

The Court of the Mind

Pastor's Edge (1/2/20) - Glen Elliott

My story

My motto: Faithfulness - not success.

Moses

The Court of the Mind

The “Voice”

Everyone has an internal critic, a voice in our head that's an internal narrator. This voice is the inner chatter, non-stop conversations that drive our reactions.

Here's what this “voice” does. It governs our lives. It is mostly negative, repetitive and focused on self (ego). It creates a constant low-grade crisis and at times creates an all-out crisis. It's focused on the past (memory, mistakes) and future (anticipation) and rarely on the now (present) which is the only thing we can affect. It's driven by unexamined urges and desires that are deep in our subconscious. It judges us and others. It taunts us. It is never satisfied. It compares you and me to others. It thrives on drama. It can also be very good. It can lead us to live like Jesus.

What's crazy is we take this voice for granted and are largely oblivious to this powerful part of who we are. What the voice says is not necessarily true but we tend to automatically listen to it and worse, blindly act out our thoughts. Our thoughts create our feelings and together they shape our hearts. It is our heart that causes us to react to people, tasks, and situations.

Our thoughts are just thoughts. They are not necessarily true or based on reality and tend to be extraordinarily negative. Our thoughts exist only in our heads. They must be examined. A popular word in culture now that describes this is the word “mindfulness.” The Bible says we are to guard our hearts (Proverbs 4:23) and take every thought captive (2 Corinthians 10:5). We need to slow down and look at the very thought(s) that we wish to be free from. We are wise when we stop reacting blindly to our thoughts.

You are not your every thought or feeling. We have to examine the lies that fuel our lives. How do we do that? We start by slowing down our minds and reflect on what our “voice” is telling us. We can, with intentional effort, minimize the internal “yelling.”

Slow Down and Reflect in Order to Respond Vs. React

We need a system to help us become aware of our thoughts. When we encounter a thought or ongoing conversation that is clearly not good, helpful or of God, we need to become the jury in the courtroom of our mind, rather than just the defendant being accused. How? The key is the skill of **awareness**. Awareness is a skill we practice where we slow down the critical voice and reflect on what it is saying. This is the act of creating space. There is incredible power just in creating space as Viktor Frankl suggests:

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In the space there is the power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

Here are some things you can do in the “space” :

1. Be aware - learn to listen to your body and mind. What is it telling me?
2. Own the thought or belief. Not that it's true, but that it exists right now. This starts to neutralize its power.
3. Explore how it affects your feelings, body, relationships, habits, reactions, etc. Is this thought useful? For example, some short term fear is useful.
4. Regarding the “voice” ask: What can I control and what don't I have control over? What's a distraction and what should I focus on that I can control? Let go of what you can't control and act on what you can affect. The only control you have is how you react.
5. If the thought is a lie and not helpful, take it captive. This thought and the feelings associated with it are not who you are. Isolate the thought from you. Replace the lie with the truth from God. If it is true and helpful, explore it and embrace it by asking the Holy Spirit to lead you in the change he wants.
6. Finally, choose to respond rather than react.

Making “Space”

How do you get to the place where you can respond rather than react? Here are some tools to help create and use the “space” well. We use “space” to stop being a slave to whatever thought pops into our heads.

1. Practice making space to be aware - daily and in a given moment.
2. Utilize purposeful pauses, especially when you are stuck. Pauses allow you to be aware and/or focus. It is also key to creativity and getting unstuck. I call these “shower” moments.
3. Feed your heart with constant good input: daily Bible reading, reading good books, podcasts, etc.
4. Use breathing meditation to slow down the voice.
5. Use biblical meditation to change the message of the voice. There are many ways to practice this like meditating on one verse or each word in a verse.
6. When you find yourself repeating negative thoughts and can't get unstuck, get help - personal or professional. Isolation only amplifies the voice in your head.
7. Work toward a motto and/or a list of aspirational values.

We Can Change The “Voice”

In the end, you can't stop all the negative thoughts from popping up in your head. They arise out of our mysterious ego and subconscious. You can control how you handle those thoughts. That is what the Bible teaches (here are a few declarations):

- Proverbs 4:23 - *Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.*
- Romans 12:2 - *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*
- Colossians 3:2 - *Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*
- Philippians 4:8 - *Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*
- 2 Corinthians 10:5 - *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. (The context: Paul is facing accusations of being weak and has overused his apostolic authority)*

The science of neuroplasticity confirms what the Bible teaches us - that the brain can be renewed. The brain is constantly changing in response to experience. You are not a victim to your experiences. You can sculpt your brain just like you can change your body through exercise. The brain can be trained. It can be trained to be resilient, content, generous and compassionate.

Paul Tripp: There's no one more influential in your life than you, because there's no one talking to you more than you do. You have a non-ending conversation with yourself. You preach more sermons to yourself in one week than you will to your congregation in a lifetime. What sermon are you preaching to yourself? What kind of gospel do you listen to and believe? It is the Gospel or anti-gospel?

Anti-gospel

Self-sufficient and on your own
God

Alone, unworthy, undeserving

Identity formed by the “voice”

Everything is against you

Gospel

Living by the power and presence of

Broken, loved and given grace

Identity formed by God

God is for you

Listen to the Gospel of Jesus so you can give the Gospel to all who are in your life.