

Lesson 1 – Treatment 1

Thinking Errors

Read the lesson below and then answer the questions that follow on a separate sheet of paper. Consider the questions carefully and give long detailed answers. It's time to move from the shallow thinking of our past and move toward a more thoughtful future. If you believe this lesson would be helpful to others you know, feel free to share it with them.

Either you are currently in treatment or you will enter treatment in the future. You may be quite skeptical about what secular psychology may have to offer you as a Christian. Much of what secular psychology has to offer is in direct opposition to Biblical teaching. However, let's not fool ourselves. Much of what we had to offer the world around us was in direct opposition to Biblical teaching.

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Cor 10:5 NIV)

The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit. (Prov 18:21 NIV)

We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. (James 3:2-8 NIV)

In cognitive intervention, it is taught that our thinking leads to the way we feel which leads to our behavior. Our thinking is also referred to as "self-talk." The Bible has much to say about our thinking and the power of the tongue. When we tell ourselves a lie to make a wrong thing seem right, it is referred to as a thinking error. Scripturally, there doesn't appear to be direct connection between thinking (self-talk) and our feelings or between our feelings and behavior. But the Word does indicate a direct connection between thinking (self-talk) and behavior (reread James 3:2-8). Everybody deals with thinking errors. The question is, are we willing to recognize them and take them captive in obedience to Jesus Christ?

See the attached list for the definitions of some thinking errors you may recognize that you have used. Some of these feed directly into our criminal behavior. Others may have been used to treat those around us poorly as we worked to protect the secrecy of our hidden (criminal) life. This list is by no means all inclusive. You may recognize some of these thinking errors under a different name.

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1. Looking back at your own life, what thinking errors did you use to make wrong things seem right? After each thinking error you recognize, write out what kind of statements you told yourself that fit the thinking error.
2. What thinking errors currently challenge you as a Christian? As with the question above, write out what kind of statements you tell yourself that fit the thinking error.
3. What tools have you discovered to take these thoughts captive? Do you have enough of these tools to get the job done? If not, how might you go about getting more of these tools?
4. If you have a tool to take a thought captive in obedience to Jesus Christ, when does that tool work best? When the thought first arrives in your mind or after you have entertained that thought or enjoyed it for a while? Discuss why you answered this way?
5. Relating to the question above, what kind of negative thoughts do you entertain for a while before taking it captive? What kind of negative thoughts do you tend to take captive immediately?

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1. **Excuse Making:** Avoiding accountability for your actions by blaming situations or things for your hurtful or irresponsible behavior. “It’s okay to drive faster than the speed limit because I’m running late for work.”
2. **Externalizing Blame:** Blaming other people for your hurtful or irresponsible behavior. Finger pointing and finding fault in another person in order to avoid accepting your own faults. “I had an affair because I wasn’t getting any sex from my wife.”
3. **Justifying:** The process of trying to make something right from something wrong by listing reasons that you think validate your actions and thereby avoiding properly dealing with any sense of responsibility. “I had a bad day at work, traffic was lousy, and my dog peed on the floor, so I ate a gallon of Blue Bell ice cream.”
4. **Minimizing:** Reducing or limiting the true significance of a hurtful behavior by comparing it with “worse behaviors”, filtering out the effects on the victim, or giving it an empty label or name. Statements using “just”, “only”, or “at least” are example of minimizing. “I just called my son an idiot, it’s not like I really hurt him.”
5. **Victim Stance:** Picturing oneself as the victim when held accountable for hurtful or irresponsible behavior rather than seeing the negative effects on the person who has really been hurt or victimized. “It’s alright to shun my son and his family because he was abusive to me when he was a child.”
6. **Closed Channel:** Closed-mindedness. Used to selectively filter incoming information. Used to avoid facing information and opinions that would require a change in attitude or beliefs. “I’ve been doing this job longer than my new supervisor, so there’s no reason to listen to him.”
7. **Vagueness:** Avoiding specifics and details of one’s hurtful or irresponsible behaviors in order to not take responsibility for these behaviors. “If what I said offended you, then I’m sorry.”
8. **Redefining:** Shifting the focus from oneself to someone else or changing the topic of conversation to a less threatening one. This is done to avoid taking responsibility and not addressing the issue brought to your attention. “I know you don’t understand why I lied to you but aren’t we having some nice weather lately.”
9. **Ownership:** Viewing someone as a possession over which one has total control and authority when this is not the case. Acting as if the possessions of others are your own. “She’s my daughter so if I want to It’s nobody else’s business.”
10. **Superoptimism:** The use of wishful or “magical” thinking. The belief that you will not get caught for your irresponsible or hurtful behavior. “Jesus saved me from my sins so I’ll never sin again.”
11. **Uniqueness:** Seeing yourself as special and different in a way that information applying to others does not apply to oneself. “No one has been through what I’ve been through so there’s no way they can understand how I see things.”

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12. **Assuming:** Taking something for granted and acting on it without checking it out first. This leads to faulty outcomes based on inaccurate beliefs. “I thought that if New Name Ministries didn’t write me back, I must have been dropped from their roles.”
13. **Zero State:** Seeing oneself as worthless unless things are going perfectly well and others are doing what you want them to do. “If you won’t go on a date with me then I must be an undesirable person.”
14. **Instancy:** An unwillingness to delay gratification or to endure discomfort or difficulty to obtain desired results. Wanting to act on your desires (urges) immediately without regard to the consequences. “Even though I committed to staying at New Name Ministries for a full year, it’s been 4 months and I’ve gotta job, gotta car, gotta go.”
15. **Entitlement:** Seeing yourself as deserving of something desired. This is one of the more dangerous thinking errors when it comes to finances. “I owe it to myself to eat at Whataburger every day after work even though I won’t have enough money to pay my rent on time.”