

State of Mind
Wired
February 10, 2019

PRE-SERVICE VIDEO

Worship Songs – Promises / Climb / T&G

Survey / Announcements – Shannon

Feature – Everything is Alright

Video – In Our Own Words (1.7 mins)

(Begin) Woman: “I was about 16 when I was diagnosed with depression.”

(End) Man: “I felt like the world would be better off without me.”

Good morning everyone.

Today we’re beginning a brand new series called *State of Mind* and I’d like to say I’m excited about this series but that’s probably not the best word when you’re talking about a growing problem in our culture, particularly among younger people.

Mental health experts tell us that depression and anxiety are affecting the population at unprecedented levels and the problem seems to be getting worse. Everything is definitely *not* alright. Our state of mind, collectively speaking, just isn’t that great.

And I could bore you with a lot of statistics at this point such as ...

- 43.8 million adults experience mental illness in a given year (which works out to be 1 in 5)
- 18.1% of American adults live with an anxiety disorder.
- 6.9% live with major depression
- Depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide
- Serious mental illness costs America \$193.2 billion in lost earnings every year.

But if I did, I wouldn't be telling you anything you didn't already know ... because everyone in this room or watching online is either suffering from some form of mental illness right now, or we are in close relational proximity to someone who is – a family member, a friend, or a co-worker.

So, while I can't say I'm *excited* about this series, I *can* say I am looking forward to getting on to the solution side of the problem.

And I don't want to overpromise what I think this series might do and how God might use it, but I strongly believe that what we are going to talk about over the next five weeks can make a dramatic difference either by keeping us from *becoming* a statistic or improving things for those of us who already are.

And I believe that not only because we're going to be applying Divine wisdom to the issue but because, in our culture, so little is done *proactively* in this area. All most all of our energy in dealing with mental and emotional issues is *reactive*.

Here's what I mean by that. Most people treat their mind, heart and soul like they do their car. We just keep putting gasoline in it and keep driving it down the highway until one day when the warning light comes on and smoke comes from under the hood or something breaks.

And then we take it to a mechanic and leave it there until its fixed (assuming it *can* be fixed), which usually costs a lot more money than we were expecting; and a lot more than it would have if we had been proactive: *paying closer attention* and *doing preventative maintenance*.

Point being ... most people in our culture are not paying very close attention to and doing preventative maintenance on their mental, emotional and spiritual systems. We don't have enough "breathing room" in our schedules or in our finances to do those kinds of things – at least, not until the warning light comes on or something breaks and we find ourselves in a psychiatrist's office or at the pharmacy picking up some medicine we never thought we would be taking.

So in this series we are going to talk about being *proactive* instead of *reactive*. We're going to talk about taking control of our mental and emotional health.

And let me give you a brief overview of the whole thing so you can see where we're going and maybe invite someone who needs to be

here with you.

- We're going to talk about how to think about and deal with people and situations that are less than optimal. That will be next Sunday.
- We're going to learn how to process in a healthy way the emotional pain and suffering that is a part of life in a sin-cursed world. That will be the third week of the series.
- Then, on the first Sunday of March, we're going to talk very frankly about clinical anxiety and depression as well as suicide and all the spiritual issues and questions surrounding them.
- And then, finally, in the last week of this series, we're going to learn how to deal with the voices we hear from our culture as well as our interactions with those around us that tear us down instead of building us up.

All In Your Head

But today, we're going to begin by focusing on the root issue; the foundation of everything else we're going to be looking at going forward: *we're going to think about our thinking* because ...

- Whatever goes on in your head drives everything else.
- Whatever gets your mind gets you.ⁱ

- And you are what you think.

Actually, scientists are discovering more and more that it is *literally true* that “you are what you think.” Your thought patterns *literally shape and reshape* the wiring in your brain because of something called neuroplasticity.

Check it out.

Video Clip – Neuroplasticity (2.0 mins)

(Begin) Voice: “Not so long ago ...”

(End) Voice: “You can rewire your brain.”

<BEGIN SLIDES>

You are what you think – or, better yet, *you become – in your very brain cells – what you think.*

And once that wiring – those thought patterns – gets established, for better or for worse, it drives your life.

... which, by the way, is pretty much what the Bible said centuries ago.

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

Would you mind reading that with me again, out loud, together?

And I know that verse doesn't say "guard your *mind*" but, whenever the biblical writers talk about the "heart" they're not talking about the physical organ and they're not talking about avoiding emotional or romantic trauma by playing it safe.

They're talking about the deeper levels of the mind. They're talking about the subconscious, the very core of your being.

"Be careful of what you allow to become established *there*," Solomon is saying, "because that is going to affect everything else about you" beginning with your mental and emotional health and then radiating out into the rest of your life.

So, let's think about our thinking and where it comes from. You do know that your thinking doesn't "just happen," right?

It's actually a multi-layer process. And much of it we're not even aware of ... unless we take the time to think about our thinking.

And what I'm going to give you here is a very, very rough and super-condensed outline. But it will do for our purposes today.ⁱⁱ

We all have what modern psychology calls "core beliefs."

Core beliefs are the ideas and perspectives and mental frameworks that are entrenched deep in the foundations of your mind. They were formed in you and in me at a very young age without us even realizing it was happening.

And they're based on three things.

- Our childhood experiences
- Our inborn dispositions (personality)
- And the culture around us – whether that's the culture of our family or the culture of the city or whatever environment we're surrounded by.

Together those three things form in us core beliefs ...

In three main areas (four if you grew up in a Christian family).

- Core beliefs about yourself – what you think of yourself, how you esteem yourself.
- Core beliefs about other people – what you think of humanity in general, how you esteem other people
- Core beliefs about the world – is this a good place or a bad place? Is it safe or is it dangerous?
- Then, if you grew up in a Christian home, core beliefs about God: what you think about Him – is He good? Does He care? And so on.

So, your core beliefs are what you think deep down – in the very foundations of who you are – about yourself, about others, about

the world and about God.

A good analogy is to think about building a house. The first thing you do is to lay a strong foundation. You pour wet concrete at the base of the house – into the footings and the trenches – and then, when the concrete dries, you build the rest of the house on top of it.

In the house of your thinking, your core beliefs are like the concrete foundation of a house. When you're young, *it's wet concrete*. It's being shaped and molded and formed by your childhood experiences, by those innate dispositions, by the culture around you.

But as you get older, that mental concrete begins to dry so that by the time you're a teenager, many of your core beliefs are completely set. They're at the very center of who you are. And they're the foundation on which you're going to build your thinking and therefore your life.

Now these core beliefs give rise to “assumptions.”

In every situation you in which you find yourself, you're operating off of a set of assumptions about yourself, God, others, and the world and how it all fits together. You have an implicit understanding of what everyone's role is, what everyone's motive is, what everyone's thinking is, etc, etc.

You just assume all of those things to be true, based on your core

beliefs.

Now this is very important. Both the core beliefs and your assumptions are hidden to you. You don't, on a daily basis, think about these things. They're just buried somewhere in your mind.

Now, these assumptions create what's known as "automatic thoughts."

"Automatic thoughts" are what goes through your mind on a day-to-day basis without you even having to try. (This is why they're called automatic).

You don't wake up the morning and go, "Oh man, I'd better be thinking every second today or I'm in trouble."

No, you wake up and you just think and you just go. You're thinking constantly without telling yourself to do so.

The question is ... *where do these thoughts come from?*

They're driven by your assumptions about yourself, God, others and the world, and the core beliefs that sit under those assumptions.

Are you following this?

Now, again, those assumptions and core beliefs are hidden to you. They're buried in your subconscious. They're in your *heart* (to use the language from Solomon's proverb).

But these automatic thoughts? You're aware of them. They're what's going through your mind as you go throughout the day.

And they create, finally, your actual behavior.

What you do, why you do it, how you act, whether you're friendly or not to somebody, whether you get in to work early and work hard or whether you're lazy, or whatever it is ...

- Your actual behavior
- Comes from your automatic thoughts
- Which are driven by your hidden assumptions
- Which are derived from your foundational core beliefs.

Is this making sense?

Let me give you a couple of examples to help illustrate the concept – and, specifically, how our thinking gets messed up; how bad stuff starts happening in our heads and then comes out in our life.

Let's say you have the core belief that "I'm not lovable."

Remember, that's hidden from you. It's not like you go around thinking all the time, "Gosh, I am just not lovable." It's buried deep down in your heart because of experiences from a long time ago.

Now what "I'm not lovable" creates in you ...

The assumption is, when it comes to people – “people will abandon me.”

Because why would anyone stick with me? Why would anybody have any long-term relationship with me?

Everybody’s eventually going to turn their back on me because “I’m not lovable.”

Now, the assumption that people will abandon me gives rise to an automatic thought when I’m at a social event and someone new is talking with me ...

My automatic thought is “what do they want from me?”

Because they obviously don’t want to be my *friend*. They certainly are not interested in me just because of *who I am*. There has to be an angle. So what is it that this person actually wants from me?

And instead of enjoying the conversation and focusing on getting to know the other person, your mind works hard to try and figure that out.

This creates the behavior of being defensive and withdrawn from others.

In fact, you decide you’re not even going to go to these events anymore because everyone is so fake all the time.

Are you with me?

Let me give you a more personal example. I've mentioned in the past that one of the core beliefs about myself that I have struggled with ...

Is feeling like "I am not good enough."

Somehow, that belief got planted deep in my heart when I was a kid. And I can actually think of different people and situations that produced that in me. I have a pretty good idea how it got there.

And that belief often leads to the assumption that "other people are better and smarter than me."

I remember when I came to seminary years ago and I was in class or at meetings with other pastors. I would always get this feeling like they were so much – this is weird – *bigger* than me. Like "I'm just a little kid here. I'm not a *real pastor* like they are."

Now, when your assumption is that others are better and smarter than you ...

Your automatic thought is "I'm not sure I have that much to offer anyone."

In fact, a lot of times that thought is actually in my head while I'm speaking to you all except it's worded more specifically.

I literally think, like right now, "this message is probably not helping anyone."

That's why I keep asking you if you're with me!

Occasionally, I even wonder if I could get off the stage without anyone noticing. Just kind of stop talking and be done.

But that would be even more embarrassing than finishing a message that's probably not helping anyone, so I don't.

But afterwards – and this is the behavior that comes from the automatic thought ...

What happens is self-condemnation.

Almost every Sunday afternoon, I go home from church and at some point I'll say to myself – and I don't want to give you the wrong impression here; this doesn't go on for hours and hours, it's just a period of a few minutes and it maybe happens two or three times ...

I'll say to myself “Rick, that message was just *stupid*. Why did you think it was worth talking about *that*? No one even understood what you were saying. You weren't clear enough. You didn't give enough practical application. You'll be lucky if anyone comes back next week.”

Now some of you are thinking, “Come on, Rick, there's no way that should happen to you. You've been doing this for enough years now that you should know you're doing *something* right. You should know that God is using your messages.”

You're right. I *should* know. I *do* know. But the self-condemnation keeps happening.

In fact, years ago it got so bad that Jetta told me to please not ask her for her opinion of my message after church because whatever she said was never enough.

We'd get in the car and I'd say, "well, what did you think?"

And she'd answer, but I was never happy with what she said.

But *that* wasn't *her* fault.

The problem was that *she* would be talking about something at the *conscious* level – what just happened at church. But the issue I was dealing with – *unbeknownst* to me – was at the subconscious level; at the heart level. And nothing she could say could fix that.

And just to be totally clear, I'm not sharing this with you because I want you to come and tell me how great my messages are.

Well, actually, I do.

But don't – unless God has really spoken to you somehow – because if you're trying to make a person feel good about themselves, nothing you can say will be enough.

The problem is at the heart level – their messed up core beliefs.

And you can't fix that.

The Fixer

Which, of course, then leads to the obvious question ... who *can* fix it?

Heck if I know. I'm done. I'm too embarrassed now.

Just kidding.

Who can fix my messed up core beliefs and your messed up core beliefs and all the downstream consequences that lead us into the psychiatrist's office because we're anxious and depressed ... or the lawyer's office because our spouse can't live with our behaviors any longer?

Who can fix the mess in this system?

And I know what you're thinking (because this is always the answer whenever a preacher asks a "who" question) ... you're thinking "*Jesus* can fix it!"

You can never go wrong by answering "Jesus" in church, right?

But not this time because the truth is – and if you're a Christian, this is very, very important for you to understand because a lot of us tend to think of Jesus as a genie in a bottle who will magically

solve all of our problems.

But the truth is ...

The only person who can fix my faulty core beliefs is ME.

I'm the one who has to guard my heart. I'm the one who has to look deep into the muck and mire and clean it up.

Now, that doesn't seem very fair because the concrete of my core beliefs was poured and hardened before I even knew it was happening. But that doesn't change the reality of the situation.

Of course that *is* a little confusing because the Bible *does* say that when if you're a Christian – if you put your faith and trust in Jesus as your savior and decide to follow Him as your leader – if you're a Christian, God *does* give you a new heart.

But that's not the same thing as what we're talking about here.

In that case, "heart" means a new set of desires that wants to please God. And *even in that case*, those desires compete with the old desires that want to please ourselves instead of God. So there's no "magic" there, either.

"But what about the Holy Spirit, Rick? Doesn't He come to live in us? Doesn't He give us power to change?"

Yep. Absolutely.

But even then, the Holy Spirit doesn't magically do it for us. He doesn't reach in and supernaturally change our faulty core beliefs and assumptions.

Here's what Jesus said the Spirit would do for us.

"He will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you." John 14:26 (NLT)

In other words, the Holy Spirit will provide us with an alternative and correct set of core beliefs based on what Jesus taught and modeled.

But replacing our messed up beliefs with those beliefs? Changing the neuroplasticity of my brain and the patterns of thinking that have become hardwired and now direct my life without me even thinking about it?

That transformation is up to me.

Or, as the Apostle Paul puts it:

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

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

By the way, that's actually very similar to something Jesus said over and over in his teaching which was "repent" – a word which literally means "change your thinking, change your mind" and *not* change your behavior or clean up your act.

Why? Because Jesus knew that if you got rid of your faulty core belief system and trusted what He was saying, your life would change. You would become the person you were meant to be; the best possible version of yourself; a person who lives a life pleasing to God and yourself.

So, just to be clear: even if you're a Christian – *especially* if you're a Christian – it's up to *you* to change your core beliefs. No else can believe something different *for you*. You have to do that yourself.

Where your relationship with God comes in is that ...

- The Holy Spirit gives you the *desire* to change
- He gives you the *power* to do so
- And He gives you the *proper core beliefs* about yourself, God, others and the world (and we'll talk about them in the coming weeks).

But the work is still yours to do.

Renewal Project

So how do we do it?

I think there are three steps involved in the process. And you need to do these over and over again in your life.

1. Give thought to your thoughts. Think about your thinking.

By the way, the fact that you can even do that is evidence that you are created in the image of God. Your dog can't do it and neither can your cat.

Anyway ... when you give thought to your thoughts you start by paying attention to how you act in certain situations that come up again and again.

For example:

1. Do you often find yourself saying "yes" when you really mean "no?"
2. Do you find yourself getting depressed when people are upset with you?
3. Do you have a need to be approved by others to feel good about yourself? (that's me)
4. Do you act nice to someone on the outside, but on the inside you can't stand them?
5. Do you often remain silent in order to keep the peace?
6. Do you believe that if you make mistakes, you are a failure? (that's me)

7. Do you criticize others in order to feel better about yourself?
8. Do you try to avoid looking weak or foolish for not having the answer? (that's me again)
9. Do you get defensive when people offer you constructive criticism?
10. Do you have a need to be needed in order to feel alive?
11. Do you want your children to behave well so others will think you are a good parent?
12. Are you living in a way that is contrary to your personality?

Asking questions like those will help you start to pay attention to your actions.

Then, once you do that, you ask the “why” question because this is what reveals your hidden assumptions and the core beliefs.

1. Why do I get defensive when people offer me constructive criticism?
2. Why do I have to be needed in order to feel alive?
3. Why am I fearful and unable to take risks?
4. Why is it so important that other people not get mad at me?
5. Why am I afraid to admit that I am not God and I am inadequate in some areas?
6. Why is it so important to me that others think I'm a good parent?
7. Why am I living in a way that is contrary to my personality, the way God wired me up?
8. Why am I avoiding this certain situation or this person?

9. Why do I say “yes” when I really mean “no?”
10. Why do I want to succeed so badly (in anything)?

You get the idea? “Why” reveals a lot about what’s going on beneath the surface.

And by the way, don’t hesitate to ask God to point these things out to you.

The Bible says that ...

The LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts.
1 Chronicles 2:9 (NIV)

The work is up to you, but the Holy Spirit will help you see the “why” if you ask.

The second step in the process is to ...

2. Crush your faulty core beliefs once they’re identified.

The Apostle Paul wrote something very interesting about this. He said ...

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God ...

In other words, there are thoughts and ideas in our heads that are opposed to what God has revealed about us, Him, others and the

world. They *seem* to be the real deal but they're only pretenders, Paul says.

So we're demolishing them. We're taking a sledgehammer to them.

Then he says,

And we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:5-6 (NIV)

So, in this second step, we look at our core beliefs and ask “is that the truth?” If not, it needs to be demolished.

For example, my core belief “that I am not good enough” and my assumption that “everyone else is better than me” are not from God (and I'll explain why in just a minute). So they need to meet the sledgehammer.

And my thought that “therefore, I have nothing to offer so what a loser I am” needs to be taken captive thrown in the thought jail because I want to be thinking what God says.

... which is the third and final step in the process.

3. Think God's thoughts.

Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Philippians 4:8 (NIV)

So, what is the proper core belief for my faulty “I am not good enough” belief?

This is really going to help some of you because you have the same problem.

Here it is.

It’s that “I don’t *have* to be good enough because Jesus is. It’s OK that I can’t be perfect. It’s OK that others are better than me. It’s OK that sometimes I don’t have anything to offer. It’s OK that sometimes my messages aren’t that great.”

I don’t have to be perfect because Jesus is. And I can relax in Him. That’s what’s true.

And guess what? When you start doing this process and keep at it, over time your brain will literally change. You will literally re-wire it.

And your mental and emotional health – among other things – will begin to improve.

Conclusion

So, this week, your assignment should you choose to accept it is to spend some time every day ...

1. Giving thought to your thoughts so you can identify your core beliefs.
2. Then crushing your faulty core beliefs.
3. Then (discovering if necessary) and then thinking God's thoughts.

Let's pray together.

Feature – You Say

CLOSING COMMENTS

1. Next week – Point of view: dealing with people and situations that are less than optimal and how that affects mental and emotional health.

2. Blessing

May you have the power to understand
How wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is.

May you experience the love of Christ,
though it is too great to understand fully.

May you be made complete with all the fullness of life
And power that comes from God.

Endnotes

ⁱ Rick Warren, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-battle-for-your-mind>

ⁱⁱ This explanation is from Andrew Gardner's excellent introductory message in his RE:THINK series from October 2017. <https://vimeo.com/232586203>