

Headspace
Week 4: Reframe
Philippians 1:12-14

There are things we've been taught, and just kind of accepted as common knowledge, that simply aren't true. They're myths or misunderstandings that most of us just believe as truth.

For instance, how many of you have memories from your childhood of being held down by your mom or dad so they could pour hydrogen peroxide in a wound because, somehow, that bottle of liquid nails that start to bubble up like toxic acid will "help it heal faster?" ...That's just not true! In fact, research has shown that the opposite is true! Peroxide actually causes cellular damage and **extends** the healing process. All that pain because we believed something that's not true!

Here's another one...chewing gum will stay in your stomach for 7 years after you swallow it. I remember the first time I swallowed my gum. I actually did the math in my head to see how old I'd be when it finally came out. The truth is, gum just doesn't digest and I'll leave it at that. You can draw your own conclusions about what happens next.

Now, this one, I learned last summer and, I've got to be honest...it rocked my world. I've always believed that going swimming after you eat wasn't safe. That you had to wait at least 30 minutes before swimming again or you **will** drown. Not, you might, you will! And, I've just never been willing to take that gamble, so I've always waited before getting back into the pool or lake.

But, here's the thing...it's not true! And you may be thinking, "*Uh, no, I'm pretty sure that's true.*" But, it's not. You can pull your phone out right now and Google it...and Google never lies!...but it's not true. You **can** swim after eating.

Now, a little bit of pain from peroxide, or worrying about gum hanging out in your stomach for 7 years, or even missing some swimming time...believing these things that aren't true isn't a big deal. But, a lot of us believe lies that have serious implications on our lives and our relationships.

We believe that we aren't good enough and never will be. We believe that the more we have the happier we will be. We believe that we'll never be able to change. That this is just who we are. Or that God doesn't love us. At best, He might tolerate us. All of these are lies that we believe and they are waging war against us in our minds. This battle taking place in our headspace.

And, here's why this matters. In his excellent book, "Winning the War in Your Mind," Craig Groeschel says, "**A lie believed as truth will affect your life as if it were true.**" In other words, if you believe the lies that Satan is whispering to you, lies that have created a stronghold in your life, if you believe these lies as truth, they will affect how you live, how you view yourself and others as if they were true.

So, if you go through life believing the lie that you're always the victim and every negative experience in your life is someone else's fault, then you'll never own your personal responsibility and make the changes you need to make. If you believe the lie that, the only way you will be loved is if others approve of you, you will make compromises that make other people happy, but leave you feeling used and brokenhearted.

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That's why the Apostle Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 10 to take those thoughts captive and make them obedient to Christ before we become obedient to them. To hold it captive before the lie begins to hold you captive.

And, there's an urgency to Paul's words here because, over time, these lies that we believe create mental ruts that we get stuck in, and these ruts form into what social scientists call cognitive biases. **A cognitive bias is believing something is true because of past experiences.**

So, if your trust was broken by someone, you may develop a cognitive bias that says you can't trust anyone. If you grew up with a critical parent, then any criticism you receive, even constructive criticism for your own growth and development, will feel like a personal attack. If you have a string of decisions that backfired, you may develop a cognitive bias that makes you believe you can't do anything right. If you grew up in an argumentative home, then any conflict feels destructive and makes you walk on eggshells.

These cognitive biases, or lies we believe because of past experiences, create lenses through which we see everything else. They create a framework on which we build our lives and they become strongholds that affect how we think and feel about ourselves and others. And, while you can't change what has happened to you, you can control how you view it through what's called, **Cognitive Reframing. Learning to identify and correct irrational thinking** based on past experiences. Learning to use the Word of God to question the lies we believe that shape how we view our experiences, and respond to the truth rather than the lie.

And, the Apostle Paul, who was teaching and practicing this stuff long before modern psychology was even a thing, shows us a great example of how to do this in our text today. If you have a Bible or a Bible app you like to use, turn with me to Philippians 1.

If you're a student of Scripture, you know that Paul writes this letter to his friends in Philippi from a prison in Rome. He had longed to go to Rome to preach Jesus because he knew that this influential city could become a launching pad for the Gospel to spread throughout the world. But, instead of preaching freely in the streets and synagogues like he had hoped, Paul was locked up as a prisoner, chained to a guard, and awaiting his sentencing that could possibly lead to his death. Not where he thought he'd be and certainly not where he wanted to be.

And, Paul could have let his circumstances get the best of him and his faith. He could have sulked in his misery, questioned God's goodness or the effectiveness of prayer. He could have thrown in the towel and said it's just not worth it.

But, through all of this, Paul understood a principle that will help us fight off the lies in our headspace today. He knew that you cannot control what happens to you, but you can control how you frame it. You can't always control your circumstances, but you can control how you choose to respond to them. And here's how Paul chose to respond...(READ Phil 1:12-14)

Paul says, "Yeah, things didn't turn out the way I expected. But, listen, God is working this situation out in ways I couldn't have even imagined!" He says, "This has **actually** served to advance the gospel" which makes me think that maybe he questioned it, or knew his readers would.

As he looked at his situation through fresh eyes, he's like, "God has blessed me with prison guards who are chained to me! They are literally a captive audience and have no choice but to listen to me preach about Jesus! And, every 8 hours, I get a new audience!"

Paul wanted to preach Jesus and see the Gospel spread throughout Rome and it was actually happening, just not in the way he thought it would. And he would have totally missed it had he not reframed his thoughts about the situation. Instead of sulking or throwing in the towel...instead of believing the lie that our current circumstances are permanent and jumping to the conclusion that nothing good could come from it, Paul reframed his thinking and saw the good that God was working out for His glory.

He saw Jesus being shared and believers being strengthened and encouraged to proclaim the gospel without fear. And it gave him a new boldness to faithfully walk through these circumstances. Paul's faith in Jesus and his core belief that nothing compares to the richness of knowing Him, helped him reframe how he thought about the situation he was in, which reframed how he felt about it and how he lived in it.

So, how can we reframe our thinking about the situations we may find ourselves in. How can we reframe a cognitive bias that makes us believe something is true because of our past experiences, but just keep us trapped in a lie? As we wrap up today, I want to share some tools that have been shared with me over the years in hopes that they'll help you as much as they have helped me.

First, it's important to know how our thoughts and emotions and behaviors all interact with each other. I think this diagram is helpful (show Cognitive Triangle).

Situation: Something that happens in your life that triggers a thought within you.

Thought: The thought is how you interpret that situation. And, often, the thought pops into your head before you even had a chance to think about it! It's your cognitive bias coming out.

Sometimes that's good, but often times it's that lie you believe as truth. And that thought triggers an emotion.

Emotion: How you feel about yourself, the situation, or the other person based on the thought you have about yourself or them or what's happening.

Behaviors: Your response to your thoughts and emotions about the situation. Now, notice I did not say it's your response to the situation. Your behaviors are a response to how you interpret the situation through the lenses of your thoughts and emotions.

So, here's a real life example of how this plays out between me and Amber sometimes. She'll ask me to do something, say, grab a gallon of milk from the store on my way home. I walk in, empty handed, and she says, "Where's the milk?" Now, in that situation, her thought is, "He probably left it in the car." **MY thought** is, "Shawn, you're such an idiot! How could you forget to grab the milk. You can't do anything right!"

And, in that moment, the enemy bombards me with all of these negative emotions. I slap all of these labels on myself, none of them good, and figure that Amber must be doing the same. I assume she's thinking, "Wow, what is wrong with him? I asked him to get the milk 5 minutes before he left the office. He can't do anything right. Why did I even marry him?!"

And the resulting behavior of these thoughts and emotions, is that I get defensive, or I mentally beat myself up. I emotionally disconnect, which then creates new thoughts that Amber and I feel. She thinks maybe she shouldn't have asked me to get the milk and starts to feel like it's all up to her to get the groceries. And on and on and on we go around this triangle of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. And it's NOT because I forgot to get the milk. It's because of how I interpreted the situation through the lenses of my thoughts and emotions.

Because, watch this. Imagine that same scenario. I walk in empty handed. Amber asks, "Where's the milk." Right there! I have a choice to make. How will I respond? I can't change the fact that I forgot the milk, but I can control how I respond to it. What I think about myself or the situation. Imagine the difference if, instead of irrationally labeling myself and making the situation worse than it actually is, I simply said, "Oh! I completely forgot. I'll run out to the store and be right back."

That crazy triangle of thoughts and emotions and behaviors would stop right there because I identified and corrected my irrational thinking. I reframed the situation and responded like a normal human being who made a mistake.

Every single one of us have well-worn neurological paths between our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. It's why you always respond the same way in certain situations. The key is, before those thoughts turn into emotions which inform your behavior, PAUSE and **Identify your thinking errors.**

Thinking errors are these cognitive biases that are on auto play in our minds. It's when we overgeneralize and think that just because something happened once it will always happen. "I didn't get that job, so now no one will hire me." "I got a D on that midterm assignment. I'm such an idiot." That's a thinking error.

Another thinking error is catastrophizing. It's when we automatically assume that the worst-case scenario is going to happen. As someone who doesn't get headaches very often, whenever I get one, I'm like, "Is this it? I had a good run!" Mind reading is a thinking error. Believing we know what someone else is thinking or feeling.

All of these thinking errors trigger negative emotions within us that affect how we live and act and treat others, including ourselves.

We put together a list of common thinking errors and will have it on our website at socc.org/headspace in the next couple of days along with a little worksheet you can print out to help you **Replace your thinking errors with rational thoughts**. Help you reframe like Paul did in his letter to the Philippians and see what's really going on so you can respond appropriately.

And, here's the thing, if you know you struggle with one of these thinking errors because you see it pop up in your life again and again, you can do this preemptively. Let's say you have a difficult conversation that you know you need to have with someone, but you just don't want to do it. In your mind, you have already catastrophized the situation and are convinced you know how the other person will respond before the conversation even happens.

You've been playing it out in your mind and already believe it's going to be bad. They'll get mad and then you'll get mad. You start to wonder if you should even have the conversation because you might just make it worse. And IF you have it at all, at the first hint of conflict you'll think to yourself, "I knew it! I knew they wouldn't listen! They always get defensive!" You react.

But, what if you preemptively reframed the conversation in your mind? You notice yourself catastrophizing it and say, "You know what...they might get angry, but I'm going to stay calm. I'm going to be a thermostat, not a thermometer. I'm going to set the emotional temperature in the room, not react to it. I'm going to love this person and have this conversation because I love them."

Now, it's not guaranteed that you'll stay calm, but what do you think will happen when the conversation gets tough and you feel their emotions and yours start to flare up? You'll be able to push pause between the thought and the emotion, or the emotion and the behavior (because sometimes we catch it a little late!), and you'll be able to respond differently. You'll be able to REFRAME the situation and win the battle taking place in your headspace.

The life you have is often a reflection of the thoughts you think, and what comes into your mind tends to come out in your emotions and behaviors. It's why Paul tells us in Romans 12 to not be

conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. A renewing and transformation that can only happen by the grace of God through Jesus.

You see, Jesus didn't just die to rescue us from our sin, his death, burial, and resurrection restores what sin and Satan have stolen from us. The Holy Spirit living in us renews us and renews our minds. We replace the lies we believe with the Truth living in us. Jesus is that truth and when we pursue him, he will truly set us free.