

This was a paper for
the christian
counseling course i
took earlier this year.

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Abstract This paper identifies what some causes of thinking errors are, how they develop and affect an individual on a day to day basis. It will also review how some defense mechanisms are used to survive a traumatic event and ways that these can be overcome. Ultimately, it will examine the importance of a relationship with and learning trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and how this integrates into the healing process. It will review how individuals may learn to form a bond with God and thereby overcome the negative situations and experiences they have had in life. Additionally it will clarify how neglecting to forgive offenses can hold an individual back from a true and fulfilling relationship with God, self, and others. The intent is to create a clear overview of the healing process from a walled-up state to an individual on the road to recovery, thereby identifying and learning healthy coping skills and sound thinking processes while building new core beliefs of self-worth and value. Discipleship Counseling and Helping Others Find Healing Through Christ The way a child is raised will determine their disposition towards positive or negative habits, thoughts and behaviors (Anderson, 2003 p. 330). They will treat others, including their own children, as their parents taught them. In time, they may come to see the errors in the behaviors, or at minimum feel that something is not quite right and wish to change but are unsure where to go or what those changes should be. There are many factors which lead a person to seek help or guidance from a counselor, therapist, or clergy. A life-changing event may have occurred, such as a death in the family, or an upcoming marriage. For many it is that they have come to the end of their rope and just cannot handle the stressors anymore

(Myers, 2002 p. 520). They are looking for hope, help, and a way to resolve the hidden skeletons in the closet (Anderson, 2003). Faulty Thinking and Thinking Errors Everyone has thoughts, or a progression of thoughts, which may or may not follow a healthy or typical pattern. Thoughts are the basis of all decision making. How a person chooses to act or react to any situation is indicative of the underlying thought. Actions are a result of the attitude and perception of the environment, or world that surrounds them. These actions have the potential to change when the thought which supports the attitude is changed (Myers, 2002 p. 139). A person needs to be guided to understand that their choices are not merely an act but also an "attitude that reflects a belief" (Anderson, 2003 p. 291). Three major areas of concern in counseling are: a dysfunctional family background, personal problems, and spiritual problems (Anderson, 2003). After a traumatizing experience, an individual is prone to develop thinking errors or "faulty thinking" (Anderson, 2003). The trauma could be something as simple as a child losing a favorite toy or even a helium balloon, as severe as what a soldier experiences in the throes of war, or a battered woman or man experiences over the course of years in a problematic or abusive relationship. According to Wheeler (2007) trauma is a natural part of the human or physical experience (p. 132-141) and it is important to note that it affects all aspects of the individual. Sometimes a thinking error is all a matter of perspective, and reality checks can help provide a change of perspective. It can be challenging to step back from the situation to identify that there is more than one solution to a problem. Thinking errors can also come from a lie that someone has been told multiple times, from someone they respect or look to as an authority figure,

which they believe as a real truth. These false concepts will lead the individual to form a wall of defense using various methods (Anderson, 2003). Cognitive distortions are identifiable errors in thinking and include: "all-or-nothing thinking; overgeneralization; mental filter; discounting the positive; jumping to conclusions; magnification; emotional reasoning; should statements; labeling; and personalization and blame" (Yurica & DiTomasso, 2005). The counselee needs to be made aware of the cognitive distortions they are using, so they can change their way of thinking. By so doing, they will be able to cease using thinking errors and in time develop a healthier set of thought processes. The end goal of treatment is to successfully help the counselee understand cognitively and emotionally that they no longer need to listen to the committee in their mind (Anderson, 2003 p. 308). Coping Mechanisms and Dissociation Coping mechanisms can help an individual survive trauma, but in general the individual needs to be trained away from using them during the healing process. The mind has in place a defense mechanism when the original trauma occurred; in some cases it leaves a lapse in the individual's memory (Anderson, 2003). The body remembers what has been blocked temporarily from the mind and as situations occur in life, the individual will recall the associated emotion, situation or actual physical pain (Copeland & Harris, 2000, p. 115). For some this occurs as they dissociate from where they are at the present, and are essentially in a split-level of conscious (Myers, 2002). In a sense, this means that the person is physically in one place while their mind is disconnected and seemingly elsewhere. When they reconnect, they have no recollection of what happened in their physical state. As a victim justifies the actions of their

abuser, they are minimizing the abuse which has occurred (Anderson, 2003 p. 273). If they make it seem less, then in their mind, it does not feel as bad as it actually was. By doing this, they are using codependency to cope with their current circumstance, and have written their life script to take on the role of caretaker (Anderson, 2003 p. 280 & Jones, 1997). They live each day with the hope that the person they are codependent with will finally change and they themselves will be accepted, and of value and worth. These people will never find true happiness until they are lead to understand their true value and worth as individuals, through their divine nature as children of God. It is important to note that the defense mechanisms and coping skills which are used to survive trauma and its after effects are not instantly changed. The individual cannot even begin the process of healing until they have identified what coping/defense mechanisms they are using. While it is possible to educate someone about the tools they have used, it will take time as they heal and rediscover who they are in Christ, before they can fully let the behaviors (Anderson, 2003 p. 218). Any crisis a person experiences can lead them to unify or divide, to progress or regress, and bring them closer to or farther away from God. Every person needs to be helped to the point that they are able to cope with the experiences of life without reverting to using their damaging coping mechanisms or codependency (Dockery, 2000 p. 41). Guiding them to let go of the crutch of the coping skills can be done by helping them to learn to forgive offenses, whether real or perceived.

Forgiving Perceived Offenses When someone does something which is hurtful, or perceived as hurtful, it is in the best interest of the person hurt to forgive the offense. The connection between forgiveness and moral anger is

essentially solid and cannot be broken (Griswold, 2007 p. 67). There are two levels of forgiving: Cognitive and Emotional. A cognitive decision to forgive is a choice made in one's mind, whether coerced or not. In many cases, as an individual forgives because they feel compelled to forgive, they retain the negative feelings and complete only a cognitive or decisional forgiveness. Unfortunately, this leaves the emotional hurt within the injured person. As long as the offense goes unresolved, the feelings associated with it, will "eat at the person who does not reduce those negative emotions in some way" (Clinton, Hart & Ohschlager, 2005 p. 122). The scriptures clearly instruct mankind to forgive others until seventy times seven (Matthew 18: 22) and to take a Christ-like approach by forgiving as Christ has forgiven (Colossians 3: 13). Forgiveness not only means letting go of the offense, but to also overcome any negative emotions associated with it. This includes feelings (including resentment) such as contempt and scorn as they are also forms of "moral hatred" (Griswold, 2007 p. 69). While it is relatively easy to discuss forgiveness, it is another thing altogether to accomplish it. The injured party may feel that the wrong-doing needs more recompense than was achieved. As they learn to empathize with the offender, some of the negative emotions may be released over time (Clinton et al, 2005 p. 127). Forgiveness is not a habit that can be formed in a day; it takes practice and a will to achieve it. Some suggestions for improving one's ability to forgive are: meditate on forgiveness-specific scriptures daily, start a journal and record thoughts each day on forgiveness, and find a good book about forgiveness and use it for morning and evening devotions (Clinton et al, 2005 p. 133). Often forgotten is the need of the injured to forgive themselves for past failures. This is

something which they will need to apply to their lives moving forward, keeping in mind that only God can forgive their sins (Anderson, 2003 p. 259). As they practice forgiving their own failures and shortcomings, they will more readily forgive the failures of others which they may have perceived as an offense. It is best put by Anderson,(2003) “ Forgiving ourselves is actually receiving forgiveness from God" (p. 260). One thing the injured individual needs to come to better understand is that Christ paid the ultimate sacrifice for the sins and transgressions of all mankind. This act made it His option to forgive, and a requirement for all mankind as it says in D&C 64: 10 “ I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men. " Forgiving others is a choice that is made individually, and by choosing to forgive completely, one is choosing to live with joy. God is on the journey with us, through the grief and pain and He supplies the joy and hope during struggles, and laughter in times of pain (Dockery, 2000 p. 202). Core Needs/Beliefs (biblical view/self-worth) An individual’s core belief of self-worth can and will affect how they choose to respond to offenses they receive, whether intentional or inadvertent. If they are of a Christian persuasion, they will more readily accept that Christ is their Redeemer and has already suffered for the sins which they are required to forgive of others. With this background, the injured party can be guided to acknowledge their divine nature as a child of God. Satan was allowed into the individual’s life through openings he was given, either by them or as a result of circumstances (Anderson, 2003). As it says in Myers, 2002, “ Character, it is said, is reflected in what we do when we think no one is looking" (p. 143). This is a spiritual battle for the mind, as the Prince of Darkness also has a

hold on the individual. They will likely have thoughts that they are of no worth, do not deserve the Savior's sacrifice, and that God does not love them (Anderson, 2003). They need to be reminded that these thoughts are lies, as God would never stop loving His children. This is reiterated in the scriptures Isaiah 49: 15 as God will remember and have compassion on His children much like a woman who cannot forget her sucking child. Accepting the truth, and choosing to have faith, because it is a choice, may be challenging at first as the counselee has believed a lie for so long. " Satan hates the truth and deplores the light, and unfortunately, so do people who have something to hide" (Anderson, 2003 p. 358). This is also reiterated in 1 Nephi 16: 2 " The guilty taketh the truth to be hard, for it cutteth them to the very center" as well as in John 3: 20 " For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. " By believing a lie and allowing it to perpetuate itself in their mind, they have effectively abandoned themselves. They need to be reminded that God is there, cares for and expects them to cooperate by caring for themselves (Beattie, 1992 p. 108). The individual will need to identify the false thoughts, and renounce them, to cast aside the devil. It is crucial they understand that to have true faith means they must let go of the lie, as it says in Luke 16: 13, " Ye cannot serve God and Mammon". It is not possible to " believe the truth and the lie at the same time and still experience your freedom in Christ" (Anderson, 2003 p. 221). As the believer chooses to exercise God's authority by obeying His commands, they will come to see that they are able to utilize the authority of Christ to keep the devil at bay. By so doing they are taking their place with Christ and standing for the right (Anderson, 2003 p. 224).

They also need to come to the understanding that they can (and need) to take accountability for their thoughts. If they choose to banish the negative and doubting thoughts, their minds can become a safe haven for them and for God. This was the purpose of the atonement of Christ (Anderson, 2003 p. 230). The individual can take control of their thoughts by stating "I am a child of God" and commanding the bad spirits, by the authority of Christ, to leave them (Anderson, 2003). The more they practice this, the greater their belief will become, and in the long run will make it possible to maintain freedom from the negative thoughts. Only through acknowledging that they are truly loved and of worth by their Heavenly Father can they obtain a real sense of self-worth (Anderson, 2003 p. 299).

Discussion While the ways that people choose to address and cope with their life experiences differ, the process towards resolution is essentially the same. When a person experiences trauma or crisis, they tend to find a way of coping with things as best they can. They need to address the problem, identify how they are coping, and completely turn it over to God. The cognitive distortions which people use to handle the early stressors can lead them to continue the same patterns as occurred during the initial crisis because this feels familiar. These can lead to the use of thinking errors as well as coping mechanisms. While both of these seem helpful while they are in crisis, the trauma event must eventually be worked through. As they come to recognize the coping mechanisms for what they are, they will eventually, come to see the damage it is causing in their lives. They will desire a change, which change of heart can only come through forgiveness and true repentance (from the Greek word "metanoeo" which means "change your mind") through our Lord and

Savior Jesus Christ. Part of the process of working through that event is learning to truly forgive and turn things over to Christ. As they learn to let things go, and release the emotional bindings, they will gain a stronger sense of self-worth. They will also come to truly see and acknowledge their value in the sight of God. They will accept their divine nature and desire to maintain and ever improve that bond. References Anderson, N. T. (2003). *Discipleship Counseling: The Complete Guide to Helping Others Walk in Freedom and Grow in Christ*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books. Beattie, M. (1992). *Codependent No More*. Center City, MN: Hazelden . Clinton, T. E., Hart, A. D., & Ohschlager, G. W. (2005). *Caring for people God's way: Personal and Emotional Issues, Addictions, Grief, and Trauma* . Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.. Copeland, M. E., & Harris, M. (2000). *Healing the Trauma of Abuse: A women's Workbook*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.. Dockery, K. (2000). *When A Hug Won't Fix The Hurt*. Birmingham, AL: New Hope. Griswold, C. L. (2007). *Forgiveness: a philosophical exploration*. Cambridge, GBR: Cambridge University Press. Jones, J. J. (1997). *Let's Fix The Kids! A Parenting Resource Manual*. (6th ed.). Westminster, CA: J. J. Jones. Myers, D. G. (2002). *Exploring Psychology*. (5th ed.). USA: Worth Publishers. Yurica, C. L., & DiTomasso, R. A. (2005). Cognitive Distortions. In *Encyclopedia of Cognitive Behavior Therapy*. (Part 3, pp. 117-122). Wheeler, K. (2007), *Psychotherapeutic Strategies for Healing Trauma*. *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care*, 43: 132—141. doi: 10. 1111/j. 1744-6163. 2007. 00122. x

Scriptures are from the Holy Bible King James Version as well as from the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants as published by the LDS Church.