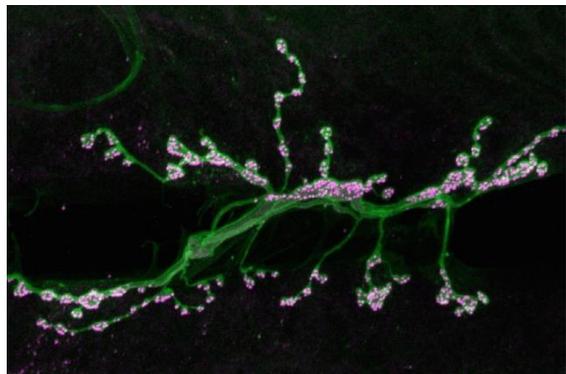


The Voices In My Head

On Sunday, we concluded our New Year's sermon series called "Getting Myself Together" by exploring how to triumph over negative thought patterns that bedevil us.

1. Warm up question: We have a lot of voices in our head. Some of them are positive, some negative, and some just plain amusing. Share an amusing thought that has flashed through your brain lately. Nothing profound, just something random.
2. Jeff told about a memorable sermon he once heard preached by Joyce Meyer on the concept of "strongholds of the mind." Although Joyce didn't invent this concept, she has popularized it. The concept comes from what Paul says in his second letter to the Corinthians. Read II Corinthians 10:1-5.
 - a. In verse 3, Paul refers to "strongholds" that need to be destroyed. He goes on to identify these strongholds as arguments and thoughts that lead us astray. He says we have the power through Christ to destroy these negative thoughts and replace them with positive truth. From this, we get the idea that each of us has certain negative thought patterns, deeply ingrained, that need to be destroyed and replaced with positive thoughts. What is the most powerful recurring negative thought that afflicts your life right now? As best you can tell, where did that negative thought pattern come from? What life experiences gave rise to it?
 - b. Why are negative thought patterns so stubborn and difficult to get rid of? What makes them so resilient?
 - c. In John 8:44, when referring to Satan, Jesus says, "When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for his is a liar and the father of lies." So what does this tell us about Satan's favorite method for attacking and undermining our life?
3. The spiritual concept of "strongholds of the mind" is consistent with what science teaches about how the brain functions. Scientists tell us that each time we repeat a thought or action, that thought or action activates the same path of nerve cells in the brain, causing that path to actually grow deeper and wider with each use, like a path in the forest that gets clearer and wider with frequent use.
 - a. How does it make you feel to know that the negative thought pattern that bedevils you is actually physically imprinted on your brain, that it occupies a powerful neural pathway in your brain? How does that realization make you feel?
 - b. A thought pattern often repeated becomes so second-nature, it can operate without us being conscious of it. For example, when you drive



to work each day, are you conscious of driving and the choices you make as you turn, accelerate, and steer the wheel? How are these choices being made?

- c. Scientist tell us that complex emotional feelings and thoughts operate the same way as when we're driving to work. For example, over time we develop a common pattern for responding to conflict that gets recorded in its own deep neural pathway. So when we experience conflict, what happens? What are the implications of this for feelings and behavior of all kinds?
 - d. If neural pathways are like paths in the woods, what does that tells us about how we can modify our negative thoughts? What happens when we stop using an old path in the woods? What happens when we start walking a new path in the woods? Do you think changing our thought patterns can be that straightforward?
4. According to II Corinthians 10:5, "We [have the power to] take every thought captive to obey Christ." On Sunday, Jeff suggested several steps we can take to destroy a negative stronghold and replace it with a positive one.
- ✓ Identify your negative thought pattern, recognize the lie behind it, and identify the opposing truth.
 - ✓ Start practicing a new opposite pattern of thought and action based in truth. (Develop a breathe prayer reflecting that truth, repeat it frequently, and act in faith as though it's true.)
 - ✓ Get the support you need with counseling, medication (if needed), support groups, accountability partners, and spiritual friends.

Take the negative thought pattern you mentioned in Question 2.a. above, and talk through how the foregoing steps would apply. What is the opposing truth? What might your breathe prayer be? What kinds of actions might you take by faith to live into the reality of your breathe prayer? What kind of support do you need?

5. Henry David Thoreau said, "I went to the woods because I wanted to live deliberately. . . and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." Our current sermon series has challenged us to experiment with a Spiritual Action Plan as a way of living more deliberately. This coming Sunday, we will say a special prayer of blessing and celebration over our 2019 Plans. If you'd like to participate, go to www.LifeJourney.church and scroll down to the green button labeled "Spiritual Action Plan."
- a. What one or two spiritual practices are you committing to in 2019 as a way of keeping yourself spiritually centered?
 - b. In the current sermon series, we've talked about several practical areas of life that tend to challenge us: relationships, personal finances, body care, and negative thought patterns. What's going to be your most important personal growth goal for this year? (Note: It doesn't have to be in one of the areas we discussed.)