

Les Parrott is my personal coach. For more than a decade, Les and I have been meeting to talk about life—*my* life, specifically. He knows my secrets, my failures, my insecurities. He knows my anxieties as well as my triumphs and aspirations. Not only that, Les, along with his wife, Leslie, a renowned marriage and family therapist, have walked beside my wife, Chelsea, and me through the highs and lows of our marriage.

To say that Les knows me well is an understatement. In fact, you'd be hard-pressed to find anyone who knows my inner world as well as Les Parrott. And through the countless hours we've spent together in his Seattle study (not to mention on the phone and through texting), I realized there is a theme that runs like a ribbon through our meetings. It's a seemingly simple truth that, for me, becomes more powerful every day of my life:

*I am
what I think.*

This simple yet profound insight has changed my life. It has revolutionized my relationships. The more

COME TO
THINK OF
IT, I SHOULD
HAVE HAD
HIM SIGN
AN NDA.



ON A SCALE
OF ONE TO
TEN, HOW
MUCH DO YOU
AGREE WITH
THIS?
(AND IT'S
OK IF YOU
DON'T.)

Bad Thoughts

I focus my thoughts, the more I experience grace, love, courage, authenticity, and empathy. In short, this simple truth has helped me improve my emotional health and live a better life.

I'm confident it will help you too. You're about to see how this seemingly small insight—*I am what I think*—can make a massive difference in nearly every aspect of your home life, work life, and social life.

Before you get any further in this book, I want you to know that Les is not your average coach. He's a clinical psychologist with a PhD and a passionate personal faith. He's a professor, a social scientist, and the author of numerous bestselling books. He's one of those unusual brainiacs who have not only degrees and credentials but also an uncanny ability to apply practical solutions to real-life issues. For this very reason, I asked Les to write this book with me.

As a preacher, I continually speak across North America and around the world. I routinely preach in my own church. I'm constantly coming up with sermon ideas on a wide variety of topics, which makes me a bit of a generalist. By contrast, Les drills down deep. He's a scholar and a true expert who has done in-depth research with other experts over many years that has shown that our thinking is basically binary—it's either productive or destructive.

He knows the science behind how a little irrational thought can burrow into our brain and hold us captive. And he also knows how a specific counterbalanced

NO, I'M NOT
JEALOUS.



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thought can take its place and instantly set us free. I, of course, know the same concept from my studies in Scripture. I bring the sermon; Les brings the science. Together, we can bring a one-two punch to your bad thoughts and help you exchange them for positive, life-giving thoughts. We're a team—a preacher with biblical wisdom and a psychologist with human understanding. And we're both passionately committed to helping you live a better life.

None of Us Are Immune

One day during a coaching session, I asked Les if he knew which specific thoughts were most destructive.

"You looking for a new sermon series?" he quipped.

"Maybe." I smiled.

"Tell you what," he said, "I have my hunches. But why don't we join forces to see for sure which misbeliefs mess with people the most."

That idea turned into more than a year of study together. We've now surveyed thousands of people—online, in our churches, and beyond—to find out which specific misbeliefs are most common.

The result? We stand on a mountain of research identifying five insidious bad thoughts that cause all of us grief—whether we know it or not. And none of us are immune. We discovered that these five misbeliefs

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OVER THE
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☐ POSITIVE
☐ NEGATIVE

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COAUTHOR!

MOUNTAIN
OF
EVIDENCE!


FIVE BIG
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THEM SOON.



are nearly universal. They don't care if you are rich or poor, young or old, married or single. These destructive thoughts infect people who follow Jesus and those who don't. You can be feeling down or walking tall. You can be famous or unknown. Helpless or hopeful. It doesn't matter. All of us are vulnerable to these five harmful thoughts.

Most importantly, our studies uncovered a life-giving "prescription" for each of these five bad thoughts. In this book, we'll show you exactly how to inoculate yourself against these cerebral contagions and replace them with the thoughts that matter most.

Thinking for a Change

We have a saying in my (Les's) line of work: *Curiosity is where growth begins.* And the first time Judah and I started talking about the power of counterintuitive thoughts, his curiosity couldn't be quenched. I could almost see the wheels in his brain turning. He asked one question after the next. If I were to re-create the exchange between us, it went something like this:

Judah: What is actually happening in our brains when we think?

Les: Every thought sends a surge of electrical current within our brain, releasing a shower

HE'S
NOT
WRONG



Introduction

of neurochemicals. And depending on the specific thought, this “brain shower” will either elevate our mood or depress it.

Judah: Are you saying that a single thought can instantly change our mood?

Les: That’s exactly what I’m saying. But it doesn’t stop there. If we are experiencing physical pain in our body, certain thoughts can either produce more pain or begin to curtail it.

Judah: If our thoughts are so powerful, why don’t we just change our thinking to change our emotions? Seems like it should be simple.

Les: Everyone unknowingly trains their brain with repetitive thoughts that eventually become ironclad. And if our thoughts are unhealthy, troubles start. Our thought patterns move quickly from conscious to unconscious. They do this without notice—they go on autopilot. This means we may conjure an irrational thought or an unhealthy misbelief that unknowingly shapes who we become.

Judah: That’s why you say, “We are what we think,” and the Bible says, “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.”

Les: Exactly. What we think, how we interpret our circumstances, creates how we feel. And those feelings fuel our actions. And our actions, of course, determine our character—which ultimately determines our destiny.

← INCREDIBLE,
RIGHT?

EVERYONE
HAS
AUTOPILOT
THOUGHTS,
BUT WE DON'T
KNOW IT.

LET THAT
SINK IN.

Bad Thoughts

Judah: So can we change these unconscious thoughts, or do we just get stuck with them?

Les: Some people get stuck because their emotional state is holding them captive like a prisoner. They don't see a way out. They wallow in worry, depression, or anxiety because there's no apparent alternative. Their brain becomes addicted to the neurochemicals associated with their bad thoughts.

Judah: You're not saying we're all stuck, are you?

Les: No. Science shows us exactly how we can retrain our brain so that our thoughts work for us rather than against us. Remember when you were first learning to drive a car? You gave it all your energy and your undivided attention. Then, eventually, driving became second nature. The same is true with our thoughts. If we want to create different thought patterns, we simply have to give our thoughts more attention.

Judah's barrage of questions kept coming. There was no end. In fact, in time, Judah was asking questions as if he'd just read the latest volume of the *Journal of Neuroscience*. He's a quick, intuitive study who can effortlessly connect a biblical insight to a practical application. I've never known anyone quite like Judah, and his unquenchable curiosity has led both of us to levels of understanding we likely wouldn't have discovered on our own.

It is very obvious
that we are not
influenced by
“facts” but by
our interpretation
of the facts.

—Alfred Adler

What This Book Will Do for You

“I wish we could x-ray our minds,” Judah said one day as he sat on the couch in my study. “Wouldn’t it be great to expose all our misbeliefs? I’d like to see them on something like a CT scan pinned up on the wall. Can you imagine? We’d know exactly what we’re dealing with, and we could target and improve our irrational thinking.”

What a thought!

THIS IS MY
FAVORITE
SENTENCE IN
THE BOOK.

Judah is exactly right. Our mind is separate from the physical tissues found in our head. We can’t see our mind. It is entirely nonmaterial. Because of that, the mind is intensely private. Nobody but you has access to your mind. Others can attempt to “read” your mind, but ultimately, no one else can know your mind unless you choose to share it. And even then, some of your thoughts may be unconscious—you don’t even know you have them. They may be stirring up trouble without you knowing it.

Consider each chapter in this book like a little X-ray revealing a bad thought your unconscious mind could be holding. Each chapter will hold up a diagnostic image exposing whether a malignant misbelief is buried somewhere in your brain. Not only that, but each chapter will also provide a proven prescription specific to that negative thought. The goal? To ensure you don’t believe everything you think. The goal is to get your mind thinking better thoughts.

By the way, just to be clear, this is not a book about positive thinking. Motivational messages have their

place. But we're focused on something deeper. We're not dispensing a mere pep talk or rehashing slogans from an inspirational poster. We're going beneath the surface to help you create true transformation that does nothing less than shape your very identity.

Why Your Thoughts = Who You Are

We're eager to show you the five toxic thoughts we uncovered in our research, but first we want to make sure you understand the fundamental premise of our message: *You are what you think*.

Consider this fact: The human brain is the only organ of the body that's essential for individual identity. If you have a defective kidney, liver, or heart, you can have a transplant and still retain your sense of self. But if you were to get a new brain, you would acquire a new personality. You would have a different set of memories, a different vocabulary, different aspirations. You'd also experience different emotions—a new way of feeling. With a new brain, you would acquire a new mind, the nonphysical essence that shapes your perceptions, beliefs, and awareness. In short, if medical science could solve the incredibly complex problems involved in a brain transplant, you would become somebody else in the same skin. Why? Because when it all comes down to it, the brain presides over who you are.

THIS IS
A BIG
PROMISE, WE
KNOW, BUT
HANG WITH
US AND WE'LL
DELIVER.



Bad Thoughts

The Elizabethan English version of the Bible said it first—and pretty succinctly: “As a man thinketh, so is he.” The Bible also urges us to “take captive every thought” and to “be transformed by the renewing of [our] mind.”

French philosopher René Descartes, in one of history’s most memorable sound bites, said, “I think, therefore I am.” Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius concluded, “We become what we think.” British author James Allen wrote, “You are today where your thoughts have brought you.” And Bishop Edward Steere, an Anglican minister in Africa, is known to have warned, “Your thoughts are making you.”

All these great minds have come to the same conclusion: *You are what you think.*

The big idea of this book, then, is obviously not new. But the science behind how you can use it is new. The past two decades have seen a renaissance in neuroscience. We know more about how our minds work than ever before. And for good reason. More than 90 percent of our well-being—or lack of it—comes from our thought life. How can this be? English poet John Milton put it nicely when he said,

The mind is its own place, and in it self
Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n.

Our thoughts are the single most important determiner of who we are.



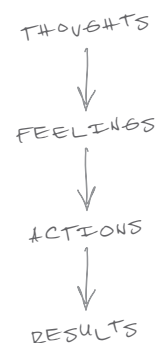
Everyone's Toxic Thoughts Are on Autopilot

Your emotional state—whether confident and hopeful or insecure and cynical—is most often the result of what you say to yourself. People tend to get that backward. We too often think that if we feel better, we'll have a better outlook. Not so. Your thoughts determine your feelings, not the other way around. Your thoughts release a series of electrochemicals in your brain that determine your mood. In other words, *you* prescribe, to a large degree, what your brain does by what you say to yourself when no one else is listening.

And get this: Over time, the secret messages you repeatedly shoot through your mind cut a groove or wear a path through your brain's cortex. The routine and habitual nature of these messages makes them prominent, so they achieve a higher priority than other messages.

This is why some of us hold on to fear. We can't seem to shake our anxiety or worry. It's why we feel lonely even when we're with a lot of other people. Or empty when we're successful. It comes down to what we've trained our brain to think. And that thinking, even at an unconscious level, determines our feelings.

Did you get that? Our thinking can become so ingrained, so habitual, that we don't even recognize the bad thoughts we are shooting through our brain.



WHERE IS
THE NEEDLE
ON YOUR
ANXIETY OR
WORRY METER
TODAY?



HERE WE GO!

So we get stuck. This book is about to change all that. How? By revealing the destructive thoughts we are most susceptible to. These are the lies we don't even realize we are telling ourselves. These are the unconscious thoughts we've unknowingly put on autopilot. And they are wreaking havoc on our emotions.

The Five Toxic Thoughts

In ancient Greece, iconic philosopher Plato said thinking is simply “the talking of the soul with itself.” In other words, thinking is self-talk. And when our internal dialogue becomes unhealthy, our self-talk falls into predictable categories.

Our research identified five of them. Sure, there are plenty more, but these are the top five misbeliefs that commonly fill our heads. Each is a governing message in our mind that carries varying amounts of weight, depending on the person.

Think of these categories as five big buckets of erroneous self-statements—the ones that define our self-sabotaging internal dialogue. These are the negative messages most of us, most of the time, eventually put on autopilot, where we literally don't give them, well, a second thought.

1. **Unworthy Talk**—This category zeroes in on mistakes—blunders, real or imagined. It's

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fueled by irrational guilt and undeserved regret. For some, it's like a snooze alarm in your head that won't shut off even after you try to appease it. Without warning, a burst of guilt rings in your head, sometimes for something that hasn't even happened.

2. **Needy Talk**—Everyone longs for authentic relationships. We want others to like us and appreciate us. But this category of irrational thinking can cause us to squander our own identity, not to mention our dignity, by doing or saying whatever is necessary to win approval and praise. It's the proverbial disease to please, and it's far from healthy.
3. **Insecure Talk**—Whether it's because of something in our childhood, a past trauma, a major rejection, or a drive for perfection, this bucket of thoughts contains countless critical conversations we have with ourselves. And every one of them is dedicated to stealing our confidence and eroding our courage. The result is uncertainty, self-consciousness, and, in some cases, social anxiety.
4. **Entitled Talk**—This category of thoughts is sometimes the toughest one to see in ourselves. Why? It's blinding. If you're caught in entitled talk, you shirk responsibility without realizing you're expecting others to carry the load. And if they don't, you can say hello to

NAME ONE
MISTAKE
YOU MADE
THIS WEEK.

I FEEL
INSECURE
WHEN...

judgmentalism and a heap of criticism. Sadly, this kind of thinking saps our capacity for love and even significance.

5. **Unlovable Talk**—This category can break your heart and wound your spirit. Ultimately, it's the most important because it can propel us onto a perpetual treadmill of trying to earn God's love instead of receiving God's gift. If we don't correct its misbeliefs, we question our value, and feelings of unlovability seep into the very corners and crevices of our soul.

YOUR
LOVABILITY
ON A SCALE
FROM ONE
TO TEN:

WHICH OF
THESE FIVE
IS MOST
RELEVANT
TO YOU?

As you read through this list of self-sabotaging categories, you're probably thinking that some don't seem pertinent to you. Fair enough. That's okay. Some of these categories will have more relevance to you than others. But all of them will affect you at some point. It's just that certain ones become more dominant than others. Everyone has signature self-talk and secondary self-talk. And don't worry. Our chapters will help you determine which is which.

So before you skip a particular chapter that may not seem very pertinent to you, try to open yourself up to the possibility that it may have more relevance to your life than you first thought. Why? Because we're literally talking about the lies we tell ourselves. And your brain may be so ingrained with a category of misbeliefs that you don't even recognize it in your own head.

Just a thought.