human beings have them. Problems occur, though, when we expect our spouses to meet all of our emotional needs. That puts too much pressure on them and damages the marriage.

4. "My spouse owes me (for all I do)."

Remember when you first started dating the person who became your spouse? You were happy to do anything for him or her and didn't really want much in return other than his or her company. What is your relationship like now? Realize that you are owed absolutely nothing for all you do in your marriage. The "payment" for what you do for your spouse is getting to do it! The reward is in the giving, not what your partner does in response.

5. "My spouse should be like me."

The belief here is that your way of being a human being is "best" and that your spouse must think, feel, and act like you in order to be loved or accepted. The truth of the matter is that if each of us was married to someone who thought, felt and acted exactly as we did, life would be boring. We are unique and it's good that we are all different.

6. "I shouldn't have to change who I am to make our marriage better."

The issue is not, "should I change to make my marriage better?" It is, "What should I change to make my marriage better?" When we marry, all of us have defects that need to be corrected. Pulling off an intimate marriage requires that we work on our weaknesses, not wrap ourselves in the "accept me as I am" flag and hope our partners salute.

Religious Lies

1. **God's love must be earned.** People who believe this lie believe that their actions determine whether or not God loves them. This kind of thinking means that people will look at their sin and believe that the worse the sin, the more God will be displeased. The truth is that God's love **can not** be earned although many Christians feel and act as though it can be. Christians in Ephesus were living with this lie when Paul wrote them and told them that *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."* He wrote Timothy that God called us to a holy life-not because of anything we have done but because of *"His own purpose and grace."* And if we think that God turns his back on us because we sin, we have only to look at Paul's words to the Romans about God's love: *"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."*

To overcome this lie: 1) meditate on God's word, 2) become involved with a community of mature Christians so that God can help you experience His love through them, and 3) then notice how often God does loving things, even when we are not living our life properly.

2. God hates the sin and the sinner. In other words, we are saying that God isn't deep enough or smart enough or wise enough to separate who we are from what we do. He equates the two. When we buy into this lie, we make turning from sin more difficult, because the energy it takes to turn from our sins is used up by all the self-hate we waste on ourselves. The truth is God doesn't hate you. It isn't in Him to hate you. He hates what we do but it was forgiven when we turn our lives over to Jesus Christ. God wants us to be thankful for that rather than to reject it. He doesn't want you to spend your life making yourself pay for something that has already been paid for.

3. **Because I'm a Christian, God will protect me from pain and suffering.** Some people believe that being a Christian always means joy, peace, and contentment. We believe that to be a Christian means to never have problems or pain, or at least not the more serious versions. We believe that God will protect us from losing our jobs, suffering serious illnesses, or having other bad things happen to us. When bad things do happen, we ask, "How could God let his happen to me?"

The truth is that life is difficult for everyone. Having faith in God doesn't mean that you won't have problems. If anything, being a Christian means more troubles for two primary reasons: 1) you are asked to die to your own selfish desires and live for God on His terms, and 2) you will be persecuted for standing up for Christ by a world that rejects Him.

The ultimate comfort of Christianity is that however bad life is down here for us, we have God's help in time of need and eternal life in heaven waiting on us when we die. Both give us real hope.

4. **All my problems are caused by my sin.** People who believe this lie believe, "I'm being punished." The truth is that sometimes we have problems and no one sinned! The challenge we face is to examine honestly the root of a problem. If the root is personal sin, then we need to repent of that sin. If the problem is the result of someone else's sin or no sin at all, then we need to let ourselves off the hook of responsibility and focus on solving the problem with God's help as best we can. The alternative is to feel guilty over something we didn't cause, all because of a lie.

5. **It is my Christian duty to meet all the needs of others.** Some people believe that to be a Christian means to never say no. God calls us to labor on His behalf, to *"bear one another's burdens"*, but we are also told that each person is supposed to carry his own load. We are supposed to do some things to help others, but we are not supposed to do all the other things. Many of us forget that we can only do our part to meet the needs of others.

There is no magic formula for when to say yes and when to say no in life. Deciding which to say requires the wisdom of Solomon at times. We need to seek God's help to make the right decision. The point is, you don't have to say yes to every request, however legitimate it may be. Christ didn't always say yes. He didn't meet every need that He saw. He didn't try to please everybody. As a result, His burden was light. Are you running? Are you always in a hurry? Are you carrying more than your load because you believe that a good Christian never says no? Learn to say no.

6. A good Christian doesn't feel angry, anxious, or depressed. This lie says that anytime that you have a negative or painful emotion about something, you are automatically sinning and showing that your faith in God is weak. In some homes and in some churches the message you get is that if you are feeling negative emotions, something is wrong with you.

The truth is that some events are worth being troubled about, and becoming troubled by about them doesn't mean we are mentally ill or lack faith in God. Give yourself permission to feel happy, feel sad, feel angry, feel peaceful, feel depressed, feel content, feel grieved, feel joyful, and feel scared. God made you to feel.

7. God can't use me unless I'm spiritually strong. Some people think their life is a mess that God wouldn't want to use them. They say to themselves, "How can I tell others about God if my life doesn't show shining proof of all I'm talking about." Yet one of Christianity's paradoxes is that through our weaknesses, God can show His power. Through our imperfections, He can be glorified. Through our sin, God can show that He is God. God has chosen to implement His plans through very flawed people, and He wants to use us even if we are not as together as we should be.

It is true that God wants his people to be mature and practice what we preach in front of others. He doesn't want us to be hypocrites. But if we wait until we are just like Christ to make ourselves available to be used by God, we will wait a whole lifetime.

STRAIGHT THOUGHTS

1. To err is human
2. Life is difficult.
3. You can't please everyone.
4. You don't have to do anything.
5. You are going to die.
6. The virtue lies in the struggle, not the prize.
7. You are not entitled to anything.
8. There is no gain without pain.
9. Emotional problems are good.
10. You reap what you sow.

Renewing Your Mind

1. Through daily prayer, ask God to help you know, believe, and do the truth.
2. Memorize and meditate on Bible verses related to the problem area(s) you are struggling with.
3. Get involved in a weekly Bible study with other committed Christians.
4. Meet on a weekly basis with a Christian friend to discuss how both of you are doing in your efforts to defeat your lies with the truth.
5. Make a list of the lies you believe and track them for one week (or longer) using the A-B-C model. Evaluate which lies show up the most frequently, and honestly examine the physical, emotional, behavioral, and spiritual price you are paying for these lies.

6. Make a list of biblical truths you can use to fight your lies. For one week (or longer), use the A-B-C-D-E model to combat your lies with these truths. Assess if there is any improvement in your overall health.
7. Purposely do something to combat your lies (example: do something goofy in public to face the "I must have everyone's love and approval" lie).
8. Take some of your most upsetting thoughts and make them even worse. Create these "worst case scenarios" in your mind and then honestly examine whether or not you, with God's help, really couldn't handle them.
9. Read biblically solid books on mind renewal. A few suggestions include:
"Telling Yourself the Truth" by William Backus and Marie Chapian
"Hope for the Perfectionist" by David Stoop
"Self-Talk: Key to Personal Growth" by David Stoop
"The Lies We Tell Ourselves" by Chris Thurman (self-serving, I know)
10. For chronic emotional and spiritual problems, seek counseling from a Christian who is competent to help you. By competent, I mean that they know the Bible and how it can be applied to various life problems, they genuinely love people, and they are committed to a truly biblical approach to counseling.