



THE IMPORTANCE OF TAKING YOUR THOUGHTS CAPTIVE DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS



Our thoughts about a situation determine how we will feel about it and what we do about it.

This may seem a rather prescriptive statement. Yet during this pandemic, our thinking styles can greatly influence how we feel about our circumstances at this time. Our situation can often not be changed. Unemployment is rising, restrictions are in place, some are feeling the isolation while other households are living in little pressure cookers! But it is our thoughts about these situations that influence our emotional states and how we will behave in response to that. Proverbs 23:7 says "As a man thinks, so is he." This is good news if our thinking is helpful! But what about the unhelpful thoughts? Let's take a look at some unhelpful thinking styles that can typically cause us negative emotion and distress and how flexible thinking can make our thoughts more realistic and less distressing.

A **Black and White** thinking style tends to focus on right or wrong, good or bad – the extremes e.g. "This is not being dealt with properly." Instead, we can consider the in-betweens, shades of grey or middle ground. We can acknowledge process and that we are still learning and developing. Certainly, our current pandemic is a new experience for all nations and we are learning how best to manage each day, based on our knowledge at any given time.

Over-generalisation is when we use one instance and impose it on all future situations. The language used in over-generalisation sounds like "I'll never get out of here," "They always change the restrictions," "Everyone is going to get sick" or "No-one ever gets better." In most cases the situation is not as extreme as we might think it is. Instead we can consider individual differences and that not everyone fits into the same box. Some people are experiencing loneliness right now and others would like some space. We need to be careful not to exaggerate our circumstances and keep it realistic.

A **Mental Filter** is a filtering in and filtering out process that creates tunnelled vision that focuses on only one part of the situation (usually the negative) and ignores the rest (often the positive) e.g. "We are living in dark days." Instead we can open up the filter and consider the positive things that are also occurring at this time such as neighbours getting to know each other for the first time; random acts of kindness and banks extending greater flexibility with re-payments! There are positive events occurring at the same time as great difficulty.

When we **Jump to Conclusions**, we arrive at a conclusion without considering all the evidence to support it. We like to think that our hunches are correct, but there are times that they are not because we don't have all the facts. We overestimate the likelihood of something happening, or overestimate the consequences of something happening e.g. "Medical workers will contract COVID-19." Instead we can take a moment to consider further evidence that whilst they may have a higher potential to be exposed, extra precautions are being taken as best possible to avoid our health workers becoming unwell.

Catastrophising is when we 'blow things out of proportion' and our thoughts whizz from zero to a hundred in two seconds flat! "What if COVID-19 is here to stay and I never get my job back and the government isn't able to make Centrelink payments and I have no money and I'm stuck in a cardboard box for the rest of my life?" Instead we need to take a breath, take one thing at a time and avoid predicting circumstances waaaaay into the future. If COVID-19 is here to stay, we need to focus on today. For now, there are measures in place to reduce the likelihood of contracting COVID-19 and we have an amazing community of scientists who are working their hardest towards a vaccine in the near future.

Finally, when we use **Emotional Reasoning** we take our emotions as being evidence for the truth. We say, "I feel, therefore it is." However, there is no evidence that something bad is going to happen, other than how we feel. "I have a bad feeling about COVID-19" and we conclude that because we have bad feelings, the outcomes will be bad too. Instead we can investigate outside of our feelings and gather facts to base our thoughts on.

When we consider what we are thinking, we are "taking captive our thoughts" and weighing them up against the evidence. When our thoughts are realistic, they become more helpful to a reasonable evaluation of our circumstances. In Romans 12:2 we are instructed ". . . be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God." We will be different when our thinking is renewed. We can then respond to our situation from a place of discernment rather than from feelings of anxiety, fear and panic.

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