

Week 5 – Rewiring Patterns of Thinking

The Process of Renewing the Mind: Challenging and Replacing Negative Thoughts using the “3 C’s: Catch it, Check it, Change it”

1. Catch it – Identify the distorted thought. Acknowledging the trauma (instead of ignoring it). The first step is to **notice the negative thought** or belief that is causing distress. Pause and pay attention to what thought is occurring in upsetting situations. For example, if you feel a sudden wave of anxiety or sadness, ask: *“What was going through my mind just now?”* Write down the thought, no matter how automatic or believable it seems. Simply acknowledging the thought (“I’ll never succeed at this”) is vital, because you can’t change what you haven’t identified. Here are steps to identify what’s really going on beneath the surface:

A. Pay Attention to the Emotion First

- a. Start with how you’re feeling. Are you anxious? Angry? Hurt? Embarrassed? Emotion is often the alarm that lets you know a deeper belief has been triggered.
- b. Ask yourself: *“What am I feeling right now?” “What do I feel in my body? Does your heart rate go up? Does your throat tighten? Are you lost in thoughts? Or maybe your stomach churns or your hands become sweaty?”*

B. Ask: What Did I Just Think?

- a. When distress hits, pause and ask yourself: *“What thought just went through my mind before I started feeling this way?”*
- b. It might be quick, automatic, or even unconscious. Examples:
- c. *“They probably don’t like me.”, “I always mess things up.”, “I’m not good enough as them.”*

C. Ask “What does this situation say about me in my mind?”

- a. This helps you uncover deeper beliefs—often tied to identity. For example:
- b. If someone cancels plans and you take it personally, the deeper belief might be: *“I’m not important.”*
- c. If you mess up at work and feel crushed, the belief might be: *“I have to be perfect to be worthy.”*

- D. Notice Repeating Patterns:** If you keep getting distressed in similar situations (like being corrected, left out, or compared), that's a sign there's a core belief under the surface. Ask: *"What does this keep bringing up for me?"*
- E. Use "The 5 Whys" Technique:** Ask "why" over and over until you hit the root:
 - a. *"Why am I upset?" → Because I was ignored.*
 - b. *"Why does being ignored bother me?" → Because it makes me feel invisible.*
 - c. *"Why is feeling invisible painful?" → Because I already believe I don't matter.*
- F. Ask a trusted friend**
 - a. *"What do you notice I seem to believe about myself when I'm upset?"*

Assignment:

- ❖ **Corinthians 13:4-7** – *"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."*

Using Corinthians 13:4-7, list 3 things in the passage that you want those who love you to start doing. For example, maybe you want someone in your life to stop reacting to you and instead practice temperance or stop being envious and start celebrating your accomplishments.

Using Corinthians 13:4-7, list 3 things in the passage that you will start doing for the ones you love. For example, maybe you want to be less reactive and more temperate or perhaps you want to be quick to forgive so you start addressing conflict as it arises instead of keeping a record of wrongdoings.

- 2. Check it – Challenge the thought's accuracy.** Next, treat the thought as a hypothesis to be tested rather than a fact. Ask Socratic questions to probe the thought: *"What evidence do I have for this belief? Is there another explanation? What would I tell a friend in this situation?"* Socratic questioning is a powerful technique that helps challenge irrational, illogical, or harmful thoughts by examining them from God's perspective.

Stress Response System

The stress response system (also known as the survival response or fight-or-flight system) is the body's way of reacting to something it perceives as a threat, whether it's physical danger, emotional distress, or social conflict. The "fight, flight, fawn, freeze" responses are different ways individuals react to stress or perceived threats.

These are instinctual survival reactions: Each of these responses is automatic — not a conscious choice — especially when we're triggered or overwhelmed.

- **Fight** – Reacting to stress with anger, control, or confrontation to defend yourself. “I have to protect myself by pushing back.” The response may be direct and intense. Fighters push for what they want, sometimes at the cost of relationships. Their assertiveness overshadows listening, leading to miscommunication.
- **Flight** – Escaping or avoiding the stressor by running away, shutting down communication, or staying busy. The response can be withdrawn and they may hesitate to speak up. “If I leave or disappear, I’ll be safe.”
- **Freeze** – Shutting down physically or emotionally, feeling stuck, numb, or unable to act. Response is inward-focused and may be hesitant to speak up. “If I stay still and quiet, maybe the threat will pass.”
- **Fawn** – Trying to appease or please others to avoid conflict or harm, often at your own expense. This response can look like prioritizing harmony. They listen well but suppress their own needs, often becoming people-pleasers. “If I keep you happy, maybe I won’t get hurt.”

Why This Matters — Especially in Parenting (young and adult children)

When adults aren't aware of their own stress responses, they can accidentally pass on stress, anxiety and fear to their children. Children learn how to react by watching and feeling the emotional climate of their caregivers and those around them.

- A parent yelling out of a fight response might scare a child into silence, not understanding that the parent's yelling isn't personal but survival-based.
 - Reactive parents can deeply shape the adult child's emotional development and their relationship with that parent later in life
- A parent who always fawns may struggle to set boundaries, and the child might not learn what healthy conflict looks like.
 - Fawning parents often suppress their own needs or emotions to keep the peace.
 - As a result, the child grows up sensing that Emotions = danger, Conflict = something to be avoided at all costs, and Love = self-sacrifice
 - As adults, these children may struggle to trust that love can include honesty, disagreement, or healthy tension.

Awareness changes everything. When adults recognize their stress responses, they can: Self-regulate (pause, breathe, re-center), Repair after rupture (apologize, reconnect), and Model resilience and emotional safety for others.

- 3. Change it – Replace the thought with a balanced alternative.** Finally, swap out distorted thought for a new thought or interpretation that is more realistic, positive, or constructive. Reframe it. For instance, “*I always fail*” might be reframed as “*I have had some successes and some setbacks – everyone makes mistakes, and I can learn from this one.*” The replacement thought should be believable and compassionate, not just blindly optimistic. This often involves crafting a new core belief over time (e.g., “I am capable and worthy” instead of “I’m a failure”). This deliberate practice helps install the new belief.

Replacing Harmful Thoughts with Truth

NEGATIVE THOUGHT / BELIEF	REPLACEMENT THOUGHT	SCRIPTURE FOR RENEWAL
“I have to be strong or productive all the time.”	“I am allowed to rest and ask for help.”	<i>Matthew 11:28 NLT</i> – “Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”
“I’m not good enough.”	“I am more than enough. I was made with purpose.”	<i>Psalms 139:14 NLT</i> – “I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”
“Showing emotion is weakness.”	“Feeling is strength. I am safe to feel.”	<i>Ecclesiastes 3:4 NLT</i> – “A time to cry and a time to laugh. A time to grieve and a time to dance.”
“I have to work twice as hard to be seen.”	“My worth is not measured by how hard I hustle.”	<i>Psalms 46:10 NLT</i> – “Cease striving and know that I am God.”
“If I speak up, I’ll be labeled angry or aggressive.”	“My voice is powerful and deserves to be heard.”	<i>Proverbs 31:8-9 NLT</i> – “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed. Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice.”
“I’ll never be truly safe or accepted.”	“God is my refuge. I am protected and loved.”	<i>Psalms 27:1 NLT</i> – “The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?”
“I have to keep it all together.”	“It’s okay to not be okay. I can fall apart and be held by God.”	<i>2 Corinthians 12:9 NLT</i> – “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

“I don’t matter unless I’m doing something for others.”	“My value isn’t in what I do — it’s in who I am.”	<i>Luke 3:22 NLT</i> – “You are my beloved child; with you I am well pleased.”
“I’m too broken to be used.”	“God uses my scars to help others heal.”	<i>Genesis 50:20 NLT</i> – “You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.”
“I’m always waiting for something to go wrong.”	“God has not given me a spirit of fear, but of peace and power.”	<i>2 Timothy 1:7 NLT</i> – “For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.”
“What if I fail again?”	“Even if I fall, God is with me. I will rise again.”	<i>Micah 7:8 NLT</i> – “Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light.”
“It’s my fault things went wrong.”	“I am forgiven. I don’t have to carry this anymore.”	<i>Romans 8:1 NLT</i> – “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”
“I should have done more.”	“I did the best I could with what I had. I give myself grace.”	<i>Isaiah 43:25 NLT</i> – “I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions... and remembers your sins no more.”
“I’ll never be as good as them.”	“I was created to walk in my own God-given lane.”	<i>Ephesians 2:10 NLT</i> – “For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.”
“I always get overlooked.”	“God sees me. I am chosen, not forgotten.”	<i>1 Peter 2:9 NLT</i> – “But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God’s very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.”

Practice, Practice, Practice – and Be Patient:

Rewiring your thinking is like strengthening a muscle – it requires repetition. Make cognitive restructuring a daily practice. You can set aside a few minutes each day to reflect on your thoughts: perhaps each night, write down one upsetting thought you had that day and do the Catch it–Check it–Change it process on it. Also, try to catch distortions in the moment during your day. When

you notice yourself feeling a strong negative emotion, do a quick mental check: “*What am I thinking right now? Is this thought distorted in some way?*” Then swiftly challenge it and reframe it. At first, you may only catch the distortion after the fact (“Ah, I spent all afternoon worrying about that meeting for no reason.”).

Building a New Mental Habit

A mental habit is a way of thinking you train your brain to do automatically — like thinking positively, challenging negative thoughts, or practicing gratitude. It takes about 66 days or about 2 months on average for a behavior to become automatic.

“Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin.” Zechariah 4:10, New Living Translation (NLT)

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References

Winning the War in Your Mind: Change Your Thinking, Change Your Life by Craig Groeschel DeGruy, J. A. (2017). Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing (Revised ed.). Joy DeGruy Publications Inc. ISBN: 978-0985217273.
Stress Response Images credit [@igototherapy](https://www.instagram.com/igototherapy/) <https://www.instagram.com/igototherapy/>
Beck, A. T. (1979). *Cognitive Therapy of Depression*. Guilford Press. Foundation of CBT principles, including identifying and reframing distorted thinking.
Burns, D. D. (1980). *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy*. Popularized cognitive restructuring techniques for a general audience.

Resources

WVUMC Congregational Care Dept. Contact - Genniveive (Gennie) Brown at (713) 726-2597 or Manager@counselingmail.com
[Black Psychiatry Directory](https://blackpsychiatrydirectory.com/) - <https://blackpsychiatrydirectory.com/>
[Therapy for Black Girls](https://therapyforblackgirls.com/) - <https://therapyforblackgirls.com/>
[Therapy for Black Men](https://therapyforblackmen.org/) - <https://therapyforblackmen.org/>
[The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD](#) (Harris County Mental Health Authority) -

being stuck in the fight response

seeking safety by confronting the perceived threat

feeling extremely
**reactive, impulsive,
or irritable**

struggling with anger
management;
explosiveness when hurt

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**ignoring or
shutting down**
other people's
perspectives

unpredictability,
explosive temper
with high levels of
shame afterwards

defensiveness;
struggling with taking
accountability or
compromising

tendency to end up
starting **fight**s or
arguments over
relatively small things

everything feels like an
attack; focused on **self-
preservation at all costs**

need to be in **control** &
have things happen the way
you want them to happen



being stuck in the flight response

seeking safety by escaping from the perceived threat

avoidance:

physically leaving
an uncomfortable
situation,
avoiding difficult
topics or hard
conversations

being **quick** to
end
relationships or
quit hobbies or
commitments

constant
overthinking
and worry

excessive and/or maladaptive
daydreaming

high levels of **perfectionism**
and **anxiety**



a constant need to
be **busy**; struggling
with **staying**
present in the
moment or staying
physically still

trying to '**escape**' & stay
distracted through
substance use,
overworking, or other
coping mechanisms

struggling with
commitment and feeling
trapped

being stuck in the freeze response

seeking safety by hiding from the perceived threat

having a hard
time making
decisions

feeling **numb**,
emotionally
detached, and
isolated

shutting down,
dissociating,
or otherwise
becoming
'spaced out'
during conflict
or other
uncomfortable
situations



mentally 'checking out' of difficult situations instead of processing or addressing them

procrastinating even with simple tasks or easy conversations, feeling **stuck** scrolling on your phone or in bed

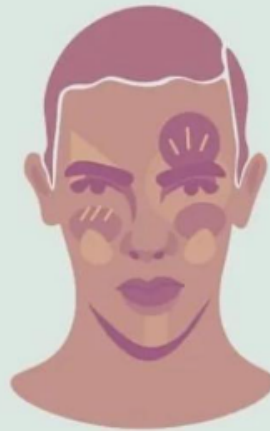
depressive symptoms, fatigue and feelings of not caring or lethargy

giving up quickly when trying to advocate for your own needs

being stuck in the fawn response can look like...

seeking safety by appeasing the perceived threat

extreme people pleasing, taking full **responsibility** and **not advocating for your own needs** even when you're not at fault or you're being mistreated



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losing your identity and only being concerned with the other person, **codependency**

agreeing or changing your opinion easily even when you actually disagree

not setting boundaries or saying no out of **fear** of consequences

doing anything to receive **acceptance**

surface-level, panic-fuelled friendliness or affection when feeling threatened



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