

12 TRUTHS FOR EMOTIONAL HEALTH

A collection of quotes from Chris Thurman's *The Lies We Believe Workbook: 12-Week Interactive Plan for Finding Emotional and Spiritual Freedom* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995). Collected to assist missionaries and those preparing for a life 'on mission'.

If you happen to be wondering what the secret for being an emotionally healthy person is, I believe I can tell you: It is dedication to the truth. Dedication to knowing, believing and living the truth.

I want to pass along to you twelve truths that I believe are among the most important for living an emotionally healthy life. These truths have been around for thousands of years. Yet, sadly, while we have heard these truths hundreds of times before, most of us don't really believe them, much less live our lives by them. Consequently, our emotional health suffers, often greatly.

TO ERR IS HUMAN

Mistakes — more than a few of us hate to make them. Anything less than perfect just won't do. Most of us struggle with this issue all our lives. Preschoolers fight among themselves to be the first in a race. The school years come along and introduce us to report cards, that quarterly reminder of imperfection!

Once we enter adulthood, we seek perfection at our jobs, in our relationships with spouse, children and friends, and a long list of other demands. What we end up with is a fanaticism for perfection. What worries me is this fanaticism makes us believe that making a mistake of any kind is horrible and proves that we are worthless as individuals. That's not only ridiculous but dangerous.

What accompanies this — unnecessary anger, anxiety, guilt, worry, and embarrassment. On the other side of the coin, the person who believes to err is human approaches errors and failure differently:

"I just messed up. I don't like it, but I did. This will take some time to correct, so I'd better get started on it. I want to make as few mistakes as possible, so I'll try to correct what led to this mistake. This isn't the end of the world. After all, I'm only human."

It's an issue of balance. Mistakes are unavoidable, but this does not give us a license to throw caution to the wind. Don't translate this issue into a lack of concern for quality. That's just as grievous a mistake as the desire to be perfect. Yes, we'll all make mistakes. But making them out of indifference or carelessness isn't healthy. As Jerry Jenkins humorously put it,



"To err is human, but when the eraser wears out ahead of your pencil, you're overdoing it."

WHAT "SHOULD" HAVE HAPPENED DID HAPPEN.

The use of the word should is our way of saying we don't like the reality we face. Should means we have a vision of a perfect world out there, and we cannot stand it when someone or something violates that world.

By constantly looking back to what should have happened, we stay focused on what did not happen, as opposed to what could happen now in life. It is when we focus on the present that we can begin to work on overcoming the problems created by past events.

The truth is, it did happen. Nothing can change that fact. Direct constructive action toward becoming more disciplined in his current day-to-day world. The next time you are tempted to say the word should, pause first to apply the truth of "what should have happened, did happen" to it. "I should have remembered the appointment" really means, "I can't accept the fact that I forgot the appointment."



Until you accept the fact that you forgot it, you won't be able to correct whatever it was that led you to forget.

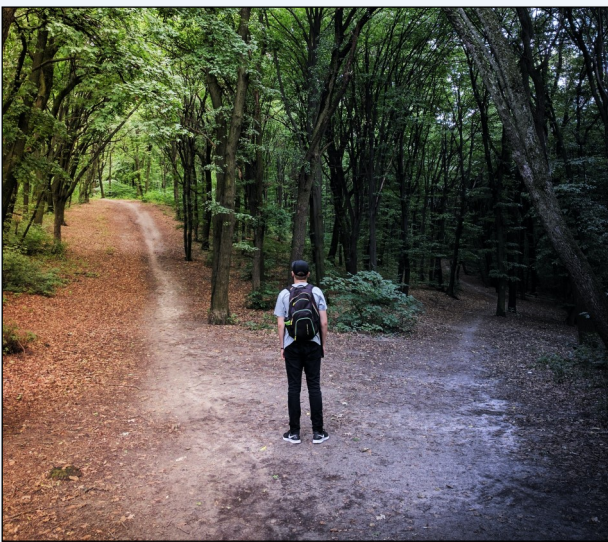
YOU CAN'T PLEASE EVERYONE

Although the truth is that we can't please everyone all the time, a lot of people keep trying anyway. If you find yourself seeking everyone's approval, don't deceive yourself into thinking it's not an addiction. It is.

Many people crave approval night and day. But the effects of approval are short-lived, so all too quickly they must seek others' approval again. It's a vicious cycle, dangerous and life-threatening, but preventable.

Your focus needs to turn toward God. Pleasing God is the appropriate goal. Jesus, our perfect example for living, found great satisfaction in pleasing His father. You can, too.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO



One of the most challenging tasks we face in life is that of taking responsibility for how we feel and what we do. The natural human inclination seems to be to blame other people or things for the unhappiness we feel and the actions we take.

Do "have to" statements sound familiar to you? I have to go to work tomorrow. I have to pay my taxes. I have to take my kids to the park. I have to lose some weight. Now let's be clear. You don't have to do anything, even though painful consequences may come your way if you choose not to do certain things.

What are two or three "have to" statements that have great influence in your life? In place of have, substitute the word choose. It makes a big difference. "I choose to go to work ... I choose to stay married ... I choose to lose weight."

If "choose to" statements ring of truth, you are on your way to living a very healthy life. If they don't, you have a lot of work to do. Keep working, it will be worth it!

YOU ARE GOING TO DIE

Few truths have the potential to affect our lives as strongly as the one that warns, "You are going to die." Death waits around the corner for us all. Death may be a terrible truth, but it is a truth that can be used positively to prompt us to live life more fully.

It is important for us to realize that we are going to die because it is another of God's great truths.

"Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth." (Proverbs 27:1)

To live life to its fullest, we need to live life wisely. And to live life wisely, we need to live it with the truth of death in a key position in our thinking.

THE VIRTUE LIES IN THE STRUGGLE, NOT THE PRIZE



This truth has become virtually unheard of in our culture. This "scoreboard" mentality, where the effort on the field is considered less important than the final score, crushes a lot of us.

Here is a well-known passage of Scripture:

*"Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."
(Philippians 3:13-14)*

The virtue lies in the struggle, not the prize. Memorize that truth, Meditate on it.

YOU ARE NOT ENTITLED

Our society advertises that we are such fantastic people that we are entitled to an equally fantastic way of living. You deserve a break today. Pamper yourself. You owe it to yourself. Because you are worth it.

When we feel entitled, we focus on what we are owed, not what we might give to others. It's a "one-way street" mind-set. When these feelings are strong and people don't meet our expectations, we often become resentful, bitter, and angry. Relationships can be (and often are) destroyed by feelings of entitlement.

You are "owed" nothing for all you do. People have the perfect freedom to fly in the face of what you want.



The challenge is to do things for people because it's healthy or mature or "right", not because you can earn "bonus points" that you can cash whenever you want.

THERE IS NO GAIN WITHOUT PAIN



Our society believes that everything in life should be quick and easy. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The truth that personal maturity and improvement require effort and hard work is not new. It's one of those truths that's been around for a long time, but I think we need to come back to it. The desire to avoid pain and seek pleasure is something we all feel, but it runs counter to emotional health.

The concept of Christians suffering is woven throughout both the Old and the New Testaments. One of the clearest passages is found in the book of James:

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." (James 1:2-4)

The pain in your life has produced great results, or else it will in the future. If you want it "easy," you have to work hard. If you want your marriage to be easy, you have to work diligently on making it strong.

If you want life to be easy, you have to put your all into it, painfully so.

YOUR CHILDHOOD ISN'T OVER

A fair number of people see the past as something that is over and done. It needs to be forgotten and left behind. Yet it isn't quite that easy, is it? Most self-help books are saying that many of us, to some degree or another, received inadequate care from our parents and, thus, were emotionally damaged during our childhood. This damage can range from mild to severe, depending on how poorly our fathers and mothers nurtured us. Destructive childhood rearing leaves a child feeling unacceptable and believing his own feelings and uniqueness are not "okay."

Even back in Moses' time, people were aware of how critical the growing up years could be. Parents were exhorted to feed their children healthy doses of the truth at an early age:



"Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." (Deuteronomy 11:18-19)

The TRUTH system still works. Our childhood is not over and done. We can still grow and be taught.

EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS ARE GOOD

I realize that most people don't look favorably on emotional problems, so this particular truth can be a real stretch for some. It is often the painful feelings of guilt, anger, or depression that warn us that something is not quite right inside.

There are a couple of important biblical concepts to consider in this area. First, it is important to understand that God does not want His people to suffer needlessly, so God wants to use bad things that happen to us for our growth and maturity. Remember Paul's words:

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28)

Second, it is vital to understand that pain often motivates a person to change and grow. Through this process a person gains emotional strength. Earlier in the same letter, Paul stated:

"Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character; and character, hope." (Romans 5:3-4)

YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW

If you plant tomato seeds, you'll pick tomatoes at harvest time. If you plant corn, you'll harvest corn. It's a law of nature. The same law of nature that is at work in our fields, is at work in our lives.

Most of us live in hope that this is not true, but we can't escape it. We spend money as if there were no tomorrow and hope the charge card companies will forget to bill us at the end of the month. We don't exercise, yet we expect our bodies to remain healthy and firm throughout our lives. In many different ways, we act and hope that we can avoid the consequences that almost always accompany these actions. This is not only a natural law, it is a biblical one as well:



"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit will reap eternal life." (Galatians 6:7-8)

Part of the rub with this issue is the appearance that some people seem to get away with certain actions without consequences. A speed demon doesn't get pulled over by the police. Someone cheats on his income tax, but the IRS doesn't audit him. In reality, many of our current problems are the long-term reapings of unhealthy thoughts.

The flip side is equally true: We can sow positive thoughts and actions and can reap healthy consequences by doing so.

The size of the healthy seed sown may be small, but we can choose to keep nurturing the seed until it produces truthful benefits in our lives.

LIFE IS DIFFICULT

Life is difficult. We've been working through various issues and many return to this common denominator. Too often people seem surprised, even insulted, that life proved to be difficult, as if there were some guarantee that life would be smooth and easy. Life is full of difficulties. Some are necessary and some are not, but they all happen.

Our choice is either to face life's difficulties and accept them, or be mad at life and lose in the process.

Rick B is the Executive Pastor of Island Evangelical Community Church, Hong Kong.