

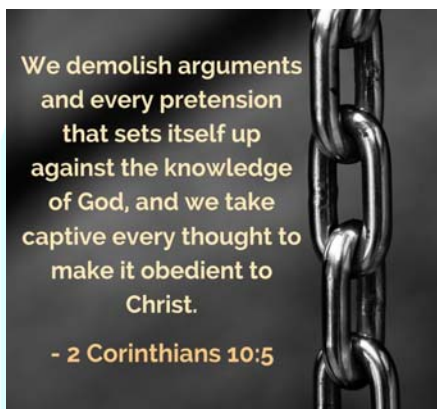
# Cognitions: Thought Processes & Wellbeing

■ by Kim Pronoitis, MA, LCPC

**W**hat does cognition mean in psychology? Cognitions refer to our mental comprehension which includes thinking, learning, remembering, knowledge, and problem solving. When we try to see something from a different perspective in therapy, we refer to it as our thought process. We all have thought processes and truths we believe and live by. They become our reality and are often automatic. However, our thought processes and truths may be distorted and therefore become unhealthy thinking.

## Cognitive distortions = unhealthy thinking

This is where we look at positive vs. negative thinking -- hence the old term “stinking thinking.” Our thought processes can come from many places and start early on as we become “wired” a certain way. This doesn’t mean to say good, bad, or otherwise - we can use the term healthy vs. unhealthy thinking patterns.



It is beneficial to understand our thought process and know what our internal dialogue is saying to us. A good place to start would be to pay attention and recognize our distorted thoughts which hold us back from personal, relational, and spiritual growth. We call distorted thoughts cognitive distortions. Cognitive distortions are biased perspectives we accept as truth, which affect how we think about ourselves and the world around us. They are irrational thoughts that are unknowingly reinforced over time.

## Challenging unhealthy thinking

The first step to change cognitive distortions, or unhealthy thinking, is to identify what we tell ourselves. No one is immune from negative thinking, as we are human, but we can challenge unhealthy thinking by examining the evidence and disarming it with biblical truth (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Below are some examples of cognitive distortions and how we can challenge them.

**Black and White thinking.** Looking at things in absolutes. An “all or nothing” approach. Example: While on a diet I ate some cookies, therefore I blew my entire diet.

**Challenge:** A couple of cookies ought not “blow” the diet. I can begin the diet again right now. Isaiah 55:8 “For my thoughts are not your thoughts...”

**Overgeneralizing.** Viewing a negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat. Using always or never statements. “Why do bad things always happen to me?”

**Challenge:** Jeremiah 29:11 “For I know the plans I have for you...”

**Filtering.** Ignoring the positives and dwelling on the negative.

**Challenge:** I like to encourage people to look at their accomplishments and not dwell on what they didn’t. Be grateful for what you do have. Psalm 23:4 “Even though I walk through the valley...”

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**Jumping to Conclusions.** Assuming others are reacting negatively when there is no evidence of this, or predicting that things are going to turn out badly. "I know I'm going to fail this test."

Challenge: Romans 8:28 "And we know that God causes all things to work together..."

**Personalization.** Taking something personal which is out of your control. Say that our husband had a bad day at work and is crabby. Perhaps he may be a bit snippy and you think that you did something and he must be mad at you.

Challenge: Galatians 1:10 "Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings..."

**Labeling.** Identifying your shortcomings. If you make a mistake, telling yourself that "you are stupid or a jerk."

Challenge: Romans 8:31 "What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?"

**Should Statements.** "Shoulds" set expectations and most of the time set you up for failure.

Challenge: Matthew 6:25-27 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life..."

**Emotional Reasoning.** Reasoning how you feel. I feel like an idiot, so I must be one. "I can't do it." (projects, school work, could be anything).

Challenge: Did you ever meet anyone who did something they said they can't? Can't = Won't! Proverbs 3:5-6 "Trust in the Lord with all your heart..."

**Magnifying (catastrophizing) or Minimizing.** Blowing things out of proportion, or minimizing the importance of something, maybe even "brushing it under the rug."

Challenge: Philippians 4:6-7 "Do not be anxious about anything..." Isaiah 41:10 "Fear not, I am with you..."

**Discounting the Positives.** Insisting that accomplishments or positive qualities don't count.

Challenge: If you have worked hard for something, it ought to be recognized. Ever meet someone who doesn't know how to accept a compliment? Philippians 4:8-9 "Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just..."

## God calls us to healthy thinking

Having a more positive thought process allows us to have more peace in our lives and helps us to attain our goals and purpose. Being a positive light is what draws others to us. In many places throughout the Bible, Jesus talks about being positive, knowing and having an understanding. Having insight benefits us greatly and sometimes we have to stop to examine and challenge our thinking. We cannot change what we do not acknowledge. If you feel stuck with this, reach out to a therapist or professional to help you see things from a different and more objective point of view. Why not be the best version of yourself that you can be? Life is a gift. God put us here and gives us purpose. Improve your wellbeing with healthy thinking! ■



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