

## Get Out Of Your Head

1. Warm-up: Think back across your day. Was there a time when your spontaneous thoughts wanted to pull you in a negative direction in some way large or small? What was the thought? Did you go with it or reject it?
2. Optical illusions are a powerful example of how our brain can play tricks on us, reminding us that what's happening outside of us – objective reality – often differs from what's happening inside of us – our perception of reality. Tell us about a time in your life when your perception of a situation proved to be a completely wrong.
3. On Sunday we launched a new sermon series based on Jennie Allen's New York Times bestselling book, "Get Out Of Your Head: Stopping the Spiral of Toxic Thoughts." In her book Jennie challenges us to think about how we think and become much more assertive in taking control of our thoughts. Jennie says, "The greatest battle of our life is being fought between our ears."
  - a. Jeff said, "There is literally nothing more important we can ever do than to learn how to harness our thoughts in ways that empower us to be and become all God intended us to be." Do you buy that? What are some other powerful forces that affect our life? Are any of them more important than our thoughts?
  - b. Lao Tzu once said, "Watch your thoughts, they become your words. Watch your words, they become your actions. Watch your actions, they become your habits. Watch your habits, they become your character. Watch your character, it becomes your destiny." When you hear this quote, what thoughts or feelings arise within you?
  - c. Jeff compared our runaway thoughts to a time when his dog Lucy escaped a fence and ran wild into a busy street. Our thoughts are like Lucy. They have a tendency to take us to bad – sometimes destructive – places. Jennie gave some examples from her own life of times when negative thoughts haunted her career, her marriage, and her parenting. She said, "The thing is, I have always believed lies. And not just believed them, but built entire chapters of my life around them. I'm pretty sure the same is true for you." Is it? Looking back over your life, tell us about a time when you got trapped in negative toxic thinking in some important area of your life.
4. All that we have discussed so far raises the question: Why is it so easy to get trapped in toxic thinking? The answer, Jennie says, is "spiritual warfare," *i.e.*, the idea that each of us is in an ongoing battle with powerful negative forces (literal or metaphorical) that are determined to take us down.
  - a. I Peter 5:8 says, "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." Does that statement feel true to your own personal experience? Why or why not?

- b. If we're up against powerful negative forces of evil (literal or metaphorical), we need to be prepared to respond. In any battle, we need to anticipate our enemy's strategy so we can counter it. So what is Satan's favorite weapon to use against us? Jesus tells us, "[The devil] is a liar and the father of lies." John 8:44. Let's think about that for a second. Why are the lies that seep into our brain so deadly?
  - c. Jennie suggests that virtually every lie we believe about ourselves falls into one of three basic categories: (1) *I'm helpless*, (2) *I'm worthless*, and/or (3) *I'm unlovable*. Which of these three categories of lies are you most prone to buy into? Where did your tendency to think that way originate?
5. If Satan's greatest weapon against us is lies, we need to know how we can best counter those lies. Jesus tells us: "[When] you know the truth, the truth will make you free." John 8:32. When we find ourselves falling into negative toxic thinking, it's imperative that we recognize the lie and identify the countervailing truth. For every lie, there is a countervailing truth that has the power to explode the lie. The life of the Apostle Paul is an example of this process at work. He believed Jesus was a false prophet and became obsessed with destroying the early Christian movement. But then something happened. Read Acts 9: 1-18, selected verses, as printed on p. 3.
- a. Note that key phrase, "Something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored." If we're open to the work of God's Spirit in our lives, we too can have similar experiences where it feels like scales are falling from our eyes. Jeff told how the lie he internalized about being a terrible public speaker suddenly exploded when he overheard someone saying something positive about his public speaking. Can you think of a time in your life when a sudden flash of insight blew away a lie you had embraced about yourself or some situation?
  - b. The main point of Sunday's sermon was: "The lies we believe can hold us captive. But truth has the power to set us free." When we get lost in toxic lies, what are some practical things we can do to break through and discover the countervailing truth that has the power to explode the lie?
6. In the weeks ahead, we'll dig deeper into practical ways to identify and destroy toxic thoughts, but for now Jeff asked us to begin pondering three key questions. How would you answer these questions:
- a. Which of the three big lies most torments me at this juncture in my life? (*I'm helpless, I'm worthless, I'm unlovable*).
  - b. What specific form does the lie that bedevils you take in your life? (For example, if your weakness is thinking, *I'm helpless*, in what area of your life right now is Satan trying to convince you that you're most helpless.)
  - c. What is the opposing spiritual truth you need to begin to embrace to set yourself free from that lie?

## Acts 9:1-18, selected verses

<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, <sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup> Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. <sup>4</sup> He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" <sup>5</sup> Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. <sup>6</sup> But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."

<sup>10</sup> Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord."  
<sup>11</sup> The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying."

<sup>17</sup> So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."  
<sup>18</sup> And immediately **something like scales fell from his eyes**, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized.