

LIVING
IT OUT



**DAILY
BIBLE
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

Let's Talk About Mental Health

October 8, 2018

CedarCreek's motto is "You Matter." What does this mean? I believe it means God loves you, and you are important to him. God cares about your physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental well-being. Many people find it difficult to talk about their mental health issues with others. We will discuss family problems, physical illnesses, financial problems, and other personal matters, but for some reason, mental illness is taboo. We don't like to admit we struggle with depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, addictions, or any other problems.

Mental illness is something that impacts everyone, and 50 percent of us will be diagnosed with some sort of mental illness at some point in our life. One in five people suffer from mental illnesses each year. Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illnesses in adults 18 and older in the U.S., affecting 18.1 percent of the population each year. The leading cause of disability in the U.S. from the ages of 15 to 44 is depression. There are more than 200 types of mental illness diagnoses. If you are presently not suffering with some type of mental illness, you probably know someone who is.

Mental health was one of the top issues people identified as a struggle in life through CedarCreek's online survey. This past weekend, Ben Snyder interviewed Dr. Jason Brouwer, a clinical psychologist, about this issue in our lives.

In the interview, Dr. Brouwer shared with us that an indicator or red flag we can look for in regards to mental health is when our reaction doesn't quite match the situation at hand. Another indicator that something is not quite right with our mental health is if we find ourselves in a season of life that is uncomfortable for an extended period of time or we feel that our discomfort is to a degree that is a little excessive. These indicators are signs that we may need to process why we are experiencing these feelings.

This weekend, Dr. Brouwer shared with us the ABC Chart—a tool to help us process our emotions during difficult situations.

ACTIVATING EVENT	BELIEF	CONSEQUENCE
"Something happens"	"I tell myself something"	"I feel something"
A	B	C

As you go throughout your day, identify the activating events in your life. In other words, when something happens that causes you distress, it's important to recognize the facts that occurred in that event.

Secondly, pay attention to the story you are telling yourself about those events. Keep in mind, your beliefs may not be based on fact at all.

Finally, identify the emotions that result from the story you are telling yourself about that activating event. These are the consequences to your belief(s).

By going through this exercise, you will be able to process your emotions and those red flags in the area of mental health. The more you do the ABC exercise, the more natural it will become.

Over the next few days of the LivingItOut, we will continue to look at some very practical steps that will help you process emotions and live emotionally healthy.

As you go through this week, if you find yourself in a struggle, it is important to know that we don't have to struggle alone.

Isaiah 41:10

Do not be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God, I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.

I can't wait to see how God uses this service and this week's *LivingItOut* to help all of us. Hopefully, we will feel free to share our struggles with others, feeling God's love and acceptance though out.

Questions

Are you struggling with some mental health issue? Who can you talk to if you have a mental health issue?

Next Steps

Talk to someone. Attend Celebrate Recovery. Pray for guidance.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, please help me to lean on the people you have placed in my life to help me work through my mental health struggles. I know it will not be easy to open up, but I realize that it is very important to talk about it with someone I trust and know has my best interest at heart. Please let me be also there for others in my life who struggle with mental health issues. Please give us all the strength to work through any mental health issues that we may have. Amen.

Respond Versus React

October 9, 2018

I manage a very diverse group of people at my job. There are many personalities and backgrounds, some older folks, and lately a lot of millennials. Managing all of these personalities can get tricky sometimes, especially when there is conflict. I, like many people I suppose, do not like conflict. I think that most of us feel like if we just leave it alone, it'll go away. This is not a healthy solution because inevitably it doesn't go away; it festers and becomes an even bigger issue.

Sometimes these personalities get very confrontational, and that can be even worse. People say things they don't mean out of anger or frustration, and then, neither side is open to hearing the other and resolving the issue. Instead they are only concerned with holding their own position. Furthermore, when someone feels that they are being attacked, they go into fight or flight mode. We have all heard of this before. It is the "knee-jerk" reaction that comes from a very small part in the center of our brain—the amygdala. The key word here is reaction. This is why we need to practice to remain calm, **take a pause**, and allow ourselves (and the other person for that matter) time to process the situation. By doing that, we allow our frontal cortex to catch up. This is the part of the brain that has sense and reason. We need to be able to have reasonable thoughts about the situation so that we can *respond* rather than *react*. When we pause, it gives us room to assess and, if necessary, change our interpretation of events.

James 1:19

Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.

When these situations occur at work, I tell the people involved to take a few minutes to cool off before we reconvene to talk things over. Sometimes, we have to do this a couple of times before they get to a place where they can communicate without being combative. It's hard to be calm when you believe you are being wronged! That is why it is so important to take a little time to really figure out what is going on inside yourself. Take a pause to listen; then you can respond rather than react.

Questions:

When you are in conflict take a pause to ask yourself these questions:

What am I feeling?

Why am I feeling this way?

What is the role of the person that I'm in conflict with (what did they do or say?)

Why would a reasonable person do or say this?

What is my role in the problem?

Next Steps:

This is not an easy thing to do. It takes practice and intentionality. Write down these questions somewhere easily accessible, and intentionally pause to ask them the next time you have a conflict.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for giving me such an amazing brain and complex emotions. Thank you for giving me guidance on how to use them in a healthy way. Help me to remain calm in volatile situations so I can listen well and respond rather than react to any situation. Amen.

How Long is Your Fuse?

October 10, 2018

Luke 5:16

But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer.

Do you ever wonder why Jesus had to go off to talk to God? I mean, he WAS God, right? Yes, but he was also human. That means that he got just as frustrated with people and felt just as used, misunderstood, and taken advantage of as we do at times. In fact, the author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus was tempted in all the ways that we are but did not sin (Hebrews 4:16). That includes being tempted to be unkind, impatient, harsh, and just plain fed-up! I think part of the reason he didn't sin is because he went off by himself to talk to his Father. I also think he needed to be by himself to catch his breath, get a grip, and gain some perspective to better love the people surrounding him.

I tend to have a short fuse when I am frustrated by other people's inability to understand a concept that I think should be common sense, whatever that might be these days! This can be the **activating event**. It takes me a little while to get around to the idea that this is not a personal response to me. In fact, it seldom is about me at all. I just think it is because (I hate to admit it, but it's true) I am, after all, the center of my world! Unless I give myself a time-out, where I can create some space and figure out where my negative emotions are coming from, I do not respond well. I don't want to eliminate my emotion—that's not healthy. But I do need to evaluate it to determine if it's valid. That's what I need to do so that I can give the response that will honor God.

It is OK to be sad or anxious during times that are sad or foreboding. However, is there a false recurring belief that keeps coming up? If so, it is usually not the situation that is driving the emotion. It is a **belief**.

If that is true, then the activating event isn't the cause of the emotion. The false interpretation of it, or the false belief, is.

A major indicator of false beliefs is when we generalize. An activating event occurs (facts), and we find ourselves saying things like "always" or "never." We generalize: "No one *ever* likes me. My ideas are *never* good enough. He *a/ways* ignores my contributions."

It is important to evaluate our beliefs and ask God to help us in the process.

Often when we evaluate our emotions, we want to validate them. For this reason, it may be a good idea to have conversations with authentic friends who may not be as emotionally invested in the situation. They can help you see something that you are missing and help you process things a little differently.

Questions:

What do you do when you find yourself ramping up to an emotional response to an activating event?

Do you have someone you trust to talk you down off the ledge?

Next Steps:

Develop a strategy for the next time you respond emotionally to an activating event. Pray. Count backward from 10, or 100. Call a friend. Take several deep breaths. Walk away. Have a plan that you create ahead of time, so you can implement it when the time comes.

Prayer:

My Lord Jesus, your loving response to the difficult people in your life inspires me to want to be better at this. Please give me a heart of compassion and a desire to understand the reasons other people behave as they do. Help me to be curious about others' points of view and to take the focus off of myself and onto them, and you. Amen.

You Can Do It!

October 11, 2018

First, a ceiling light in the kitchen went out. Then, the dishwasher quit working. Finally, I noticed rotting wood on the outside of my house. Luckily, these three events did not occur all at the same time, but they were part of my journey over the last few years. This was my activating event—the breakdown of stuff around the house. Now, my belief about this event was that I was incapable of fixing anything and, therefore, helpless in this situation. I felt overwhelmed and discouraged.

This week, we are learning how to best take care of our mental health. There are four steps: Pause – Evaluate – Challenge – Replace. We already read about the first two earlier this week. Today, we will talk about how we need to challenge our errant thoughts and beliefs about an activating event.

As I paused to evaluate my beliefs about myself and my ability to handle home repairs, I realized I needed to challenge some very wrong beliefs that I had been carrying for far too long.

You see, my ex-husband was extremely good at fixing things. He has a background in electrical engineering and is a software developer. Unfortunately, as he worked on projects, he did not explain to me what he was doing and why. He said he didn't have the patience and that I was too stupid to understand.

At first, I was taken aback—I have always been scientifically and technologically inclined! When I was growing up in Germany, one of my most favorite places to visit with my father was the Deutsche Museum in München (Munich), which is a huge museum for science, technology, and engineering. I loved learning how things worked!

Nevertheless, I allowed his words to take root in my heart, and even with a Ph.D. in neuroscience, I felt too stupid to know how to fix the light, evaluate the status of the dishwasher, or replace the rotten wood on the outside of my house. So, being suddenly a single mother with two young kids and a house where appliances and fixtures were developing issues, I needed to challenge these errant beliefs about myself and the situation.

2 Corinthians 10:5 (NIV)

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.

Challenging our beliefs about a situation takes effort. As Paul says in the verse above, we have to take our thoughts captive and *make* them obedient to Christ. I had to remember back to my childhood and think about how I loved figuring out how things worked. I also thought about some of the other negative dynamics at work when my ex-husband would say such demeaning things to me. Tomorrow in *LivingItOut*, we will talk about how to replace our thoughts. For today, know that it is possible to challenge the story running through your head. And, I can proudly say that I figured out how to fix the light, researched the best dishwasher to replace my old one, and found the best solution for the rotten wood. You should have seen my victory dances each time! (Well, maybe on second thought, it's best no one saw them!) Each successfully conquered challenge made me realize how erroneous my old beliefs had been.

Questions:

Is there an area in your life where you may be holding on to erroneous beliefs or feelings? How did those thoughts and feelings come about?

Next Steps:

Make a list of the negative thoughts and beliefs you are holding on to about yourself. Think back to your past, perhaps going all the way back to your childhood, or think about other areas of your life where you might be excelling at the same thing in a different context. List the things that you could use to challenge those negative thoughts and beliefs about yourself.

Prayer:

Dear Father in heaven, please give me the strength to challenge the negative thoughts and feelings that I may have about myself or a given situation. With your help, I can identify and challenge the erroneous story I have been telling myself or that others have been telling me. Please help me to build a new picture of myself and my abilities, to see the potential you see in me, and then to fulfill your vision for my life. Amen.

This post was written by Cordula Mora, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.

Mental Reboot

October 12, 2018

My undergraduate training was in Systems Analysis (IT). Back then, the computer that I worked with filled the basement of a university building. Now the same computing power can be found in our laptops, tablets, and smartphones. Back then, if the computer didn't work, first you exhausted all the tricks you knew to fix it, then tried reading the manual, and lastly you called the help desk. Often the only thing that fixed it was turning it off and back on again. Come to think of it, this is exactly what I did last week to fix our "smart" TV! Sometimes, you just gotta reboot!

Think of your mind as the supercomputer that it is. Sometimes, the weight of the world weighs heavy on us. We worry. We worry about our health, our jobs, our spouses, our kids and grandkids, our parents, and our volunteer responsibilities. It just becomes too much to handle. Sometimes, we need to hit the "pause button." Even though we don't like to admit it, we just need a mental reboot. We can't continually do the same things over and over again and expect different results.

Nowadays, our time is often consumed by media, sometimes to the point where personal relationships and our relationship with God suffer. If you think you are there, talk to a trusted friend about it. Maybe you need to hit the "pause button" and take a mental reboot! Maybe you need to replace your thoughts.

After pausing, evaluating and challenging our beliefs, there was one final step that Dr. Jason Brouwer gave us. The final step is to replace our incorrect beliefs.

Romans 12:2

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Philippians 4:8

And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.

As you go through your weekend, keep these verses in mind and replace your false beliefs by allowing God to change the way you think. Focus on the true and excellent things that God has given you.

Questions:

Do you have problems with impure thoughts? Is the weight of the world worrying you? Do you need a mental reboot?

Next Steps:

Examine what you are putting into your mind through television, books, conversations, movies, print, and the internet. Replace harmful material with helpful material. Most importantly, read the Word and pray.

Take some time to write out a list of things that are true, honorable, right pure, lovely and admirable.

Spend time listening to worship music this weekend.

Prayer:

Dear heavenly Father, thank you for helping me see your vision. Giving you control is hard, but filling our minds with thoughts that are true, noble, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy is the right thing to do. Thank you for guiding me and helping me help others. Amen!