

Session Four – Cognitive Approaches

Read Chapter 7 – pp. 76-98

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

-Philippians 4:8

Thinking in the Bible

Thoughts are a big topic in the Bible. What people think has big implications in matters of life and death, both temporal and eternal. The Bible's message is threefold: be aware of your thinking, beware of false thinking, and think correctly. (76)

- Proverbs
 - *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. 1:7*
 - *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 3:5*
- Isaiah 55:8
 - *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.*
- 2 Corinthians 10:5
 - *We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,*
- Romans 12:2-3
 - *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.*
- Philippians 4:8 (quoted top of page)

Cognitions and Mental Health Problems

Cognitions include how we think presently, how we remember the past, how we perceive the present, and how we anticipate the future... If we think pessimistically about the future – expecting that things will not work out for us, that good things will turn bad – this can cause depression and anxiety.

In terms of fast and slow thinking, if someone thinks these ways often and long enough, he or she will soon “know” them to be true. The knowledge will make the person perpetually anxious and chronically depressed. It will also affect how he or she behaves. (78)

Cognitive Therapy for Mental Health Problems

Therapy about thinking is called cognitive therapy. Let's reiterate the principles of cognitive therapy. First, thinking can become habitual so that we become unaware of what we think. Second, thinking affects how we feel and what we do. Third, thinking can be wrong. Fourth, thinking is learned and thus, can be relearned. (79)

Psychoeducation – Psychoeducation is educating people about their psychological functioning. This is particularly important for persons in emotional distress...

Gentle Confrontation – Confrontation entails challenging the validity of thinking. This must be done gently because people do not enjoy learning that their thoughts are wrong. Confrontation involves showing them examples of how thinking can easily be wrong and gently pointing out examples of their incorrect thinking...

Acceptance – Acceptance is the opposite of resistance. It means accepting that one is prone to incorrect thinking. Once a person realizes this, he or she can contest and struggle against the thoughts... Mental health professionals utilize the strategies Luther utilized: normalization and depersonalization.

- **Normalization** – To normalize mental health problems, empathize with people in their distress. Talk about and name what they are experiencing, then express directly that there is nothing unusual about the experience of mental health problems.

- **Depersonalization** – Depersonalization is making foreign something afflicting us... If something is not part of us, it is easier to recognize it as alien, challenge it, despise it (as Luther would say), and defeat it... This is obvious with some medical illnesses... it is harder to with mental health problems because our thoughts and emotion are uniquely our own. (79-80)

Restructuring, Reframing, and Ignoring – After a habitual thought is pulled into awareness, examined, and found to be erroneous, its power over feelings and behavior can and must be diminished. Restructuring and reframing are strategies for changing thinking. An alternative strategy is simply ignoring such negative thoughts.

- **Restructuring** – A restructured thought acknowledges reality (“not everyone likes me”), but it is more balanced and realistic [than the initial thought of “no one likes me”].

- **Reframing** – Reframing is more drastic. We “frame” events and incidents by how we think about why they happened...

- **Ignoring** – At times, thoughts cannot be changed... They come unbidden and keep coming even if we try to change them... Fortunately, restructuring or reframing is not necessary to diminish the influence of thoughts. Someone who is aware of negative thoughts and recognizes them as erroneous can ignore them. He or she can tell himself or herself, “I may not be able to stop my negative thinking, but I do not have to believe my negative thinking.” (81-82)

Luther’s Use of Modern Cognitive Therapy Techniques

- Discuss your favorites... or your least favorites (82-90)

Common Types of Negative Thinking

All-or-Nothing Thinking – Perceiving events only at the extremes.

Perfectionism – Thinking that any event or performance that is not conducted perfectly is terrible.

Attending Only the Negative – Focusing on small problems or imperfections while ignoring overall success.

Catastrophizing – Greatly exaggerating...the importance of some minor problem or mistake.

Disqualifying the Positive – [Discounting] success as luck, good fortune as unusual, and praise and kindness as exceptions.

Mind Reading – Assuming to know what another person is thinking [particularly attributing bad feelings/thoughts] (90-91)

Applying Cognitive Strategies as Luther Did

- Discuss how to apply cognitive strategies in helping/supporting others (91-97)
 - Psychoeducation
 - Gentle but Firm Confrontation
 - Acceptance
 - Depersonalization
 - Normalization
 - Restructuring Thinking
 - Ignoring Thinking

Christ and Anxious Thinking

- Read and discuss Matthew 6:25-34

25 *“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? **26** Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? **27** And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? **28** And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, **29** yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. **30** But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? **31** Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ **32** For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. **33** But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

34 *“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*