

# Telling Ourselves Lies

Drs Larry and Lois Dodds (3 of 3)



Romans 1 tells us, “to be transformed by the renewing of your mind”, but how do you do that? How do we change our minds? Scripture says, “as a man thinks in his heart, so is he.” So saying that, a lot of the things that come out of our hearts are the things that make us and help us—the activities we do, the decisions we make. Matthew 15:18 says, “Out of the heart the mouth speaks.” Again, all of these things that come out of the heart influence our behaviour. Proverbs 4:3 says that “Out of the heart flow the issues of life.” So how do we go about changing our thinking? How do we renew our minds?

Recent discoveries in brain chemistry and physiology, as well as counselling, support the notion that as we change our thinking and how we think, we actually change neurone-pathways and how our brains work. Then as we substitute truth for the lies we have learned, usually unconsciously, we change the ways we feel and behave. Changing the way we think literally changes the production of serotonin in our brain which affects how we feel.

We saw a demonstration of this at a conference for treatment of depression. They were trying to push medication at the conference, but we saw CAT scans, that you’ve probably seen, where images of the brain were blue in the background. Where there is more activity, it is yellow. But where the most intensive activity is, is red. There were two individuals, two patients, who were treated. There were before and after pictures. One person was treated with a medication and the other person was treated with changing how he thought. The end result was the same. The person who took the medication had changes in the brain showing he was thinking better. But the other person had changes in his brain because he learned to think differently. What that picture showed me was that how we think and what we think changes our brain chemistry. Many of our emotions are created.

Let me describe something. Maybe I’ve known you for a long time and I pass you along the sidewalk and I don’t greet you. You begin wondering, “What is wrong with Larry? What is wrong with me? Is he angry with me? Is he upset with me? What is happening here? Maybe he is angry with something I said at the meeting we had last week.” Really what is happening here is this event happens. You have feelings as a result in trying to sort this out. But what is really happening is that an event happens and you make an interpretation of that event as to what it means. Based on that interpretation, you have feelings.

This is a crucial piece of knowledge to have because we make these interpretations lightning fast based on past experience, based on negative messages we have in our hearts. For example, “I’m not worthwhile so Larry doesn’t want to talk with me because I’m not worth talking to.” That might be the message. Or because the family we grew up in, when people are angry with you, they don’t talk to you. So therefore, “Larry didn’t talk to me so he must be angry with me.” So you see our interpretation of the event is really what causes the feelings, not the event itself. This becomes then a gross distortion of reality.

These thoughts are, as I said before, they are lightning fast. We have been used to thinking this way so often that we never consider there is another possibility. They are very specific, such as, “I’m dumb, I’m stupid, I always, I should have.”

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They are usually almost always based on early messages that we had that condemned us or put us down. These automatic thoughts are always self-deprecating. They always put us down. This self-talk that we have that we interpret what things mean are based on gross distortions of reality. They are not true. This is why we call them lies. A book was written, 'Lies We Believe.' Based on these lies, we interpret what happens to us in the light of that.

For example, we have a friend who, when she was a little girl and there was a knock on the door, her mother would gather all the children and take them into a back bedroom of the house until the person went away. From this she learned that people coming to the door should be avoided or perhaps were dangerous. She found out years later that they were having problems with bill collectors and so mother didn't want to deal with them and took the children to a back bedroom. This is something she learned. She interpreted all of her interactions with strangers based on this experience she had as a little child.

Now how does this manifest itself? Some of the signs that show that you are thinking distortions are self-deprecating thoughts which put you down, which make you feel worth less than other people, make you feel insignificant, unloved, inadequate, incompetent, unlovable, all sorts of things. These can then proceed into a provoking a downward spiral and you feel even worse about yourself. Actually they create a kind of tunnel vision. They don't give any other options or possibilities for another interpretation. On-going conflicts in interpersonal relationships are often a sign there may be some of the automatic thoughts. These are hidden heart messages by which you are making interpretations of other people's actions. But it is the wrong interpretation and it leads to conflict.

One of the fallacies also, is that when something happens, there is only one way the situation can be interpreted. We have an acquaintance who had to go to the hospital for several days. When she got home, she called up Lois very upset that there were several messages on her answering machine from people who were checking up on her. Lois said, "That is interesting, how can you tell the difference between people who are checking up on you and the people who really care about you and want to know how you are doing." "I never thought of that," she said. She only had one way these messages could be interpreted.

So no matter how irrational our thoughts are or how wrong they are, we believe them because we never examine them. This includes things like should, ought, or must. If you hear yourself say should, ought, or must, behind that is a lie that you are believing. Sometimes we can awfulize. "Isn't this awful? This is terrible. The world is coming to an end if this happens." It is not that bad.

Just as automatic thoughts are learned, we can learn to think a different way. We can teach our minds to think true and positive thoughts which lead to feeling better about ourselves so that what we experience is the outworking of our own thoughts and beliefs. Now we have lots of ways of making errors, but I'd like to go through the distinct process of how we change how we think.

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For example, there may be a triggering event. Very often you'll find a situation happens and you'll have bad feelings about yourself. I'll just use a very simple one. I drop a half gallon milk container on the floor. My first thought is, "I am clumsy." What's wrong with this, the truth is 999 times out of a thousand I have taken that half gallon container out of the refrigerator and nothing has ever gone wrong, so I am not clumsy. The problem with my thinking is, or could be, "I have to do everything right without making a mistake. I have to do everything well." The truth is, this is the first time I've spilled milk in a year and most of the time I've taken out the milk without difficulty. So the next time, I'll just use two hands instead of one. And frankly just saying it, I feel better about myself. It is such a simple process. Something happens and we have the feeling about ourselves, "I'm clumsy, incompetent, I'm stupid, life is not worth living." Then we have the feelings as a result of that interpretation, but we have to go back and see what is wrong with this.

Here's another one. You wake up in the morning really feeling down in the pits. The thought is, "Life is for the pits. Life is not worth living. No one loves me." The error here is saying the way I feel accurately represents reality. It doesn't. This is a feeling I have, but it doesn't represent reality. And so the truth is the way that I feel doesn't represent the true state of the world. There is much to be grateful and appreciative for. For example, I was able to wake up this morning and get up on my own power and get dressed and feed myself and do all those things. That's a lot to be thankful for because there are a lot of people who can't do that. And so there is much to be grateful for. So the way that you feel is not an accurate representation of reality.

Just to recap, first when you have a negative feeling like that, what happened just before I began to have the feeling? What interpretation did I make of that? And then, is that a correct interpretation or are there other explanations? Is there another possibility here? And then, what is the truth about me and the situation? What is the truth as it applies to me? Very literally, as I mentioned earlier, thinking this way, we can change our brain chemistry. When we change how we feel about ourselves, change how we think, we will interact with others differently and we will have improved relationships.

There is good neurological evidence from research to show that when our brain is working more effectively we have an enhanced spiritual life too. A brain that is having difficulty with thinking negative thoughts has great difficulty with a spiritual life. So by thinking the truth and believing the truth, you replace the lies that you have with God's word and all the things that God has to say about you, you are loved, you are treasured. Ephesians 1, for example, talks about all the good things that God has done for us and is doing for us. You get that into your heart down deep, you can replace the lies. This is perhaps why scripture says to encourage one another daily. If we have a friend who's believing a lie, we can feed the truth to them and say this is really the truth. We can encourage them to be thinking the truth, believing the truth, and acting on the truth. In a way even more than we had ever realized, the truth will set us free. But the truth comes from believing it.