



Battle for the Mind Leaders' Notes



The Problem is not the Problem

“The problem is not the problem.

The problem is your attitude about the problem.

Do you understand?”

Captain Jack Sparrow, *Pirates of the Caribbean*

Misunderstandings

Bethany's friends told her that they were planning to go shopping in town but they weren't going to invite her to go with them.

➤ How do you think she felt about that? Why?

Then they said ‘Hey – whose birthday is it in a couple of weeks’ time? Well it was hers!

➤ So how do you think she felt about it then? What made the difference?

What you **believe** about something will affect how you **feel** about it.

If you think your friends are leaving you out of a shopping trip because they just don't want you with them you will feel left out / unwanted / rejected. If you believe they have not invited you because they are planning to buy you a birthday present you will feel pleased, even special.

Aimee is 12 and has been doing Spanish at school for a term. She says she can't remember even one word.

➤ How might she feel about this?

Well it depends on what she believes about it. Consider these options

1. She wants to become an aid worker in South America where Spanish is the main language. It's the only thing she is interested in doing!
2. She believes that she has to be successful in everything as her value as a person depends on this
3. She believes that she will never need Spanish and that learning it is a waste of time and very boring.

➤ So what are Aimee's choices regarding her attitude to Spanish? Possibilities include:

1. She could trust God over whether she will need it or not.
2. She can accept that not being good at everything is okay and does not make her any less special as a person.
3. She can ask God to help her to learn something useful.

I struggled with learning German at school and tried to fail in it so that I could leave the class. Twenty years later I found that I needed the little that I had learned and was glad of it.



I was also bad at sport but when I was 15 I prayed that I would be good enough to enjoy participating. This helped me to change my attitude and I started making more effort. With the exception of rounders I did improve and consequently enjoyed it more.

Charlie often fails school assessments and so believes that he is stupid.

➤ What else could he believe about this?

Responses here may vary according to culture but the aim is to encourage not condemn. Many people who did not thrive at school go on to lead rewarding lives.

See [School Reports Get Outdated](#)

"Everybody is a genius.
But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree,
it will spend its whole life believing that it is stupid." Attributed to Einstein

Frances is fanatical about fashion. Actually she isn't more than most girls but she does worry a lot about wearing the 'right outfit'. Fashion can be fun but it can destroy our freedom if we believe that our value depends on our appearance.

At home your Mum or Dad may be short tempered with you some days. It could be that you have upset them or it could be because they don't feel well or are worried about money or something. Sometimes when parents divorce, their children mistakenly believe that it's their fault. It never is.

King Saul lost his mind. It's unclear how it started. He had made some stupid decisions as king, such as when he commanded the army to fast when they were in the middle of a battle situation. (1 Samuel 14:24) After God told him that he had rejected him as king and would be appointing someone else, he really began to go downhill mentally. His imagination started to feed on negative thoughts. He became paranoid and imagined that other people, especially David were out to get him when they were not. He became unpredictable / unstable / neurotic. Not only did he try to kill David when he realized that David was God's choice as his successor, but he even threw a spear at his own son Jonathan on one occasion when Jonathan was trying to reason with him concerning David. (1 Samuel 20:32-33)

Self-talk

An old Cherokee told his grandson, "My son, there is a battle between two wolves inside us all. One is evil. It is anger, jealousy greed, resentment, inferiority, lies and ego. The other is good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, humility, kindness, empathy and truth."

The boy thought about it, and asked,

"Grandfather, which wolf wins?"

The old man quietly replied, "The one you feed."

Most of us don't get quite as bad as King Saul but we all talk to ourselves. Research shows that we can have as many as 1,300 words a minute or 30,000 thoughts a day racing through our brains.



Growing Thought Trees

Food we put into our stomach is digested by enzymes and affects our physical health and growth. In the same way, our 5 senses feed information into our brain. Electrical impulses and chemicals in the brain process the information creating thoughts. Thoughts and memories are made of neurons (nerve cells) and look like miniature trees with branches. The more we choose to dwell / focus on a thought / memory / situation / problem, the more branches grow on that particular thought tree. Some trees will be positive, some neutral and some negative or toxic. Some may be mixed. Each type of thought tree triggers certain chemicals. These will affect our mood, attitude and health both physically and mentally. Therefore what we think about has a significant effect on both our physical and mental health. Toxic thoughts are like parasite that sap our strength and cause a range of illnesses.

A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person's strength. Proverbs 17:22 NLT
A happy heart is like good medicine, but a broken spirit drains your strength. Proverbs 17:22 NCV

Healthy thoughts have the following effects

- They help the brain to grow
- They help the nervous system to stay balance and healthy
- They strengthen white blood cells which fight off infections
- They help the digestive system work smoothly – good general health.
- They help us to feel like exercising which releases healthy chemicals
- They help us to maintain good mental health

What influences our thoughts?

Our thoughts/beliefs about things that happen to us are affected by things like

1. Our past memories and experiences
2. Misunderstandings / not knowing all the facts
3. What we see, hear, read on TV, papers, books etc
4. Our own self-image and goals in life
5. Current problems

When things do go wrong ask God to bring good out of them. Cow dung is a smelly waste product but it also fertilizes the soil. Romans 8: 20 Genesis 50:20

Memories

"Miss Earthy – you've shrunk", declared Jenny as she towered over her prep teacher.

"This room has got smaller", noted Trudi who was re-visiting her old church.

As we grow taller things get smaller! In the same way we sometimes need to shrink our memories. Sometimes we need to step back from a memory and ask God to help us see it differently and ask for healing for any pain. It is possible for an amputee to feel pain in a limb that is no longer there. It is the same with memories but God can help us to see them in a new way.



“Simon was always doing things for people but despised himself as a ‘wimp’, until someone said ‘you have a good heart’. It was a revelation. He realized he was still judging himself by the nasty attitudes of bullies in his primary school. Now he can stop feeling bad about the being the good-hearted person he is.” *Article by Jane Firbank*

Memories can play tricks on us and we sometimes don’t remember correctly what actually happened. A girl named Janice remembered her mum being really mean and not letting her go on a trip to the beach with her friends that she had been looking forward to all summer. But years later when she checked the facts with her brother and mum, she found that it hadn’t happened that way at all. Her mum had reminded them both that the bus was due in 10 minutes and they needed to hurry in order to catch it. They didn’t listen to her and so they missed the bus.”

Retold from ‘Unlocking the Secrets of your Childhood Memories’ Leman & Carlson, page 134-5

Guard the gates of your mind

Guard the gates of your mind – your eyes and your ears. Be careful what you see and hear. Of course it’s impossible to go through life without seeing and hearing some things that aren’t good for us. But we can choose which thoughts to keep replaying in our heads and therefore which type of thought trees we are growing.

Our self-image and personal goals

Our personal value system plays a large part in how we interpret our experiences.

The goals that we take seriously can contribute towards unhelpful thoughts and feelings.

- **Unreachable goals**

You can’t do your Maths homework.
How do you feel?

- **Blocked goals**

It’s your mum’s birthday tomorrow and you can’t find the present that you wanted to give her.
How do you feel?

- **Uncertain goals**

“I must do well at school / at football / at...
It seems like a good goal but how can it make you feel?

Examples of unhelpful beliefs - How would these thoughts cause you to feel?

1. I’m completely useless/ stupid
2. I must do everything ‘perfectly’.
3. I have to please everyone
4. I should be able to do this or I am a failure
5. I have to be like everyone else or no one will like me
6. This week is going to be awful.

We all experience the negative emotions of fear, guilt, shame and anger and sometimes they are necessary.

Allowing them too much space can enable them to overwhelm our brains and make us ill either physically, mentally or both.



More unhelpful beliefs

7. Things must go the way I expect.
8. I have a right to be angry over this
9. If I am criticised, it means people don't like me
10. I must get things right first time
11. I must win – be the best at ...
12. I must get this right without needing help
13. If I look silly or fail, I couldn't handle it.
14. If I were rejected it would be so painful I wouldn't get over it.
15. Nobody really likes me
16. I'm no good at anything
17. There is a perfect way of doing this & I have to find it
18. People should listen to me
19. If I can't get this right first time, it's not worth doing at all.
20. If I make a mistake, no one will like me
21. I must look good

"As the waves crash
against the rocks
so negative thoughts
pound against
the shoreline
of our personality
eroding
our sense
of worth."
Liz Babbs

- Which of these thoughts do you get and how do they affect you?
- What antidotes or positive thoughts can you think of to help you fight these / strengthen you?
- Is there anything else you can do?

Attitude is a choice: no one forces you to think, feel or behave the way you do. Pastor Tayo Adeyemi

Our attitudes are influenced by our experiences and our environment – our background, how we are treated and so on. But as we get older, we have more choice over what attitudes we want to nurture within us.

We can choose to develop a negative critical attitude which makes it difficult for us to enjoy life and also makes us difficult to live with. Or we can choose to develop a positive attitude – be grateful – to God and others and look for the best in people.

A morning prayer!

Dear Lord,
So far today, I've done all right.
I haven't gossiped.
I haven't lost my temper.
I haven't lied or cheated.
I haven't been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish or overindulgent.
I'm very thankful for that.

But in a few minutes, Lord, I'm going to get out of bed;
and from then on, I'm probably going to need a lot more help.

Amen

Author Unknown



Sadly I have to admit that I need help sooner than that, because those waking moments present the 1st challenge of the day for me in terms of my attitude.

It's an easy time for negative, critical or anxious thoughts to slip in. If I let them settle, it makes a bad start to the day. My mum called it 'getting out of bed on the wrong foot'.

I now try to make an effort to choose a positive or grateful thought.

Finding a happy thought to help you isn't just a fairy tale thing (Peter Pan / Harry Potter book 3). It's about encouraging healthy thought trees to grow in your brain and discouraging the thorn trees.

Watch your thoughts for they become words
Choose your words for they become actions.
Understand your actions, for they become habits.
Study your habits, for they will become your character.
Develop your character, for it becomes your destiny.

So how do we deal with it?

What are you like in the mornings?

Do you get out of bed 'on the wrong foot', or feeling that the world is against you?

Or are you lovely until someone upsets you?

Rather than let thoughts rampage through your mind, chaotically & uncontrolled, capture them and present them to Jesus.

How?

Even the best people have bad attitude days so don't be afraid to take responsibility for your attitude.

Self-honesty is the 1st step to recovery.

Identify any negative phrases you often use.

Ask God to help you want to change

Help is always available to those who ask.

Picture your thoughts as miniature trees.

Ask – is this thought good for me?

Is it true or could it be from my own confused thinking?

Is this a healthy tree or a poisonous/thorn tree or a mix?

Decide whether to let this thought tree stay, grow, prune it or uproot it.

Whatever you decide to do with it will affect the neural circuitry of your brain. If you accept it your brain will grow more branches. If you reject it, it should disappear.

It is harder to this in particularly difficult memories but let's focus on everyday ones for now – they can be hard enough sometimes!



How to Pray

Ask Jesus to

1. Heal any painful or difficult memories that you have
2. Take away your fears
3. Help you to see your true value
4. Help you to understand what triggers these thoughts.
5. Help you not to keep thinking thoughts that harm you
6. Ask him to fill you with his Holy Spirit.
7. Trust him – he is building your character and can use everything to help you grow.

Do this regularly.

The enemy will return with his battering ram. Don't be discouraged. He's already lost the war and he knows it. He's just trying to get in a few more shots before the whistle blows.

Soak your mind in some Bible verses. The Psalms are a good place to go for help with thinking positively. It may take time to fully deal with these things.

Have something by your bed to read as soon as you wake, or even better memorize a short verse to think even before you are able to open your eyes.

Have a piece of music ready to play. Maybe something gentle rather than over cheerful first thing in the morning.

Helpful thoughts/beliefs/words (antidotes)

1. I would likebut I can live without it
2. I don't likebut I can put up with it.
3. I like to get my work right, but it doesn't mean I'm stupid if I don't.
4. Others struggle with life sometimes too but they show it in different ways.
5. It's okay to make mistakes sometimes – everyone does. (Did Jesus ever get his sums wrong?)
6. Just because I'm different, it doesn't mean that people don't like me.
7. When I make mistakes, most people are likely to forgive me.
8. God is bigger than my mistakes and I can take them to him.
9. Pearls are grown because of annoying pieces of grit

You're in a battle. It rages every day whether you choose to participate or not. There is an enemy who wants free access to your heart, to intoxicate it and produce all sorts of vile thoughts, attitudes and behaviours.

Go through an average day and chances are you'll get shot down once or twice. Disappointment, discouragement and disillusionment are always on the prowl. But with God, you can be wise to these assaults. The best way to do that is to make sure it's filled with God. Knowing God is so important because it shapes everything that we become. Jesus offers you life in its fullest sense, so don't settle for anything less.

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A final story

Columnist Sydney Harris tells the story of accompanying his friend to a newsstand. The friend greeted the newsman very courteously, but in return received gruff and discourteous service. Accepting the newspaper which was shoved rudely in his direction, the friend of Harris politely smiled and wished the newsman a nice week-end.

As the two friends walked down the street, the columnist asked:

“Does he always treat you so rudely?”

“Yes, unfortunately he does.”

“And are you always so polite and friendly to him?”

“Yes, I am”

“Why are you so nice to him when he is so unfriendly to you?”

“Because I don’t want **him** to decide how **I’m** going to act.”

‘Why am I afraid to tell you who I am? John Powell page 38

The Bible on Thoughts

Exodus and Numbers tell us about the Israelites leaving Egypt – the people’s constant complaining.

There are many books and articles on the power of positive thinking. Some of them say that the power to live a good life comes from us, whereas the Bible says that such power comes from God although we do have to play our part. The idea that what we think has a powerful effect on us has been in the Bible for centuries. Proverbs 4:23 in the Youth Bible (NCV) says

“Be careful what you think because your thoughts run your life”

This is short and catchy so easy to remember. The full depth of this verse can be found in other translations. One possible paraphrase would be –

**“Most important of all, be careful what you dwell on in your heart,
because it is the control centre of your personality.”**

Proverbs 4:20-27 (from NLT, NIV and the Message)

My child, pay attention to what I say.

Listen closely to my words.

Don't let them out of your sight.

Keep them in your heart.

They are the **key to life** for those who find them;

they **bring health to your whole body.**

Above everything else, guard your heart.

It is where your life comes from.

Don't speak with twisted words. Keep evil talk away from your lips.

Keep your eyes focused on what is right, ignore all sideshow distractions.



Other verses

Don't copy the behaviour and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Romans 12:2

Let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God. Ephesians 4:23

Casting down harmful imaginations, we capture every thought and make it give up and obey Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:5

You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, whose thoughts are fixed on you! Isaiah 26:3 NLT

A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person's strength. NLT Proverbs 17:22

A happy heart is like good medicine, but a broken spirit drains your strength. NCV Proverbs 17:22

Love prospers when a fault is forgiven, but dwelling on it separates close friends. Proverbs 17:9 NLT
Romans 8:18-39, especially verse 28

NB: This session / article is not about going into denial about problems. Suppressing feelings is often just a short term solution and can be harmful to your health. This is about being careful not to misinterpret events and not to develop a habit of thinking negatively too often. Likewise, many health issues both physical and mental may have different root causes. Whatever the cause, people need understanding and support. If in doubt, speak to your doctor.

Sources and further information

CWR seminar notes

Article based on sermon: Transforming your attitude. Pastor Tayo Adeyemi

'Lord, Change My Attitude' James MacDonald

Word 4U 2Day

Articles and video clips by Dr. Caroline Leaf <http://drleaf.com/>

Dr. Caroline Leaf is a cognitive neuroscientist specializing in Neuropsychology.

[Anatomy of a Thought](#) 2.09 mins video clip.

[Controlling Toxic Thoughts And Emotions](#) 1.35 min video clip.

<http://drleaf.com/about/toxic-thoughts/>

<http://drleaf.com/blog/eliminating-toxic-thoughts-part-of-the-dirty-dozen>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A5VJ8UhP_Ig 2.14 minutes

The Depression Alliance - www.depressionalliance.org

Depression Anonymous - depressionanonymous.org

Clinical depression - www.clinical-depression.co.uk

The Samaritans - 08457-90-90-90

Credits

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Image: Fotolia Good Versus Evil © Scott Maxwell

Bible verses are from: NCV = New Century Version (Youth Bible)

NLT = New Living Translation

NIV = New International Version

And the Message by Eugene Peterson