

State of Mind  
*Point of View*  
February 17, 2019

Congregational Songs – Called Me Higher / Trust in You

Video – Behind the Scenes

Feature Song – Heavy

Good morning everyone.

Let's pray together as we begin.

Lord, I lift up to You everyone in this room or watching online who can identify with the song we just heard.

- Those for whom life feels so heavy.
- Those who are hard-pressed on every side by trouble and feels crushed.
- Those who are perplexed – they don't understand why things keep happening to them
- Those who are at the point of despair.
- Those who are persecuted and feeling abandoned.
- Those who have been struck down by illness or disease and feel as if their life is being destroyed.

I lift them to you, Lord, and I pray that they would not become discouraged and lose heart. And I pray that your Spirit would take what I say in this message and use it for their good and your glory.

I ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.

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As Shannon said, we are in week two of our series *State of Mind*. And we're doing this series, as I said last week, to keep us from either *becoming* a statistic or improving life for those of us who *already are* a statistic of the mental and emotional health crisis that seems to be engulfing our nation.

And last week we kicked things off by talking about ...

- The necessity of being *proactive* instead of *reactive* in this area

- *Taking control* of our mental and emotional state instead of being controlled by it
- And *directing* what goes on in our thinking and emotions instead of letting them run wild.

**Or, as one of the ancient sages of Divine Wisdom put it:**

*Above all else, guard your heart for everything you do flows from it.  
Proverbs 4:23 (NIV)*

“Be careful,” Solomon said, “of what you allow to become established in the deeper levels of your subconscious, the very core of your being” (which is what biblical writers meant by the word *heart*) “for what happens there will affect everything else about your life.”

And last week we talked about ...

- How things *do* get established there in what psychologists call our “core beliefs.”
- And the necessity of *thinking about our thinking* so we can identify those core beliefs which drive our assumptions and automatic thoughts and, eventually, our behavior.
- And then changing those beliefs to match up with truth instead of lies.

And if you missed that message you can always go back and listen to it, watch it or read it in the media section of our app, website and podcast.

Now, you need to know that we’re going to deal even more directly with that process in the final message of this series (on the second Sunday of March) but ...

### **A Critical Challenge**

Today, we’re going to focus on a specific mental and emotional challenge that, if not handled well, will likely produce clinical anxiety and depression.

And once those conditions become established in the physical wiring of your brain (and that is what happens because of neuroplasticity, which we also talked about last week) ... once your brain has been rewired to run in the neural pathways created by clinical anxiety and depression ...

- Anxious and depressed emotions will come to dominate your automatic thoughts ...
- Which will contribute to even greater clinical anxiety and depression ...

- Which will become even more dominant in your automatic thoughts ...
- Which will contribute to even greater clinical anxiety and depression ...

And this vicious cycle will continue on and on ... and you will spiral further and further down ...

Until, if you're lucky, some psychiatrist figures out which meds can adjust the chemicals in your brain so that you can function *and more importantly* – and this is so often overlooked – so that you can gain enough mental and emotional breathing room to learn how to think differently.

And I'll say more about that in two weeks when we talk more specifically about anxiety and depression.

But, for today, my point is that learning to handle this one specific challenge is critically important to your ongoing mental and emotional health.

So, what is that challenge?

**It's how you perceive and react to the problems that come into your life.**

It's the way you assess and evaluate the trials and tribulations associated with people and situations that are less than optimal. It's what you think and what you say and do when unpleasant and undesirable events occur.

How you perceive and react to the problems that come into your life is critically important to your ongoing mental and emotional health.

Now, those problems can be major or they can be minor.

One that is major ...

- Might have something to do with your health or your finances.
- It might be an injustice or a tragedy that happens to you.
- It might be a relationship or an educational or career opportunity that isn't working out.
- It might be having to move to a different home or a different part of the country because of some external factor.
- Or having to deal with a spouse or a child gone awry.

- Or dealing with a boss or employees or customers who are uncaring, rude and inconsiderate.
- It might simply be circumstances that you wouldn't have chosen but now make up your daily life.

In the “minor” category would be things like ...

- My dog. I've told you about this before but, our dog is very old and he is not as aware of when he's going to poop. And so, almost every day, we find dog poop somewhere in our house, which is very frustrating. I've gotten over being mad at him – I know he can't help it – but it still drives me crazy.
- Another in the “minor category” of my life is that, because of the recent tax cut and an oversight on my part, we actually owe on our taxes this year. *Thanks Trump*. We have the money to pay it but, it sure was irritating to see that final number show up on the TurboTax screen – especially when I thought we would get some back.
- And then there's the remote start on my car. It doesn't always work which is a pain because of how cold it's been.
- And speaking of cold ... and snow ... this weather is making me stir crazy. And I love winter! But it's getting to be too much.
- Plus, it affects what we do here every Sunday, which makes it even worse!

Now, I'm sure you could make a list just like that if you wanted to, of the minor problems in your life, but, again, what's important for your mental and emotional health is how you perceive and react to them as well as those which fall into the “major” category.

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### **Negative Mindsets**

Now, for most people, when problems happen our first thought is almost always *negative* ... and – and this is very important – *automatic*. The thought is just *there* – immediately – in our heads and then, very often, in what we say.

- “Arrrrgh ... Stupid dog!” (or “boss” or “customer” or “idiot who doesn't know how to drive in the snow”)

- “I don’t have time for this.”
- “Here we go again.”
- “Just for once, why can’t things be easy?”
- “How many times do I have to tell you before you get it right?”

Ever have those kinds of thoughts when things don’t go the way you want?

Now, what’s important to realize is that these Automatic Negative Thoughts (which psychologists call ANTs) ... these ANTs are the product of a negative mindset which is developed over time.

**And a “mindset” is the frame of reference by which you assess and evaluate your reality. A mindset determines how you perceive and interpret the events and situations you are experiencing.**

Now, there are many negative mindsets by which we all live; too many to talk about in the time we have.

So, this past week I spent some time “thinking about my thinking” (and yours, too) and I realized that there are four common negative mindsets – four negative frames of reference – by which many of us typically assess and evaluate our problems, major or minor.

**1. The first is an *expectation* mindset: “This problem violates my standards.”**

We’re irritated and unhappy about the problem because ...

- People ought to just do what’s right.
- Things should just work.
- Dogs ought to poop in the yard not in the house.

If you often think or say the words “should” and “ought” when you encounter problems in your life, it’s likely that you have an expectation mindset.

**2. The second mindset is an *entitlement* mindset: “I don’t deserve this problem.”**

When problems show up in our lives, we’re frustrated and angry because ...

- It just isn’t fair that this happened to me
- I’ve done everything that I was supposed to do
- I go to church, I pray, I tithe, I live a good life.
- Why me? I thought God cared about me.

If you often think or say things about “fairness” and your “performance” when you encounter problems in your life, you probably have an entitlement mindset.

**3. The third way many of us look at our problems is from a *hindrance* mindset: “This problem is standing in my way.”**

We get upset and grumpy because ...

- If I didn’t have to deal with this right now, I could get my work done.
- I really needed a good night’s rest but it was impossible with your snoring.
- I wanted to be a good spouse but he/she was so demanding I just stopped trying.

If you often think or say the words “if” and “but” when people and circumstances are less than ideal, you probably have a hindrance mindset.

**4. The final mindset is the *victimhood* mindset: “This problem proves (again) that I am cursed.”**

When we’re controlled by this mindset, we usually don’t get upset or angry. Instead, we’re passive and resigned.

- No matter what I do, things like this always happen to me.
- I guess this is how it’s always going to be.
- Things will never change. Why even try?

If you often think or say the words “always” and “never” when faced with problems, you probably have a victimhood mindset.

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So, we have expectation, entitlement, hindrance and victimhood mindsets. Any of those apply to you?

For me personally, I struggle with the first one and the third one – with the *expectation* mindset probably being the strongest. When things don’t go or work like they should – including myself – it generates a whole lot of negative mental and emotional energy in me.

And that’s the problem.

It’s not so much that the ideas behind these mindsets are *wrong*. I mean ...

- It’s not unreasonable to have expectations in life.
- Nor is it unreasonable to hope for fairness and justice.

- And sometimes problems really do hinder us.
- And there are some problems we'll never be able to solve.

The issue is when these mindsets create negative mental and emotional energy.

Because *that*, as we've seen, does a number on the wiring of our brain which puts us on the pathway to anxiety and depression – and sometimes worse.

### **Better Mindsets**

So, what's the solution?

**It goes back to what we talked about last week.**

*Do not conform to the pattern of this world ...*

Don't say to yourself "well, you know, everybody struggles with negativity when it comes to problems. It's just normal human behavior. That's just how it is. Take your meds if you need to. Just do the best you can."

*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Romans 12:2 (NIV)*

Change your entire life by rebuilding what's going on in your head from the ground up.

Now, if you're a Christian – and I realize that not everyone here is and that's great; we're glad you're here and we hope (we believe) that what we're talking about will be of help to you even if you don't believe ...

But if you're a Christian, you need to remember that the Holy Spirit isn't doesn't magically do this for you. He doesn't reach in to your brain and supernaturally change your neural pathways so that you suddenly think differently.

That's your job. That's my job.

**What *the Spirit* does (according to Jesus) is to ...**

- Give you the *desire* to change
- Give you the *power* to do so
- And He gives you the *proper core beliefs* (or mindset) about yourself, God, others and the

world ... including ... proper (and better and more helpful) mindsets about your problems.

So, let's talk about that. Let's talk about better and more helpful ways to perceive and react to the problems that we face.

And let's do that by looking at alternatives to the four common mindsets which produce ANTS – those automatic negative thoughts.

Instead of an *expectation* mindset that says “this problem violates my standards” and brings us frustration ... a better and healthier alternative is ...

**1. An *acceptance* mindset: “This is life in a fallen world.”**

Things and people don't always work the way they should. That's just how it is and no amount of grinding on my part is going to change that.

The basic idea of the acceptance mindset is what God says through the writer of Psalm 46.

*“Cease striving and know that I am God.”      Psalm 46:10*

The phrase “cease striving” means in the Hebrew to “let your hands drop” or to “let go” or “relax.”

The other day, someone send me a quote which was a really good explanation of this mindset. Here's what it said:

You are either trying to *stop* suffering, controlling your environment to *avoid* suffering, or worrying about suffering *in the future*. This state of affairs is so prevalent that you don't see it, just as a fish doesn't see the water.

Your thoughts are about the problem, why it is bothering you, and what you can do about it.

If you want to achieve a healthy state of being, stop asking your mind to do this. Just relieve your mind of the job of making sure that everyone and everything will be the way you need them to be so that you can feel better inside. Your mind is not qualified for that job.

When you are done playing with the temporal and finite, you will open to the eternal and infinite.<sup>i</sup>

In other words, when you cease striving – when you let go, relax and be still – you will experience the peace and presence of God.



Now, in practical terms what this means is that sometimes you literally need to stop striving and grinding when confronted with a problem and say, “I release this.”

That doesn’t mean you ignore it.

It means you detach yourself and your emotions from it. You stand back and you say, “this is life in a fallen world. Old dogs poop in the house. People get serious illnesses. Cars break down. People disappoint you.

“That’s just how it is. And it’s OK.”

And when the emotion subsides and the acceptance kicks in, then you re-engage and do what you can, which might be nothing.

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OK, let’s look at the alternative to the second mindset, the *entitlement* mindset that says “I don’t deserve this problem. It’s not fair. I’m a good person and I’ve done everything right.”

Instead of *that* mindset (and the mental and emotional anguish it creates), a better and healthier alternative is ...

**2. A *humility* mindset: “Many people *better* than me have it *worse* than me.”**

Now, again this doesn’t mean that you don’t hope and pray for justice and fairness in your life.

But instead of perpetually grinding over the fact that you are being “cosmically mistreated” by whatever forces are “out there,” it means you look at the big picture of human life: *so many people better than you have it worse than you ...* including, incredibly, God Himself.

The Apostle Paul put it like this:

*Have the same mindset as Christ Jesus who, being in very nature God ... made himself nothing. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!*

*Philippians 2:5-8 (NIV)*

In other words, the perfect man was mistreated – and He *willingly accepted it* – in a way far worse than you will ever be.

And Paul says, “that framework – that’s the one you ought to renew your mind with.”

So many people better than you have it worse than you.

And, furthermore ... in reality ... in spite of how *bad* you might have it, in some ways you actually have it *better* than you deserve.

A couple of months ago, we filmed an interview with Ryan Waggener in which he, amazingly, expressed both of those ideas.

(If you don't know who Ryan is, he's one of the guys who regularly appears on our pre- and post-service announcement videos. His wife, Erika, who is also in the video, led us in the first worship song today).

Let's watch.

**Video – Ryan Waggener (5.8 mins)**

(Begin) Ryan: “It was 1984 Olympics ...”

(End) Ryan: “... people that just lift me all the time.”

Thanks Ryan.

Now, did you catch that? Ryan has it worse than many people and yet, he is also aware that good people have it worse than he does AND that in some ways he has it better than he deserves.

That's the humility mindset.

Of course, because he is humble, Ryan would be the first to tell you that he's not perfect at that. Erika would probably be the second. ☺

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Turns out that Ryan is also a great illustration of the alternative to the *hindrance* mindset which says “this problem is standing in my way. If I didn't have to deal with it, I could be <whatever>.”

Instead of that demoralizing and debilitating pattern of thinking, a better and healthier alternative is ...

**3. An *opportunity* mindset: “This problem allows me to flourish in other ways.”**

It says, “even though I am not able to go there and do that, I still have the opportunity to grow and become more of who I want to be and who God has made me to be. It's not what I expected or would have chosen, but good can still come from this.”

This is why James, the brother of Jesus, once wrote:

*Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy.*

What? That sounds crazy, James!

No it's not. Here's why:

*For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow.*

*So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. James 1:2-4 (NLT)*

Your problems, if you interpret them as an opportunity, will lead you to grow and mature in ways you can't even imagine.

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So, we've talked about an *acceptance* mindset, a *humility* mindset, and an *opportunity* mindset.

All three are far better than the alternatives. If you will be disciplined and "think about your thinking" (as well as the mindset you're typically bringing with you to your problems) ...

... and then begin to renew your mind with acceptance, humility and opportunity, you'll find yourself moving towards mental and emotional health. You will.

But as great as those shifts can be, the greatest is this final one.

Instead of a *victimhood* mindset which says "All these problems are further evidence that I truly am cursed. Things will never change for me, so why even try?" a much healthier alternative is what I will call the *glory* mindset.

But before I explain what it is, I have to tell you that it requires a lot more faith than the first three. If you're not a Christian, you will not be able to adopt this one because it's dependent on belief in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. It's based on believing that an event took place in the past, in history, and its implications for the future.

Listen closely to how Paul explains it and how he describes his problems and the suffering they cause him and his companions.

*We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed;*

*Perplexed, but not in despair;*

*Persecuted, but not abandoned;*

*Struck down, but not destroyed.*

*We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.*

We totally *look* like victims and have every reason to think and feel like victims, but God is actually up to something good.

**Then Paul continues – and this is incredible ...**

*Because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus ...*

Because we understand that what God did for Jesus in the *past* is in our *future* ...

*Therefore, we do not lose <WHAT?> heart.*                      2    *Corinthians*    4:14,16  
(NIV)

Isn't that interesting? In our innermost being, at our very core of existence, Paul is saying, we are not melting down because of our problems.

In fact, he says ...

*Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.*

**And here's why:**

*For our momentary, light suffering is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.*                      2 *Corinthians* 4:16-17 (ESV)

The point is that instead of a victimhood mindset which will kill your heart, the alternative – if you're a Christian – is the glory mindset which will keep you from losing heart.

**4. The *glory* mindset says “This problem may feel like a curse now but it is creating an eternal treasure.”**

It may feel like a curse now, but my feelings are not reality. I am not a victim. God is not out to get me.

My suffering is producing something. My suffering is meaningful. Every millisecond of it is producing a peculiar glory for me that will be revealed when Jesus returns.

Whether your problem is cancer or criticism, slander or sickness, it's already doing something in the future. You just can't see it yet.<sup>ii</sup>

## Assignments

Well, I think there's a lot to chew on in all of this. Renewing your mind, gaining a new point of view and perspective on your problems is not a simple endeavor and it will take work.

And to help in that, I want to share two ideas very quickly that might help jumpstart the process.

### 1. For one week, don't complain or curse.

This week, instead of complaining and cursing (in thoughts or words) when something goes wrong or someone frustrates you, *don't*.

Why? Because complaining and cursing only continues the negative mental pattern that you are trying to break.

Furthermore, especially don't do it about your minor problems because how you interpret and react to the minor problems, creates the pattern for how you will handle the major ones.

### 2. Serve someone less fortunate than you are.

Get out of your own little world and concern yourself with someone else's problems. It will help you to see that some people who are better than you actually have it worse than you.

Let's pray.

## Feature Song – Future Past

### CLOSING COMMENTS

1. Next week ... *Detox* When life truly hurts, three radical techniques prescribed by Jesus and the ancient prophets can keep us from becoming mentally and emotionally overwhelmed.
2. Offering @ door
3. Blessing
  - a. The Lord bless you and keep you

- b. The Lord make his face to shine upon you
- c. The Lord be gracious unto you
- d. And give you peace, love, harmony and fulfilment as you walk in His ways

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Michael Singer, The Untethered Soul

<sup>ii</sup> Great insight from John Piper