

Putting it together

The Thoughts and Feelings Circle

We start with thoughts



which lead to feelings...



But what if those feelings are



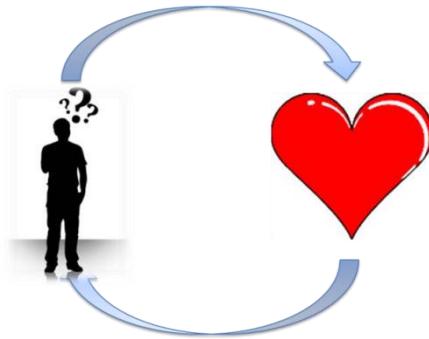
and we get stuck in them?



Can we change our thoughts so that our feelings can change?

We can – but there are two things we need to know:

1. By now, our feelings are influencing our thoughts. For example, because we *feel* guilty about something, we assume we must *be* guilty so we *think* we are guilty, which again reinforces what we *feel*, and so on. We are caught in a vicious circle.
2. We tend to live out what we feel. So if we feel rubbish, we will act rubbish. We affect our relationships and even our circumstances – and then point to those difficulties that we have created as evidence of the fact that we are rubbish!



So what can we do?

1. Concentrate on what you think

We all want to feel better so it is natural to wish we could change what we feel. We cannot change what we feel without changing what we think.

2. Challenge the way you think

Just because we have always thought a certain way doesn't make it right. Just because that way of thinking has been consistently reinforced by how we feel about ourselves over many years still does not make it right. Our 'norm' might be well wide of the truth. We have to be prepared to challenge what we think.

3. Change the way you think

Be prepared to open your mind to another way of looking at yourself, your past, your family, your future, life as a whole – and God himself. Remember the 4R's - *recognise* that something is wrong in

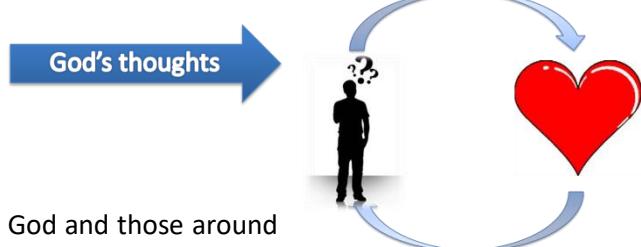
what you think, challenge and *remove* that wrong thought, *receive* the truth from the Bible and *replace* the wrong thought with God's truth.

4. Church – where it all happens

Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome and told them that they could be, '*transformed by the renewing of your mind*' (Romans 12:2). How is our mind renewed? By thinking God's thoughts, seeing things the way he sees them – and believing those thoughts to the point where they begin to affect the way we feel.

We often don't recognise when our thinking is wrong. We are hardly likely to challenge our thinking if we are not shown that there might be more valid reference points. It may well take the insight of a friend to help us see where our view of our past is distorted, or to challenge us when we are negative about ourselves.

If we are going to break the vicious circle of thoughts and feelings, God's thoughts need to break into that circle – and God's thoughts should be found at their clearest amongst God's people.



If we really want to build our relationship with God and those around us then we will allow God's Spirit to work in our hearts and through our Christian family, in order to change the way we think – and ultimately the way we feel.

Changing our thinking – two examples from the Bible

1. Dealing with the heart that condemns - 1 John 3:16-20

John tells the Christians in Ephesus that '*we can set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us.*' From this we learn two things:

1. There will be times when our hearts wrongly condemn us.
2. We can do something about it. We don't have to put up with that – we can choose to set our hearts at rest before God. The role of the will is highlighted here and gives enormous hope.

How does this work? The letter was written to help these Christians to know the difference between true Christians and those who pretended to be. One of the tests that John gives is that, however bad we might feel, deep in our hearts we know that we do love. We would want to reach out and help someone in need. That love is there because God is there, and in that way we can set our hearts at rest when our hearts try and make us feel unworthy or guilty. There can be many reasons '*our hearts condemn us.*' John reassuringly tells us that '*God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.*' We might not have the whole picture but God does and we can trust him. He knows our hearts even if we don't!

2. Dealing with fear – 1 John 4:16-18

John sets love as the opposite of fear and says, '*There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment.*' We feel afraid so we think we deserve punishment. However, as it dawns on us, as a result of God's indwelling Spirit, that we are truly loved and that God's intentions towards us are always for our good then we realise that the issue is not punishment

but about our accepting that we are loved – just as we are. We can choose to not think about punishment but about the fact we are loved and in so doing we will change how we feel.

Go for depth

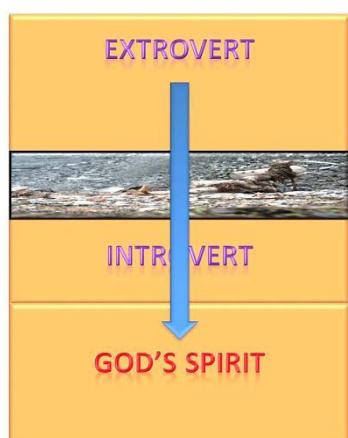
We will draw together some of the material we have shared so far and put it into diagrams to help us remember the concepts. On a scale of 0 – 10, where 0 = none at all and 10 = a lot, what score would you give yourself for what you feel worth?

How is it that we can feel reasonably alright most of the time but when pressure enters our lives we seem to tap into what we really feel about ourselves? How do we cope with what we perceive as criticism?

In Step One ([Session 6](#)) we thought of the three circles that make up who we are and we noted that when we become Christians, God's Spirit takes up residence in our spirit and wants to bring God's life to the whole of who we are. We also learnt that, when emotional patterns have become distorted and misshapen within our soul then it is harder for the life of God to break through into the whole of who we are. God's life within us has to push against the grain of distorted emotions.



Let's change the analogy and link it to what we learnt in Step One about [reaching the introvert within ourselves](#).



We discovered that, as we try and push down into our introvert, the first emotions that we encounter are often negative – the residue that rises to the top of the introvert tank. We end up identifying our introvert with those negatives – which is why we give up trying to go there.

The cliffs at Lyme Regis are full of fossils but in one section it is also full of something else – rubbish! The town rubbish tip, deposited by the Victorians, is being eroded into the sea. But beneath the rubbish there are valuable fossils.

When we go down into our introvert, on the way through we will hit the layer of rubbish – and that is where many of us stop. However, beneath the rubbish are all the wonderful qualities that lie within our introvert.

And there is more. As a Christian pushes down beyond those awful feelings of being rubbish, we find God's Spirit, bringing God's truth about who we are as people made in the image of God, and who we are in Christ.

As we learn to recognise that God himself lives within, then we hold on to those little glimpses of the truth that he gives us – those times when the clouds seem to clear and we feel free. Gradually the clouds clear completely and we learn to live in the fullness of God's love.



'But when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth'
Jn 16:13

- the truth about God, ourselves and the future