

CCC Thinking Clearly About Your Problems

Clear Thinking Part 1

Your mind is an amazing creation of God. Did you know it handles billions and billions of bits of information? It can process 800 memories a second. No computer will ever compare with the computing power of your brain. And you in your lifetime will only use a fraction of your intellect during your lifetime. The Bible tells us "*As a man thinks in his heart so is he.*" You are what you think. More than anything else, even more than your background, then your environment, what determines your life is your thoughts, what you choose to think about has a greater influence on your life than anything else than you can possibly imagine. God's word, the Bible says, "*As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.*" A few weeks ago I put my name on the line and God's name on the line with me and I gave you a guarantee

for the year 2009. . I made you a guarantee, I said, "If you'll open your life up to the light of God's love in your life, I guarantee you will enter 2009 with a new level of brightness and clarity and understanding that you didn't think possible, if you'll just let God have His life in you... I guaranteed you your 2009 would be a better life than your 2008. I am going to for the next 365 days continue to tell you and show you how to start this and how to grow in it and have a wonderful blessed 2009. But it is going to take some of your work. You need to listen to what I say but you also have to act on what I say to you and if you're serious about wanting a great 2009, you have to start by changing the way that you think. The Bible tells us in Romans 12, "*Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*" The way you are transformed, the way you are

changed, the way you are built into something that you want to become is to change the way you think.

New Years is a good time for us to talk about what you'd change in your life. We've got a whole new year ahead of us. How are you going to be different at the end of the next 365 days? How will you be different spiritually at the end of this year? How will you be different physically? Will you be in better health or in worse health? How will you be different financially? How do you intend to be different socially or relationally? If you want to make the changes in your life that will help you be more what God wants you to be, you've got to start by changing the way that you think.

This morning I am going to talk to you about, *Clear Thinking*, and I am not sure if this is going to move into a series or not... Maybe we need to make it into a series,

honestly I am just not sure right now which way God wants to go here. It could be a great series, we could talk about... thinking clearly about your future, thinking clearly about your family, thinking clearly about your work. But today I want us to talk about thinking clearly about your problems that you will inevitably face in the New Year, 2009.

Life is basically a series of mountains and valleys, ups and downs, highs and lows, good times and bad times, obstacles and opportunities, problems and potentials. They both come at you at the same time. In the year 2009 you will have some depressing days. There is no doubt about it, you will have days when you feel like, "Why did I get up this morning?" Days of disappointment where you feel like you're just not making any progress. You're discouraged and you feel depressed. You will have days of

defeat in the year 2009. No doubt about that, and that I can guarantee you also. Some days you're going to feel like a loser. You're going to feel like a total failure. You're going to feel like, "Why bother?... Why make the effort?... Why keep on trying?... It's not working."

And in the year 2009 you will go through some dark days, days where you haven't the slightest idea where you're headed, no idea where you're going. You feel like you're in a fog, in the dark. And you can't figure out what to do next.

What do you do in those kinds of days? How do you get through those kinds of problems?

God's word, the Bible says it starts by changing the way that you think. You're biggest problem in the year 2009 is going to be your perspective. How you look at your problems is far more important than the problems you

actually have. When you have the right perspective on your problem you can handle almost anything. But, when you have the wrong perspective on a problem you can handle almost nothing. It's all in the way that you look at it.

Somebody who handled a lot of problems in the Bible was the Apostle Paul. In 2 Corinthians 4 he tells us about some of the problems he went through. vs. 8-9 "*We are pressed on every side by troubles but we're not crushed and broken. We are perplexed but we don't give up and quit. We get knocked down but we get up again and we keep going.*"

Here is a man of incredible endurance. He says I'm knocked down but I'm not knocked out. I just keep on keeping on. Wouldn't you like to have that kind of endurance, that kind of stamina, that kind of determination

in the year 2009? How do you get it? How do you keep from being beat up by your problems? He tells us in the next verse, here's one of the tangible in my guarantee v. 18

"We set our eyes not on what we see but on what we can't see. What we see will last only a short time. What we can't see will last forever." Paul says the secret of endurance is, I focus my mind. Circle the phrase *"we set our eyes."* Paul says there are some things I deliberately choose to focus on when things aren't going right in my life. There's some things I turn my mind to, I turn my attention towards, I focus my mind, my vision, on these things when times get tough. First, I don't look at the external. I look at the eternal. I don't look at my problems, instead, I look at God who can solve them. I don't look at the difficulty. I look at the Deliverer of them, the one I know who can help me out.

The classic book on learning to think clearly in the Bible is the book of Psalms. Most of it was written by David. Almost every known problem to man is covered somewhere in the book of Psalms. David was a person who had all kinds of problems and fortunately for us he wrote down his prayers. He talked them out to God every time he had a problem. Often his thinking was quite fuzzy, confused. He starts off a lot of the Psalms being very confused, just like you and I are with our problems. But inevitably God helps him work it out and he thinks it through and thinks clearly and comes to the correct conclusion.

So today, I want us to look at some of the different Psalms and I want us to see from David's example three important keys to handling the depressing and the defeating and dark days of life.

You may not be in this situation right now and if your not, Congratulations. I hope you're not. But I guarantee you will be in some in the days ahead. I encourage you to take notes today on what to do with your problems when you face them.

**1. WHEN YOUR SITUATION LOOKS
DEPRESSING, YOU NEED TO THINK ABOUT
THE GOODNESS OF GOD.**

Depression is always a warning light. A warning light that you're focusing on the wrong thing. You're focusing on your problem not the solution. You're focusing on the negative, not the positive. When you look at all the bad things in your life instead of the good things... of course you're going to get depressed. Of course you're going to get down. When you get depressed it's a warning light that you've forgotten how good God is to you.

Depression is almost always the result of what I call the All-Or-Nothing thinking syndrome. It's a trap. This trap of All-Or-Nothing thinking goes like this: Somebody criticizes you and you think, "Everybody hates me!" What have you done? All-Or-Nothing thinking. It's exaggerating, catastrophizing. It's making the problem bigger than it really is. You go through a delay or difficulty and you say, "Everything is wrong in my life!" No, it's not. Something may be wrong but not everything. There may be several things wrong in your life but everything is not wrong in your life. But when you do this All-Or-Nothing thinking you get depressed. When you make a mistake you say, "I can't do anything right!" But that's not true. You can do some things right. But in All-Or-Nothing thinking you're bound to get depressed.

If I were to go home today after church and turn on the faucet in my kitchen and no water came out, it would be kind of silly for me to go outside and yell in the street, “The world is out of water!” No, the world isn’t out of water it’s just that my faucet isn’t working. Yet you do that all the time with your problems and that’s what leads to depression. All-Or-Nothing thinking. You forget the good things in your life.

I’ve told you many times that studies have shown that the healthiest emotion known to man is the attitude of gratitude. Being thankful for what we do have... The more you fill your life with gratefulness, thanksgiving, gratitude, the healthier you’re going to be both emotionally and physically. If you’re depressed – and by the way a lot of people get depressed this time of year. It’s kind of the let-down of Christmas, New Years, and it’s the darkest time of

the year. And a lot of people tend to fall into depression at this time. What you need to do is go count your blessings. You need to go home and get out a piece of paper and make a list of 100 things you can be grateful for. The goodness of God in your life.

That's a starting point but it's far more than that. Focusing or thinking on the goodness of God means more than just being grateful for all the good things God has done for you. It also means seriously thinking about how good a God, God really is. God has your best interest at heart. He loves you and He knows what He’s doing and that He wants good for your life even when you don’t understand it.

Let me be clear about this. Not everything that happens in your life is good. There’s a lot of bad things that happen. But God is always good. And God’s plan for

your life is always good and God can always bring good out of bad if you'll trust Him.

There is a story of Joseph in God's word, the Bible, in the Old Testament. Here was a guy, and as a young kid he had a dream one night that he would be a great ruler one day and God would bless his life and all of his brothers would give him the respect he was due. He was number eleven of twelve kids. So as the runt of the family he didn't get any respect. His brothers hated him. They were jealous of him. They didn't like him. In fact, one day they took him and threw him in a pit. They were just going to get rid of him. Later they took him out of the pit and sold him to some slave traders who were heading to Egypt. So he's taken captive down in Egypt and he's sold as a slave to a guy in Egypt. While he's working there the man's wife falsely accuses him of rape. He's innocent. He ends

up in prison in a foreign country as a slave accused of something he never did. Everything has gone wrong in this guy's life. And He's talking with God and saying, "God, what's going on here? Why is this happening? This is not the way I planned my life to go." Have you ever said those words, I know I have...? "This is not the way I planned my life to go!"

But God had Joseph exactly where he needed to be because He had a plan and it was a good plan because God's a good God. God's plan was to eventually raise Joseph up, the second in command in the nation of Egypt and he would save not only the nation of Egypt but the nation of Israel from famine. Later on his brothers did come and he saved their lives and they bowed down and gave him the respect that he had dreamed about. In that confrontation when he could have been filled with

resentment for all the hurt that his brothers had caused, all the evil that had happened, he said this in that fateful meeting in Genesis 50, “*You [talking to his brothers] meant it for bad but God meant it for good.*”

My Question to you this morning: What have other people meant for bad in your life? (PAUSE) Surely you’ve had people who have mistreated you. There are people who want to hurt you. There are people who want to lie about you. There are people who want to mistreat you. There are people who will stab you in the back. They’ll reject you. They’ll cheat you. There will be people who will unscrupulous about you where you work and say all kinds of things that aren’t true. And they mean it for bad. They mean it to hurt you.

But God means it for good. And God is a good God. He’s bigger than the problems you’re going through. If you’ll stop focusing on how people have hurt you, you’ll stop being depressed. Instead, if you’ll start focusing on how God wants to use it for good in your life, you’ll start being happy again. It’s all in the way you think about the experiences of life. You can’t control your experiences but you can control how you choose to think about them.

This principle that I’m talking to you about this morning, the principle of focusing on the goodness of God when life doesn’t make sense, has helped me more than any other principle personally in handling the disappointments of life. Life is full of disappointments! Full of them! Things just don’t go as planned. There are big disappointments and there are little disappointments.

What do you do when you face those depressing days?

You focus, you think about, the goodness of God.

I think about all the times as a leader of Calvary church, it's been seven years – seven years we have been trying to build an equipping center to house our children and our weekly ministries and we had lots of plans and spent monies and we have had no success. And each year I see the people come and visit they love Calvary but the accommodations just won't do for them and their families. Time after time, disappointment after disappointment is all I have had in this area, and on top of that I know the church won't grow any more then it is, until this expansion happens. I'm going, "God, I don't know why this is happening *but* this I do know You are a good God and I know You want what's best for this church, for me and for everybody else and You have a plan." God has a plan that

we don't know about and if we'll wait, if we will keep the faith... He'll bring it in at the right time and the right place.

When life doesn't make sense, you just need to trust God.

You're not as smart as He is. And He is a good God. He's worthy of your trust.

God can use the disappointments in your life if you'll focus on the goodness of God during those times. Big disappointments. Little disappointments. I'm talking even about things like traffic jams, being late to things, bad weather.

Just this Christmas we had everything go wrong before the Calvary Family Christmas Eve Service that you could think of and on top of that several last minutes changes. Know we had spent months planning the songs, the skit, the music, the specials. We had every reason to be down and out and confused over everything, but it doesn't change

who God is; God is still a good God and it would all work out somehow, somehow, for His glory and honor. And after the service I had a young lady come up to me and said with tears in her eyes and her little baby in her arms say to me, “I never knew God was this way.” Most of the things we had to change or just go by the seat of our pants are the things that moved here most... Listen, God had a plan for that night... After the service I heard from others even more good testimonies of new people being moved by the celebration we had Christmas Eve... God is good and has a plan...

Psalm 31, “*How great is Your goodness. You have stored it up for those who honor You. You do good things for those who trust You.*” Life is filled with disappointments – big one and little ones – but nothing happens in the life of a believer without the heavenly Father’s permission. If you

are a Christian, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you’ve committed your life to Him, nothing ever happens in your life by accident. Nothing. Even the bad things that other people cause, God means them for good in your life.

God doesn’t have bad plans for your life. He’s a good God. In fact the Bible tells us in Romans, “*All things work together for good for those who love God.*”

In those times of life, when life doesn’t make sense, when you can’t figure it all out, when you don’t understand it, when it actually seems like a senseless tragedy, that’s when you most of all need to think about and trust that God is a good God. He really is a good God! He sees what you don’t see and He knows what you don’t know. Trust Him.

Let us pray: I want to encourage you today to thank God for His goodness. Just talk to God right now... just

whisper in your mind something like this:, “Father, I believe that You are a good God. Not a mean God, but a good God. I believe that You love me and that You always have my best interest at heart. I don't understand all the things that happen to me and I don't understand all the things that You ask me to do. Sometimes they seem difficult. Sometimes they seem unreasonable. Sometimes they even seem impossible. But I want to obey what You say because I believe You are a good God and You want what's best for me. Father, this year coming year of 2009, when I face disappointments, help me to remember that You're good and that You're worthy of my trust. When I face tragedies or things that don't make sense, instead of questioning or demanding an explanation, I want to rest in the knowledge of Your goodness and that You've got a good plan for my life. In Your name I pray. Amen.”