

CONTROL YOUR SELF-TALK

- A. Introduction: For several months we've been working on how we can become unmovable in the face of life's hardships and challenges. I Cor 15:58
1. In this part of our series we're addressing the emotions and thoughts generated by life's trials. They can be so overwhelming in the moment that we seem to have no control over them. And, we let them move us from a place of trust and confidence in God. We let them move us away from obeying God.
 - a. Emotions are the spontaneous response of the soulish portion of our being to what is going on around us. They are stimulated by the information we receive through our physical senses.
 - b. As Christians, we are instructed to walk or order our lives according to what God says and not what we feel (II Cor 5:7; Prov 3:5,6; etc.). Our emotions are unreliable.
 1. Not only have our emotions been corrupted by sin and have too much sway over us, they often give us inaccurate information since they are responding to the limited facts in the moment.
 2. And, they are affected and influenced by our own ungodly thoughts, misperceptions of reality, and the strongholds (learned thinking patterns) we have built up over our lifetime.
 - A. Emotions and thoughts work together because emotions feed thoughts and thoughts feed emotions. When fear is stimulated, thoughts such as "You're going to die" seemingly come out of nowhere, and further fuel the fear.
 - B. If your thinking is wrong and your emotions are giving you inaccurate direction and information you will end up being moved from obedience to and trust in God
 - c. Emotions are involuntary, meaning that they are not under the direct control of our will. You cannot will yourself to feel or to not feel something. However, you can control what you do and how you act no matter what you feel. Rom 8:13; Eph 4:26; Ps 56:3; etc.
 2. Part of gaining control over your emotions and thoughts so that they don't move you from your trust in God or drive you to sin, is gaining control over your self-talk.
 - a. Self-talk is a term psychologists use to refer to the constant chatter that goes on in our mind. We all talk to ourselves all the time. Some of the talk is silent (only in our heads) and some of it is audible (we're literally talking to ourselves).
 - b. Self-talk plays a major role in shaping and maintaining the way we view life, as well as how we deal with life. If we're going to remain unmoved in the face of life's challenges and hardships, we must know how to deal with our self-talk. That is our topic in this lesson.
- B. Jesus addressed the issue of self-talk, emotions, and thoughts and how to deal with them when He delivered what we call the Sermon on the Mount. Matt 6:25-34
1. v25--Jesus began by telling His followers not to worry (or take no thought, as it says in the KJV). Jesus went on to address the anxiety that arises out of concern over where the necessities of life will come from (food and clothing).
 - a. Worry is an emotion or feeling of anxiety. Anxiety is "an uneasiness of mind, usually over an impending or anticipated ill" (*Webster's Dictionary*). Worry is actually fear of a future event.
 - b. When we face (or see) a circumstance of lack—whether it be a large bill you cannot pay, loss of a job, etc.—the emotion of worry is automatically stimulated.
 1. Because of the lack we see (how will I get what I need to live) we feel fear that harm is going to come to us. That's completely normal. We are wired to respond that way.
 2. Then, thoughts (or reasoning) based on what we see and feel come to us: Where am I going to get food and clothing? And you begin to talk to yourself about it.
 - c. v31--Notice that Jesus said: Take no thought saying. This is self-talk. We feel the emotion, pick up the thought, and begin to talk to ourselves. As we talk about it, we either feel more worried and more anxious or reassured and encouraged, based on what we tell ourselves..
 2. This process of sight, emotions, and thoughts happens to all of us. But if we don't know how to deal

with it, we will be moved from faith and trust in God.

- a. We have a tendency to engage and answer questions based only on what we see and feel, and then we let the emotions and thoughts lead to other, even more dire, thoughts.
 1. In this economy how can anyone my age possible get a job! My neighbor was in a similar situation and he lost everything! If my wife wasn't so bad at handling money we wouldn't be in this situation! It's all her fault!
 2. As the emotions and thoughts feed each other, your self-talk gets crazier and crazier. I'll never find another job. If I can't pay my bills, I'll lose my house. We'll end up living in a box in an alley and starve or freeze to death!
 - b. In the face of lack, it's not unreasonable to ask yourself where your provision will come from. But if you engage that thought and begin to talk to yourself about it, you must know how to answer it according to the Word of God. This is the correct answer: My heavenly Father will help me.
 1. When Jesus made these statements about not worrying or taking thought, He had just finished teaching His audience that they have a Father in Heaven who cares for them. Matt 6:9-13
 2. Then He told them: Note the birds and flowers. Your heavenly Father takes care of them, and you matter more to Him than they do. Matt 6:26-32
 - c. 'Take no thought' comes from a root word that means divided. The word itself means a distracting care or something that takes our attention off of God and His promise to take care of us.
 1. Jesus instructed His followers to exercise their will and put their attention on the way things really are according to God.
 2. Instead of talking to yourself about where you're going to get food and clothing, talk to yourself about your loving Father and His promise to take care of you.
3. We must learn to exercise self-control in the way we talk to ourselves. Through our self-talk we all tend to engage with thoughts that should be stopped in their tracks, thoughts that feed our emotions and take us further away from reality as it truly is. How can you tell if you do this?
 - a. Here's a sample of the kinds of thoughts that undermine our confidence in God, discourage us, and keep us from becoming unmovable.
 1. We spend a lot of time talking to ourselves about circumstances that we can't actually do anything about — situations where there is no action we can take that will bring it to a definitive conclusion. (Your company goes out of business. Your sister refuses to speak to you even though you've tried to reconcile with her. Your taxes went up.) Constantly talking to yourself about such situation is wasted energy and it feed your fears and anxieties.
 2. We engage a lot of thoughts that tear us down and further discourage us. (If only I had or hadn't done...God is mad at me...I'm such a loser...no one will every love me.) Become aware of that kind of self-talk and stop it. Don't do the devil's work for him.
 - b. Much of our self-talk is focused on what might or might not happen, rather than on what is actually happening. As part of Jesus' instructions on dealing with worry, He said: don't borrow tomorrow's troubles. Matt 6:34--So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today (NLT).
 1. By engaging with thoughts we should never have taken, we often let something that hasn't happen and may never happen ruin today. We let a potential future event completely shape the present moment. That ought not be.
 2. If it's something that is definitely going to happen and you can't stop it, put your focus on reality as it truly is. Begin to talk to yourself about the fact that nothing can come against you that is bigger than God.
 4. Before we move on, let me ask one thing of you. Please don't take this lesson as a technique you can use to solve you immediate crisis: If I just stop saying certain words and start saying other words, things will go well for me. It has nothing to do with a technique.
 - a. It's about changing your view of reality by learning to see things as God sees them, by learning

how to bring additional facts from the Word of God to mind.

b. Almighty, All-knowing God has all the facts about everything. Reality is everything as He sees it.

He has given us the Bible to help us see the way things really are. When we learn to see life in terms of what He says, no circumstance, emotion, or thought will be able to move us from confidence in Him.

C. Last week we looked at two examples of people who experienced thoughts and emotions as they faced challenging circumstances. In both examples their self-talk played a major role in how they dealt with their situation. Let's revisit one of them and see what we can learn from their example.

1. We looked at Israel when they arrived at the border of Canaan after God delivered them from slavery in Egypt and led them back to their ancestral homeland. Moses exhorted the people: We've reached the land God promised us. Now go in and occupy it. Don't be afraid or discouraged. Deut 1:21,

a. However, before the entire company crossed the border and entered the land, at the insistence of the people, Moses sent twelve spies into the land on a reconnaissance mission.

b. They returned to Moses and the rest of Israel forty days later with a report. All the spies agreed that it was a beautiful, bountiful land. And all agreed that there were formidable obstacles: walled cities, war-like tribes, and giants. Num 13:26-33

1. Because of the way human beings are wired, that kind of information would automatically stimulate emotions in everyone who saw the land and heard the report. The primary emotion would be fear since what they could see was bigger than the resources available to them if they looked only at what they could see.

2. Sight and the emotions generated what they could see would lead to self-talk which the spies expressed as they gave their report to the rest of Israel. The words they spoke didn't come to them in the moment they gave their report. Their words were an expression of their view of reality and what they had been telling themselves as they spied out the land.

A. Ten of the spies declared that we look like grasshoppers compared to the people of the land. This land will swallow up anyone who enters it. Num 13:32,33

B. Joshua and Caleb declared that Israel was well able to take the land. Num 13:30; 14: 7-9

1. Joshua and Caleb talked to themselves and to the people to whom they reported by reminding themselves and the others that God was with them and would keep His Word to bring them into the land.

2. Ex 3:8--The first thing God told Moses when He called the man to lead Israel out of Egypt was: I have come to deliver you out of Egypt and bring you into your own land, a land of bounty and beauty.

2. The Book of Deuteronomy gives additional information about what happened at the border of Canaan. Moses was also involved in urging the people to remember God's promise and enter the land.

a. Deut 1:28--We find out that the ten spied discouraged the entire company by what they said.

1. Discouraged literally means to liquefy and is used figuratively to mean to faint with fatigue, fear, or grief. The word translated discouraged in v21 means to shatter or to scare.

2. In other words, the spies fed not only their own emotions but everyone else's with their talk.

b. They gave a report based only on what they could see (people taller and more powerful than us) and scared the people. And, once emotions start talking, it gets worse, because we all have a tendency to embellish and speculate. It happens to us and it happened to them.

1. We've all done it. Something bad happens and we tell ourselves this is the worst thing that ever happened. Ninety-nine percent of the time, that's not true. Something worse could be happening. But we feel like it's the worst thing ever. We talk to ourselves like that, and we feel more afraid, more hopeless, more whatever we are feeling.

2. Note what the spies said: Num 13:32--The land will swallow up any who go to live there. All the people are huge (NLT). Really? Does everyone who enters this land actually die? Did

they really see everyone who lives in the land? No. This is embellishment.

c. Moses talked like Joshua and Caleb did. He again exhorted the people: Don't be afraid (Deut 1:29). Note, he didn't say: Don't feel fear. He said: Don't act on it.

1. Moses reminded them of reality as it truly is: God will go before you and fight for you just as you saw Him do in Egypt. Remember how He took care of you again and again in the wilderness, like a Father cares for His child. Deut 1:30,31

2. The voices of Joshua, Caleb, and Moses show us how we get control over our emotions and keep them from moving us to act in ungodly ways. You make a choice to bring up what God says in the face of what you see and how you feel. You make your self-talk feed your faith and not your fears.

3. The people of Israel did not listen to Joshua, Caleb, or Moses. In fact, once they got the report from the spies, they gave into their emotions completely, and fed them, making it all worse.

a. Num 14:1-3--They cried all night long. This was their self-talk: We wish we had died in Egypt, or even here in the wilderness. Let's get out of here and go back to Egypt (v2, NLT). Really?

How ridiculous is that? They were slaves in Egypt who were crying out to God for Him to deliver them from their plight. Ex 3:7

b. Then they began to speculate (based on their feelings) as to why the Lord had brought them to this place. They concluded that He brought them there to die in battle and He delivered their wives and children to be carried off as slaves.

1. That was completely contrary to why God delivered them. He brought them out of Egypt to bring them into their own land, a land of bounty and beauty. Ex 3:8

2. All of us have done the same thing. When the emotions and thoughts have free reign in us, like them, our self-talk gets crazier and crazier. And our emotions and thoughts, together with the self-talk move us to wild speculation, taking us farther away from God and His Word.

D. Conclusion: We haven't said all that we need to say. But consider these thoughts as we close this lesson.

1. If you are going to become and remain unmoved in the face of life's challenges you must become aware of how you talk to yourself. You must get control of your self-talk in order to get control of your thoughts and emotions. You must tell yourself the way things really are according to God.

a. It goes without saying that you can't do this without the Word of God and the Spirit of God. The Word of God shows us the way things really are. The Spirit of God in us is the power to take control.

b. We must learn to make a choice to bring up what God says in the face of what we see and feel. We exercise our will and refuse to act on what we feel. And God, by His power in us, will strengthen us inwardly to maintain our stand when we side with Him.

2. We don't deny what we see and feel. We recognize that there's more to reality than what we see and feel. We recognize that what we see and feel doesn't alter what God says. More next week!