

Thinking and Emotions

The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words. I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss. Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: The unfailing love of the LORD never ends! By his mercies we have been kept from complete destruction. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each day. I say to myself, "The LORD is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!" The LORD is wonderfully good to those who wait for him and seek him. So it is good to wait quietly for salvation from the LORD.
(Lamentations 3)

In a general sense, our emotions are a product of our thought life. If we are not thinking right, it will be reflected in our emotional life. A good example is found in the Bible. A man named Jeremiah expresses despair and bitterness as he wrongly perceives that God is against him and that God is the cause of his suffering and his difficult circumstances. He feels like God has attacked him & struck him down, so he can't experience life. He vents his feelings and fears. Jeremiah's emotions were a mess. What was his problem? His real problem was that his perception of God was way off center. Even though Jeremiah felt bad, God wasn't the cause of his problems. But Jeremiah wasn't thinking right, or interpreting his circumstances correctly, so he wasn't feeling right or responding right either. Blaming God never fixes anything.

Then Jeremiah remembers the truth and his whole way of being changes. *The unfailing love of the LORD never ends! ... Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each day ... The LORD is wonderfully good to those who wait for him and seek him ... therefore I have hope.* What a turnaround! Did God change? No. Did Jeremiah's circumstances change? No. What changed? Jeremiah's perception of God changed and his emotions followed suit. He remembered the many times God had been good to Him. He remembered that God would be kind to him. He remembered that with God he had power and wisdom available. Suddenly, Jeremiah had hope and strength again. There was optimism and a will to do something good. The way we think is the single most powerful motivation for how we face life each day.

We are not shaped so much by our environment as we are by our perception of our environment. Life's events

don't determine who we are; God determines who we are, and our interpretation of life's events determines how well we will handle the pressures of life. In reality we have very little control over our emotions. The weather, the amount of sleep we get, the food we eat all have subtle and unpredictable influences on how we feel at any given moment. But we do have control over our thoughts, and our thoughts determine our feelings and our responses. That's why it is so important that we fill our mind with the knowledge of God and His Word. We need to see life from God's perspective and respond accordingly.

Sometimes we feel like temptation is too strong and there's no way out for us except to give in to it. God tells us something different. The Bible says: *But remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you will not give in to it.* (1 Corinthians 10) When we are faced with temptation we can speak to our feelings and our thoughts and tell them that we can succeed with God's help. We can encourage ourselves.

Sometimes we feel that we are weak and don't have enough strength to face what we need to face and to do what we need to do. The truth from the Bible we can use to draw strength from is: *For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* (1 Tim. 1 & Phil. 4)

When we face failure and want to use that as an excuse to give up and isolate or move back into our destructive ways we can remind ourselves of how God responds to us: *The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* (Psalm 103 and 1 John)

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. What kind of thoughts color our day dark?
2. What difference does it make when I "tell myself the truth?"
3. How do I co-operate with God to get back on track when I am feeling down or pressured?