

## Winning the Battle of Your Mind

I am a Licensed Clinical Psychologist. More importantly, I am a Believer. I am a disciple of Jesus Christ. In my 25 plus years of clinical experience working with people, there is one common theme that is universal: brokenness, sin, and separation from God. This is true for non-Christians and Christians alike.

How does this brokenness manifest and what are some of the reasons people seek counseling? Some examples include: Addictions, Depression, Anxiety, Relational Issues, Co-dependency, Post-Traumatic Trauma (isolated incidents and/or complex trauma which includes sexual abuse), Eating Disorders, Marital Discord, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (also in the Anxiety Spectrum as are Phobias), and the list is long. Does anything else come to mind that steals joy and creates internal or external conflict? What do all of these descriptors of the human condition have in common? My assessment is that all are an artifact of one truth: we are fallen creatures living under our sin natures as prisoners separated from God. The only true cure for this chronic condition we find ourselves in is to come back into relationship with the One Living Triune God who never wanted us to suffer like this in the first place.

We were intended to live in perfect harmony with our Creator and since we chose otherwise because our minds deceived us, we now live out the consequences of our disobedience and desire to be equal with the One who is unequal and perfectly holy. The question then becomes how do we overcome these strongholds? From my experience the answer to this query is not through human might or power, on the contrary, we must tap into our ultimate power source first and His name is Jesus. When we ask Jesus to come into our hearts and lives, we are now able to do what apart from Him, could never be accomplished. Imagine trying to charge your phone without a charger. How would that even be possible? The answer is that it would not be possible because that is not how phones were created

to function optimally. We too need to stay close to the power source of Christ in order to function most effectively. We are told in the gospel of John, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me ***you can do nothing.***” John 15:5, NIV. Did you catch that last part? YOU CAN DO NOTHING apart from Jesus! And that, my friend, is why it is first so important to have one’s priorities straight and to yield to the Good Shepherd who loves you more than you will ever know. He loves you more than anyone or anything including another fallen human being in the form of a counselor.

Once we are aligned with our power source who is none other than G-O-D, we can begin to roll up our sleeves in the counseling relationship to address our minds which are often feeding on so many different false premises. That’s why Scripture is so important. The bible is not some outdated book with old fashioned ideals. The Bible is our life map. It is a living document and God’s love letter to us that equips us to counter the lies of the enemy, and instructs us how to live in accordance with God’s plan for our lives. Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ***Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.***” Romans 12: 1-2, NIV.

As an example of how this might work in your life or, someone you know—your daughter or friend (maybe even you)—let’s imagine that she has an eating disorder. She is convinced that her body is not what it ought to be. Her mind is full of cultural dictates of what a woman should look like (primary emphasis on outer appearance as opposed to inner beauty is another deception). She has concluded that her body does not correspond with these cultural (versus biblical) “norms” and therefore, will restrict her food intake in order to lose weight or, consult with a cosmetic surgeon to correct her perceived imperfections that are ruining her ability to live a contented and happy existence (or, so she

thinks). Furthermore, her mind is full of images that are neither realistic or in keeping with God's design since the women in these photographs have either modified their bodies through surgical interventions or, the photographs themselves have been modified through technology to erase any and all imperfections. Therefore, her mind has concluded and is telling her that the reality of her body (also known as God's gift to her and the temple of the Holy Spirit) is not as it should be and herein lies a real dilemma: her mind has been convinced of something that simply is not true. Who is the authority she defers to? Is her litmus test the authority of Scripture which is truth and filled with grace that affirms our imperfections or, is it the deceptions of the enemy; the one whose aim is to kill and destroy what was good and pleasing to God from the very beginning.

We need to be conquerors of these falsehoods and many others similar to the example I just gave. When we stand against these untruths (aka: lies of the enemy), we are in a position to genuinely take control of our minds. But this is not accomplished apart from God. Remember our power source? We must return daily to Jesus for a reset since we will be otherwise vulnerable to the enemy's schemes.

When people come to a secular humanistic therapist, they might encounter something called Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (i.e., CBT). As a matter of fact, many people request it because many insurance companies endorse it as an empirically based treatment approach. If anyone has ever taken statistics, one knows that data can be skewed or distorted in order to conform to the agenda of the sponsor of the research. Isn't that what the wine and alcohol industries, or the manufacturers of cannabis do today? Being discerning and understanding the data using critical thinking in order to interpret what these findings really mean is essential before concluding that CBT or anything else (e.g., Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, Contemporary Relational Psychoanalysis, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing Therapy, etc.) is really all it claims to offer. This is true because there are so many

different variables that affect the result. All approaches in one form or another are professing to change your thought life, which translates into shifting your perception of yourself.

Another example might be a woman who views herself as worthless and unlovable. We know that children first see themselves through the eyes of their parents. If what is reflected back is a distortion of the truth, it's very difficult to alter since these perceptions have been "hard-wired" into our brains by way of our neural pathways. Imagine a mound of sand with a marble perched on the very top. Now imagine taking your finger and pushing the marble down one side of the mound. Repeating this motion many times over will create a groove that will enable the marble to automatically go down the one side of the mound without any effort on your part over time. That is exactly what happens to us when we are conditioned to believe certain untruths about who we are in the world because it's not just reinforced by our family of origins; it is reenacted as we learn to relate to others as we grow up. We might even inadvertently, or unconsciously, seek out relationships that reinforce this false belief that we fall prey to by no fault of our own.

One's attachment style and the adaptations that take hold from the very first relationship a child has with mom or dad will for better or for worse, inform all other relationships thereafter. That is why attempting to think positively about oneself and thereby changing one's behavior, does not equate into lasting change. We have to connect back to the One who is our refuge and strength. We have to accept that our parents and important others may have failed us and we need to forgive them the hurt or in some cases, harm that was the result of their sin nature. And when we do that, our minds can be filled with truth that comes from God and not some theory based upon a flawed human philosophy of being in the world.

How do we do this? First, we must be willing to accept Jesus' invitation to spend eternity with Him instead of the tempter of our souls. Next, we abide in Him and learn His ways by reading God's

Word and being filled with the Holy Spirit on a daily basis. This is vitally important as I sometimes liken my own brain to that of a sieve. It seems like I need constant reminding and renewal since what was so clear to me on one day flies right out of my head the next and I am back up against a nature that will continually challenge me since it is far from God in so many ways. The great news is that there is a solution. It is daily time spent with the Lord as we learn to be more like Him and to trust that like the Israelites, He wants us to depend on Him daily and not get too far ahead of ourselves and think that once we know this truth that it's a done deal and we are independent and self-sufficient from this day forward. That is another lie and like the lost sheep, we must seek our Good Shepherd. The only and ultimate true source of healing and restoration; anything else is a cheap imitation and I know this as someone who has walked both sides of the path. With Jesus is so much better than trying to do it apart from Him.

What we take into our minds also affects our actions and eventually the condition of our hearts. I found a talk on YouTube (evidently, a lot of us struggle with this issue) given by Mary Kassian on developing self-control which as you know, is one of the fruits of the Spirit. In her talk she explains the Greek adjective, "sophron" which is generally defined as one of sound mind or, the ability to curb one's desires or impulses; to be self-controlled and temperate. When people come to see me and tell me that they are "...looking for tools," doesn't this sound like what they desire? People long to have control and yet, without God it is a losing proposition.

Therefore, be of good cheer since we do not worship a remote God who does not know the nature of our sufferings. We have a God who loves us so much that He was willing to humble himself in the form of human flesh. He was willing to come as a servant and to die an awful death that we truly deserved but instead, He took the penalty in our place. Wrap your head around that one and praise Him

since there is no stronghold too great that God cannot redeem and take captive. He will partner with you and release you. And, that's a promise you can depend on.

Dr. Gina M. Taffi is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist and Psychoanalyst in private practice. She works with individuals and provides psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, clinical supervision, and pastoral and biblical counseling.