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WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?

I thought I handled the blows in my life and to my sense of well-being with a learned Southern charm and grace: “Well, okay—if that’s what you think” or “If that’s what you say, then it must be true.” After all, why would anyone intentionally wound me or cause me to question his or her words or actions?

I slowly came to realize, though, that not everyone—including my loved ones—understood the power their words had over me or understood that I allowed their words to dominate my thinking and what I believed about myself. Over time, I came to understand that there were feelings and emotions deep inside that I couldn't account for. I didn't remember how or why they resided in my heart, but I wanted to banish them and the damage they had caused.

I didn't know that my thoughts and my behavior were linked in any way. So when I had a specific thought about a person's actions or a word that was spoken to me, I didn't realize how much it affected the way I lived.

The effects of these words and actions also affected the way I viewed relationships—my relationship with myself and my relationships with others. I knew I needed to reframe (“re-frame” is a term I use to mean picturing something in a different light) years of pain and frustration, but I had no role model to follow.

The Truth Chart

The Truth Chart process that I developed was initially developed for my own mental health. I began using it in 1970, but it was many years before I began sharing it with others. Now I have almost daily opportunities to share this method, and I have been surprised and humbled by the results. The participants in the classes I teach and those I counsel in my private practice continue to share that they have had dramatic changes in their thinking patterns and behaviors. These individuals have encouraged me to put these ideas into this book so others can experience what they have discovered regarding depres-

sion, emotional anxiety, and personal thought life. They have shared that these ideas are novel, concrete, and practical.

For most of my childhood and into my adulthood, I thought of myself as vanilla—you know, just plain vanilla. No sparkle, no color, nothing memorable. Certainly not jamocha almond fudge or white chocolate strawberry—just vanilla.

Many damaging messages were delivered to me by people who were important to me during the course of my life: “Can’t you do anything right?” “You’re so weak, so stupid, so clumsy . . .” I had internalized those messages, and they had become a major component in my self-talk and poor self-image. Samples of my internal scripts were “I am a zero.” “I never do anything right.”

In addition to these damaging conversations with myself, I had never really internalized God’s view of me either. These became more than just internal thoughts—they became wounds that affected me deeply. The wounds were far deeper than a skinned knee here and there, although there were many of those. The wounds I’m referring to were name-calling, displays of anger and rage, and actions against me.

Since I invited Christ to come into my life as my Savior and Lord many years ago, I’ve been totally convinced that God loves me and has a plan for my life. I knew He had forgiven my sins and answered many prayers. I’ve taught Sunday School and Bible studies since my salvation experience, and I have taught biblical life principles to others and believed them as truth. But when I had feelings of not being special or had feelings of not being of value to God, I didn’t really label those thoughts as lies. I taught others about guarding their thoughts, but I never really internalized the application

of these principles into my own thought life. It wasn't that I didn't believe I was special to God. But there were wounds—deep internal messages from others—that superseded God's messages to me. Fortunately, that has all changed.

Not too long ago I asked God for the name He had for me. I first heard of this concept at a conference by author John Eldredge a few years ago, but I didn't ask God right then. This idea originated in the passage of Scripture from John 10:3 about how “the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep *by name* and leads them out” (NKJV, emphasis added). I knew it was important for me to hear God's name for me; I just wasn't sure I really wanted to know. I was confident it would be something vanilla.

Recently, though, I decided I needed to know. I didn't hear God's audible voice, but clearly and distinctly, after a time of prayer, came the phrase “Warrior Princess.” Wow! Nothing vanilla about “Warrior Princess!” God had reframed my thoughts even about who I am.

We make choices like that every day—every moment of every day. What are we to believe when we have certain ongoing thoughts and feelings? Thoughts and feelings may feel very real. But are they true?

The purpose of this book is to help you be attentive to your thoughts and feelings, but you must not get stuck in reflections and past hurts. Instead, look at your thoughts and feelings from the truth of God's perspective. You are not wiping out the real and honest wounds or reflections or even the in-depth processing of these things that come to your heart and mind. They are to be validated; but don't get stuck there.

Wounds in Action

Once you are able to see your wounds and reflections from God's point of view, you can be freed from ongoing despondency, depression, anger, and anxiety. Remember the word I used earlier, "reframing"? Here's a recent personal story to illustrate what reframing is.

It was the week before I was scheduled to speak at a women's retreat. It was a cold, drizzly afternoon. I had just dropped off my granddaughter at her home and was only a few blocks away. I went through a fast-food drive-through and picked up some large containers of soup, which I put on the floor of my car to take to my mother-in-law.

Traffic was thick, as it always is on this busiest street at the busiest time in the afternoon—bumper to bumper. I have no idea how it happened, really, and I offer no excuses. But before I knew it, I was looking down at the soup that was wobbling on the floor—and I reached for it, consequently bumping the car in front of me suddenly. My car had moved forward—apparently my foot slipped—and I was thrust into one of the most embarrassing moments of my life! It was followed by such personal agony—a genuine shame attack. *I am such a disaster. How could I have done that? I will never be trusted ever again to drive my granddaughters.* A lot of people saw it. I felt totally exposed! I had stopped traffic, and I felt as if hundreds of pairs of eyes were watching and calling me stupid.



Hear the wound? Do you hear the stories under the wound? You can hear the ownership of responsibility, but

mostly you hear the pain. We'll reframe this in just a minute. Back to the scene.

The man in front of me was not happy. In what seemed only a second he walked back to my car and stood beside me. Oh, he was angry! And I even knew him—and his wife, who was with him. But he didn't let that stand in the way! He quickly called the police, which, of course, you are supposed to do. Within five agonizing minutes we were summoned to drive a short distance to a service station on a corner where twice as many people could see us. There wasn't just one police car—there were two. I was overwhelmed with an all-too-familiar sense of inadequacy and failure, by the feeling of being a bad grandmother. How scary to realize that my granddaughter was in the car only moments before! *I'm too bad a driver to be trusted to drive my grandchildren ever again.* These messages then multiplied and began to connect with my mother's damaging accusations from decades before—her avalanche of accusations over the smallest of infractions. That tender place in my heart was hurting so badly.

Picture me: I stood with the police in the cold, wet rain. It was freezing outside, and I had on several jackets; but because I was fresh from a pedicure, I was wearing high-heeled jeweled sandals—and holding my teacup poodle. How silly I must have looked!

For hours and hours Satan whispered additional messages to the ones I was already having, such as "How can you possibly teach the women this weekend?" My agony was profound. It was time to reframe.

Reframing

I went to God and first said, *Lord, I hurt so badly. I feel like such a failure. I feel like such a zero, so “legally blonde.” I’m very okay with the traffic ticket and the fine, and I’m fine with replacing the man’s bumper. Those things aren’t what bother me. I just hate feeling so inadequate.*

Then I started looking at that accident through God’s perspective—period. I began to say to Him, *The truth is—it was serious, but everyone is okay. I was careless, but I am not a failure as a person. God, I am so sorry. I hate what it feels like to be distracted. Lord, could you give me grace to bear this hurt—the grace that I enjoy giving to others but have trouble receiving myself? You are enough for this ouch. Thank you that I am adequate in you; thank you that I don’t have to be adequate in my own strength anyway. I would love to learn from this, Lord. I ask you to help me be a better driver. When I think of this accident, I choose to think of the ways I have already grown and choose now not to assume false shame. Thank you, Lord. You are enough.*

This book is about the process of reframing thinking, feelings, and past or present wounds, and it’s based primarily on the following two Scripture passages. It’s also about restoring relationships—through both your self-talk and your other-talk.

Though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the

knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2 *Corinthians* 10:3-5).

If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (*John* 8:31-32).

A stronghold is like a worn path—but a path that is created by the *enemy* of our lives. Have you ever taken a shortcut across the lawn again and again? Pretty soon you have created a marked path. When you know you should go a different way but you keep returning to that same path, that is a stronghold. When someone has a difficult conversation with you, and the damage of the conversation is not repaired, you will continue to feel that hurt, that wound, for a long time. Then you develop sensitivity to similar wounds by others, and that, too, is a stronghold.

Maybe you tend to often take on false guilt or false responsibility from someone else's words or actions. False guilt and false responsibility are strongholds. If you have a sad thought, then another and another—and they don't receive attention—it becomes a stronghold. Maybe you're plagued by recurring anxious or fearful thoughts that don't get resolved as the wounds deepen. Those, too, become strongholds. You get the idea of how this pattern can deepen and spread to more than just one area of your life. You have not only developed a stronghold but have also established an *agreement* with your enemy.

It is the truth—biblical truth—that does set one free from these strongholds or bondages. Truth is the only thing that can provide freedom from these “strongholds,” “arguments,” and “every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.”

Before we explore this, let me clarify that I'm not speaking of truth that some might interpret as positive messages that sound good and cheerful for the moment. Examples of these well-meaning but often damaging messages include "Oh, you can do it!" "You can always get another dog," "Time will take care of that," or "Be happy—you have so much." The reality is that when someone is mad, sad, anxious, or fearful, there's more important information to be gained from the expressions of emotions.

We need to look long and hard at what our thoughts and feelings are telling us about our heart. Just being positive and cheerful could serve only to minimize pain, implying that there is a fast "cure" that is not realistic. Positive messages we give ourselves or receive from others will not have a lasting effect. Only Christ can permanently relieve the hurt of deep emotional pain. Though you can be available for friends and loved ones, and others can be available for you, cheerful counsel and unsolicited advice are not the answer. The mind of Christ is required.

Careful study of the Scriptures, learning scriptural principles, and looking to the Holy Spirit for guidance give us the wisdom to see truth from His perspective.

Truth: Where Does It Come From?

I believe that God is the author of truth, wherever it is found. As a counselor in the public school system for 12 years, I could not initiate conversations about God or use biblical scriptures, but I could talk with students about more general principles of "truth."

It's fascinating to see how truth and reasoning are handled by the secular professionals in our society. In the field of psychology, there is renowned research to show the truth and profound importance of disputing irrational thinking as the main antidote to depression and anxiety. I had been reframing my thoughts and feelings for decades before I found this research, but it confirmed the importance of what I had been practicing to deal with my thoughts. The research states that "cognitive behavioral therapy," or the "disputing of irrational beliefs," is superior to pharmacology, which is using medication to aide in someone's pain management, or even a combination of cognitive behavioral therapy and pharmacology. God's perspective is the ultimate reframing, and it stretches beyond just knowing that irrational thinking should be disputed. The study of secular research and how it underscores the truth of what I'm sharing with you is discussed in more depth in a future chapter.

For now, let's explore more fully what reframing of self-talk is and how to develop a mental outline to help when you are continuing the well-worn path of anger, depression, fear, or anxiety. Conquering these results of self-lies is possible.