

Telling Yourself the Truth

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Introduction

This book has been written to help you live with the one person you must live with for life—you. The precepts set forth here are not new; in fact, they've been around since the time of King Solomon and before. People become happy and contented by learning how to practice the habits this book describes.

The current writings of the cognitive therapists such as Albert Ellis, A. T. Beck, M. J. Mahoney, D. Meichenbaum and Arnold Lazarus and their scientific points of view, the writings of philosophers such as Titus and Marcus Aurelius, the findings of psychological researchers as well as the probings of the greatest minds of history bring us to the truths set forth in the Holy Scriptures and the principles we share here with you. These principles are so practical and time-tested—in fact, God's own method for destroying the strongholds of evil in the minds of men and women—that it is amazing the average reader has never heard of such things!

Most of us want to be honest-to-goodness happy human beings who can handle life well and manage to feel good in spite of ever-increasing odds against us. Ironically, we use methods of

achieving happiness that make us *unhappy*. We work at and strive for something that we can't quite catch hold of.

What does it mean to be happy? We could define it as a continuing sense of well-being, a state of feeling good about life, others, and self. We could also define happiness as the absence of mental and emotional discomfort and pain. The Bible calls happy "blessed."

Blessed—*happy*, fortunate, prosperous and enviable—is the man who walks and lives not in the counsel of the ungodly. . . . But his delight and desire are in the law of the Lord, and on His law—the precepts, the instructions, the teachings of God—.¹

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus names those who are blessed, or happy. They are people who are "spiritually prosperous [that is, with life-joy and satisfaction in God's favor and salvation, regardless of their outward conditions]."²

What is your definition of happiness? After you answer that question, we want you to know that it's possible to be happy, really happy in the deepest corners of your being, and to stay that way. You don't have to be a victim of circumstances, events, relationships. You don't have to be trapped by persistent painful emotions.

This book is written to help you possess the happiness you desire and to be the person you'd like to be. You can live happily ever after with the person you are and make a profound affect on those around you because of it.

"Misbelief Therapy," as we have called our *modus operandi*, involves putting the truth into our value systems, philosophies, demands, expectations, moralistic and emotional assumptions, as well as into the words we tell ourselves. The Bible says it is the *truth* that sets man free. Jesus Christ is the living Truth. When we inject the truth into our every thought, taking a therapeutic broom

1. Psalm 1:1, 2.
2. Matthew 5:3.

Introduction

and sweeping away the lies and misbeliefs which have enslaved us, we find our lives radically changed for the happier better.

It is our hope that other professionals will join us in the exciting discovery that truth as it is in Jesus is a teachable way of life which leads to wholeness, restored functioning, and freedom from neurosis.

We ask the indulgence of our professionally trained readers who will find little scientific terminology in this book. We have purposely eschewed “psychologese” in order that all of our readers will feel comfortable with us.

Recently we completed a research project which involved follow-up calls to every client seen at the Center for Christian Psychological Services in a six-month period. The purpose was to ascertain how well Misbelief Therapy, as we call it, had actually worked in the lives of the clients. The results were gratifying. Ninety-five percent of the clients that had been treated at the Center had improved. Not only that, but these people were able to cite specific behaviors which had changed for the better. They were enthusiastic over the treatment they had received and the results that had been obtained in their lives. That is why we feel confident in recommending that you not only read this book, but that you also put into practice the procedures it offers you for bringing about real change in your life. You will be learning skills which you will want to keep forever.

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1

What Is Misbelief?

“Why do I feel the way I do?” cries the troubled person. Typically, he or she wants to put the blame on something or someone else. “It’s my wife. *She’s* the one who makes me feel this way.” Or, “It’s all my *husband’s* fault.” “My job isn’t satisfying me,” or “*My friends* are disappointing,” or “*My children* are a disappointment.” Some people blame their problems on their church. They find fault with their pastor, complain that the people aren’t friendly enough or that everybody *else* in the world is a hypocrite.

There’s something in all of our lives we’d like to change. Nobody’s life circumstances are perfect. But what are we *telling* ourselves about these circumstances?

A few years ago a man we’ll call Jerry was a wreck of a man. He was a Christian and had believed in God most of his life. Now, however, after 15 years of marriage, he was forced to live alone, separated from his family and facing a divorce he didn’t want. He thought it was the end of the world. He was really miserable. He spent many evenings trying to anesthetize his painful feelings

with liquor. He was so unhappy he wanted to die because he just couldn't see any other way out of such sad circumstances.

Finally, he decided to see a Christian psychotherapist for help. Once in therapy, he gradually began to see that his life didn't have to be over. He stopped thinking about taking his own life, and his faith in God began to stretch. He started thinking of God as a giver of *good*. He came to know Him in a new dimension, and little by little, his life changed.

He explained it this way. "One day while I sat groveling in my sorrows, I listened to the words I had been telling myself, things like, 'Oh, what's the use? I'm all alone. Nobody loves me or cares about me. Nobody wants to be with me. I'm rejected and useless . . .' Suddenly I was shocked. I thought, 'What am I telling myself anyhow?'"

Jerry questioned his self-talk. He recognized something radically wrong with what he had been telling himself and realized his depression was not due to his impending divorce, but what he was *telling himself about it*.

As a result he began to change the sentences he said to himself. This took some hard work and determination on his part. It wasn't easy at first, but because he refused to be a "chump" to a pack of self-destroying lies, he taught himself to confess the truth.

INSTEAD OF:	HE SAID:
I'm a failure and no good.	The marriage failed, but I am deeply loved by God. Therefore I am important.
I'm so lonely and miserable.	I'm alone, but I am not lonely.
I'm separated from my family and there's no joy anymore for me.	I'm separated from my family and that hurts. I can function even though I hurt.

He also stopped drinking completely. He argued with the destructive sentences he had been telling himself. "Just because I'm alone doesn't mean I have to be lonely!" he said. He told himself

the *truth* and used his situation as an opportunity to celebrate, enjoy and revel in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in his life.

His circumstances hadn't changed, but what he *told himself* about the circumstances changed! He discovered that he had been telling himself a lot of lies, straight from the devil.

Three steps to becoming the happy person you were meant to be are:

1. *Locate your misbeliefs.* (Jerry realized that he was telling himself lies.)
2. *Remove them.* (He argued against them. "I am *not* lonely!")
3. *Replace misbeliefs with the truth.* ("It's nonsense to say I'm unlovable and useless. I'm loved with an everlasting love by the God of the universe. In Him, I have countless talents and uses and I am infinitely valuable to Him.")

Jerry learned that being alone could actually be an exciting experience with the Lord. If he had hung on to his ridiculous misbeliefs, he might have gone to his grave in gloom and misery long ago. Happily, he recovered completely and now leads a wonderfully fulfilled life. He will never again suffer the self-destructive anguish he was duped by once. When he learned to see the *truth* about himself, he also learned to argue and get rid of the lies that would have destroyed him.

Truth: What Is It?

Many philosophers and thinkers through the ages have been fascinated by the idea of *truth*, what it is and what it means in our lives.

One of these people was a man named Rene Descartes. He was a devout Roman Catholic who lived at the beginning of the seventeenth century. He made a name for himself by trying to discover clear and indubitable truth.

Descartes was fed up with the never-ending arguments among philosophers and decided to put an end to their disagreements forever.

In order to find some truth which would be so unquestionable that no one could doubt it, Descartes decided to start at the point of his own doubt of things. He systematically doubted all that he could possibly doubt. In doubting everything imaginable, he told himself he was *thinking*. Then he reasoned, since he was thinking, he had to *be*.

Thus emerged his famous words, “*I think, therefore I am.*” Descartes had finally discovered what he considered an indubitable truth: He believed the most important thing about truth was to arrive at it. The trouble with his proposition is that it doesn’t tell us much about how to *live* or be *happy* with that truth.

Marcus Aurelius was another thinking man. He was emperor of Rome about 150 years after Christ, and he too was concerned with the *truth*. Marcus Aurelius was a stoic ruler and noted as one of the most high-minded and conscientious of all the Roman emperors. He had many failings, one of them his dislike for Christians; but in spite of this sorrowful indiscretion, he pursued a quest for *truth*. In his book *Meditations*, he shares an earth-shaking discovery, one that can make a difference in the way we live today.

Marcus Aurelius saw that human emotion is not just a product of chance circumstances, but is determined by the way people *think*.

Where Descartes said, “I think, therefore I am,” Marcus Aurelius might have said, “I think in order to *determine* the way I am.”

Precisely.

In the book of Proverbs in the Bible, it reads, *As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.*¹ In exploring this and other scriptural references pertaining to the importance of right thinking, we discover the Bible solidly teaches that man’s feelings, passions and behavior are subject to and conditioned by the way he thinks.

1. Proverbs 23:7.

Marcus Aurelius had unearthed a truth whose fullness he could not wholly appreciate because he did not know the Lord Jesus Christ who said, “*I am the Truth.*”²

As human beings we are not doomed to a cold, emotionless, machine-like existence. We are creatures throbbing with mental, emotional and physical energy. Once we yank out the irrationalities and lies from our thoughts and replace them with the *truth*, we can lead satisfying, rich and fulfilling emotional lives.

These irrationalities are not always easy to label. Most of what we tell ourselves is not in word form. Our thoughts are often images or attitudes without words attached to them. You may feel uncomfortable and isolated in crowded places but never actually put these feelings into words. You may be fearful of a thing and avoid it without really knowing what’s going on in your belief system at all.

But how do we change? How do we make contact with what’s really going on within us?

“Doctor,” a patient will weep, “I think the root of my problem goes back to my childhood!” How often we hear this statement!

Our culture, intinctured with Freudian philosophy, has nearly made it mandatory to believe that no one can be healed psychologically without exploring the past in detail and in depth.

It is not, however, events either past or present which make us feel the way we feel, but our *interpretation of those events*.

Our feelings are not caused by the circumstances of our long-lost childhood *or* the circumstances of the present. *Our feelings are caused by what we tell ourselves about our circumstances*, whether in words or in attitudes.

What we tell ourselves can be either (1) truth or (2) lie.

If you tell yourself untruths or lies, you will *believe* untruths and lies. If you tell yourself you’re a dumb jerk who can’t do anything

2. “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father except by (through) Me” (John 14:6).

right, you'll believe it. If you *believe* something, you'll *act* as though you believe it.

That's why your *beliefs and misbeliefs* are the most important factors of your mental and emotional life.

Misbeliefs

What are misbeliefs?

The word *misbelief* is an important word. In fact, it's the most appropriate label we can think of for some of the ridiculous things we tell ourselves. The amount of suffering we experience due to sustained bouts of negative thinking and battered emotions is outrageous.

Misbeliefs are the direct cause of emotional turmoil, maladaptive behavior and most so-called "mental illness." Misbeliefs are the cause of the destructive behavior people persist in engaging in even when they are fully aware that it is harmful to them (such as overeating, smoking, lying, drunkenness, stealing or adultery).

Misbeliefs generally appear as truth to the person repeating them to himself. They might even seem to be true to an untrained counselor. That is partly because they often do contain some shred of truth, and partly because the sufferer has never examined or questioned these erroneous assumptions. But, please understand, the misbeliefs we tell ourselves are directly from the pit of hell. They are hand engraved and delivered by the devil himself. He is very clever in dishing out misbeliefs. He doesn't want to risk being discovered so he always appears as if the lie he is telling us is true.

Words like, "Oh, I can't do anything right. I'm always making mistakes" are good examples. You'll believe these lies when you've just made a mistake.

"Oh, I can't do anything right" is a *misbelief statement*. If you believe words like that, you are believing a lie.

Martin Luther, teaching the meaning of the sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer ("Lead us not into temptation") wrote: "We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us lest the devil, the world, and our flesh lead us into misbelief, despair and other great shame and vice." The consequences of misbelief do lead to despair and other "great shame and vice."

Think for a moment about the things you tell yourself. If you tell yourself your mother-in-law hates you or the guy next door is a rotten neighbor and a no-good so-and-so, what will you be influenced by? *You'll believe what you tell yourself.* Therefore, you'll treat your mother-in-law as a personal enemy and you'll treat your neighbor exactly like a no-good so-and-so.

More than likely your mother-in-law and neighbor gave you some reason to tell yourself those things about them, so you can feel justified with your self-talk. But you're a victim of misbelief.

Why?

The Apostle James shows us where destructive self-talk comes from. "This [superficial] wisdom is not such as comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual [animal], even devilish."³ Negative and distorted statements which a person repeats to himself come from the devil. Your flesh accepts them without question and then, like spoiled, rotting food, these words of mental poison create painful emotional aches and pains.

This diet of deadly toxins will kill you, according to Saint Paul. He says to set "the mind on the flesh . . . is death."⁴ If you continue to tell yourself distorted statements, you're going to have negative feelings and you're going to engage in negative behavior.

Persistent painful feelings are contrary to God's will.

God does not want His children to suffer depression, worry and intractable anger.

Did you know God wants us to be able to control our feelings and actions?

3. James 3:15.

4. Romans 8:6.

We can do it when we get rid of our misbeliefs and start paying attention to our self-talk.

A client named Bob sits in the therapist's office for his sixth therapy session. He fidgets with his hands as he talks. "It's getting so I feel tense and knotted up most of the time," he tells the therapist. "I've prayed about it, and I know the Bible says we aren't supposed to be nervous about things, but I can't seem to help myself. It's getting worse."

"You feel tense *all* the time?" asks the therapist.

Bob frowns. "All the time. Sometimes it's worse than at other times. I go to church but that doesn't help. Last Sunday morning in church I could hardly stand it. I wanted to run out."

"Why didn't you get up and leave?"

Bob is surprised at the question. "I couldn't do that! Everybody would stare."

"And suppose they did stare? Can stares hurt you?"

"They'd think I was crazy or backslidden. Oh, I could never just walk out of church."

"But you said you could hardly stand it. Do you mean that because you were with people, you felt you *had* to stay there?"

"Well, of course. I mean, they'd think something was wrong with me if I just got up and walked out."

"Would that be so bad?"

"Well, what if they knew what was going on inside me? What if they found out how tense and upset I am most of the time? I'm always afraid people will find out how uptight I am."

"What if they did know some of your inner feelings?"

"They'd think I was a kook, maybe. Or maybe I'm not a good Christian. After all, Christians are supposed to be happy and calm."

"Let me ask you something, Bob. If you had a friend who was having tense and nervous feelings, would you call him a kook or a terrible Christian?"

Bob shifts his weight, glances at the floor. "Of course not."

“You seem to think that what others think of you is more important than your own feelings.”

Bob is quiet for a moment and then says, “I do want everyone to think well of me. I want to be liked, do what people admire—”

“Let’s examine what you’ve told me so far and see where the misbeliefs are.”

Bob shakes his head up and down. “I can see one for sure.”

“What is it?”

“The misbelief that everybody should like and appreciate me. If they don’t, it would be just awful.”

Bob made a huge discovery that day. He discovered how important the words are that he tells himself. These words, or our *self-talk*, are what we listen to in order to hear our misbeliefs.

One of Bob’s misbeliefs was that in order for him to be happy, he had to know he was acceptable to people and liked by them.

Misbelief: “I must please people. My actions must not cause others to disapprove of me in any way. If someone disapproved of me, it would be intolerable.”

This string of related misbeliefs causes anxiety and an endless source of pain.

Truth: The Christian doesn’t have to strive for the approval of everyone around him.

Bob needed to understand that the people he was worried about pleasing actually had no power to hurt him, even if they weren’t pleased with him. He learned that very rarely do people get as upset with us as we imagine them to be. He was able to make dramatic changes in his thinking when he at last realized that the actual consequences of disapproval could never cause as much despair and anguish as his misbelief caused him. He also realized that it was God’s approval that was most important.

Bob was one of the fortunate ones. He didn’t land in a hospital or become dependent upon various drugs. He was able to take control himself.

You are the controller of your happiness and your unhappiness.

You'll be on the road to freedom when you take the first step and identify your misbeliefs for what they are. Learn how to recognize them and put them in their place as lies of the devil.

“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”⁵ is a promise of Jesus. Let the truth expose your misbeliefs for what they are!

You can be free from such ugly feelings as bitterness, oppression, depression, anxiety, resentment, anger, over-suspiciousness and hypersensitivity. You can learn self-control and have fun while you're doing it.

In emotional and mental health, what you believe is *all important*. It makes a difference what you believe. Other people, circumstances, events and material things are *not* what make you happy. What you *believe* about these things is what makes you happy or unhappy.

If you believe it would be horrible if nobody talks to you at a dinner party, your mental and emotional self will react accordingly. Getting ready for the party you feel tense; on the way to the party you're feeling anxious. Once there you're sweating and uncomfortable. Your every impulse is to find someone to talk to, to be a part of things, to be liked. You wonder *why* you're so nervous. You may excuse your feelings by telling yourself, “Oh, those parties aren't for me. I'm basically a shy person.”

Do you see how misbeliefs cause us to deny ourselves pleasure as well as the good blessings of life in Christ?

The misbeliefs in the above are:

1. It will be horrible if nobody talks to me at social gatherings (or if I don't know the people).
2. It's terrible to feel self-conscious and nervous.
5. John 8:32.

What Is Misbelief?

The truth is:

1. I can enjoy myself wherever I go, and I do not need to have someone to talk to in order to have a good time.
2. Feelings of self-consciousness won't kill me.

It's all right to experience these feelings.

Discomfort never killed anyone, but our misbeliefs tell us that discomfort is terrible, awful, wretched, horrible, when in fact, although not a lot of fun, it can be endurable.

What you think and believe determines how you feel and what you do. It is our endeavor to change the fundamental negative misbeliefs in you to the point where you will energetically and actively set about to get rid of them—permanently.

If you are a counselor, you can help people by helping them discover their misbeliefs. You can watch lives change and blossom before your eyes as people shunt their misbeliefs and actively inject the *truth* into their lives.

The question now is, do we really want to be happy?