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**Karen:** In the last lesson, we were talking about the first intervention with ministering to people in pain and that first intervention was really listening to the pain that they're experiencing, really understanding what the issues are. And this second intervention we're going to be talking about is understanding their thinking and helping them to change the thinking.

Now this particular intervention we won't use always. We are going to be talking about many interventions that are useful for ministering to people in pain, but this is one that we might use at certain times.

So let me give you an example where this might occur. For instance, if you're ministering to somebody in pain who has not left their house in five weeks because they're too anxious to even walk outside the door, one of the things that might have to change for them is how they're thinking about the situation. They might have to change how they're thinking before they're actually able to change their behavior. So we're going to be talking about how to help people change the way they think.

**Alice:** But you know, Karen, immediately we run into the problem that a lot of people don't really think that they can change the way they think. They really want someone else to come and change their circumstances, change their situation, and somehow get rid of all of the things that are causing them pain—and then their thinking can change. But you are saying that they need to start with a change in their thinking.

**Karen:** Yes, so for example the person who hasn't left their house in five weeks, they might say, "If only that horrible thing hadn't happened to me, I'd have the courage to leave my house." In other kinds of situations somebody might be thinking, "If only I had a better marriage" or "If only I had more money." They might focus

on their circumstances instead of focusing in on some of the things that they are able to change.

**Alice:** But the reality remains that until our thinking changes, nothing else in our situation will change, that it starts with a change in our minds.

**Karen:** And this is actually a biblical concept. We have the concept of *metanoia*, which is a change of our minds that occurs throughout the Bible.

**Alice:** That's right. We find it in many places. I'm thinking in particular of Romans 12:2, in which the apostle Paul says that you are not to be conformed to this world but you are to change your thinking. You start with a change of your mind and then other things in your life will change.

**Karen:** And that particular thought shows up also in Colossians. In Colossians 1:21-22, we read, "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your mind because of your evil behavior. But now [God] has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation." But sometimes your mind can actually be the fortress of sin, and you need to actually take the opportunity to see where your thinking does not fit biblical truth.

**Alice:** And so what we find is that God is saying to us: You must have a changed mind. Nothing else is going to change until your mind is changed. You won't change your behaviors until you're thinking differently.

**Karen:** We see it all over and over—and not to emphasize this too much—but we see that in Ephesians 4:22-23: "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

**Alice:** And we find it again in 1 Corinthians 2 in verses 15-16, where the apostle Paul writes: "The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments: 'For who has known the mind of the Lord so to instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ."

**Karen:** Now we're going to be talking later about changing our circumstances and the fact that in some situations it is going to be very important to change our circumstances, but it's important to see the emphasis in the Bible on looking at our minds to see if there are ways that we're thinking that is not in line with God. We see it again in 1 Peter 1:13: "Prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set our hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed." [NIV] And The Message translation is wonderful. It paraphrases these verses this way. It says, "Roll up your sleeves, put your mind in gear, be totally ready to receive the gift that's coming when Jesus arrives."

**Alice:** So we prepare our minds for action. It sounds as if that's what Peter is saying to us. And one of the things that's striking in the Scripture is that God is very often much more concerned about our minds than he is about our circumstances. We want our circumstances changed. God says we start with our mind, and we have the mind of Christ as the apostle Paul put it in Philippians chapter 2. [See Philippians 2:5-11.] This is what is to control us. And if we are controlled by the mind of Christ, then we can deal with our circumstances in ways that are God-honoring.

**Karen:** Now when, as we think about how to measure our thinking against biblical principles, I want to share something that my mom taught me. Many, many years as I was growing up I heard this saying all the time. My mom used to say, "Most problems that cause people pain come from either an inaccurate view of our self or from an inadequate view of God." Now what could you possibly have meant all those years?

**Alice:** You did hear them, and I am surprised that you still remember them.

**Karen:** I say them to myself often.

**Alice:** But how often do we really screw up in life because we don't see ourselves accurately? I can think of all kinds of times when I have either overestimated what I am able to do or I have underestimated what I am able to do. I have in many ways just simply suffered from the fact that I have not had an accurate view of who I am. I am someone who is created in the image of God. It's easy sometimes to forget that. I have been fearfully and wonderfully made, as the psalmist reminds us, and it's easy to forget that and an inaccurate view of God, an inaccurate view of who I am, can really mess things up for me. That needs to change.

**Karen:** We were talking in the first lesson about the consumer culture and how we sometimes unfortunately use that to measure ourselves and how we think about ourselves, and that results in an inaccurate view of ourselves. We think of ourselves as falling short in so many ways, and we forget that we are loved by God, that we are created in the image of God, that Christ died for us.

**Alice:** That's right, and to pick up on what you were saying earlier, Karen, not only do we suffer and experience pain many, many times from an inaccurate view of ourselves, but we also very often have a completely inadequate view of God. Do we really believe the God of the Scriptures is capable of handling our situation? Do we know that our times are in God's hands and that God's hands are good hands and He can be trusted, and whatever this circumstance is that I'm going through, God understands it and God is working through it? And if I have an adequate view of God, a biblical view of God, then I'm going to be able to deal with pain in a different way and that often is a change of mind.

**Karen:** Absolutely, and I think that it all comes back to really thinking about whether we have an accurate view of ourselves as image bearers of God and an adequate view of God. Is it adequate, i.e., an adequate view of God in terms of being a God who has good hands and has us in those good hands?

**Alice:** That's right. But now we've talked about this, how do we go about coming alongside someone and bringing this second step into being? How do we intervene by helping someone change his or her mind?

**Karen:** Well, I think so many times people start with mantras. I don't know if you've ever heard people talk about mantras that they say to themselves when they wake up. You know, "I'm a good person." "People love me." So sometimes people start there in terms of trying to change their thinking. I think it's important actually to back it up just a little bit and first to really start tracking the thoughts that are negative, that aren't biblical. To listen to what is going through our heads and to start writing those down.

**Alice:** The first thing that I need to do in coming alongside someone is to help that person really look at how he or she thinks and just track that thinking.

**Karen:** Absolutely, and you can suggest to somebody to jot them down at the end of the day or jot down that thinking that's

occurring during the day so every time they say to themselves, “I’m a worthless piece of trash,” jot that down. Start tracking that thinking that really is not biblically based.

**Alice:** The “musts,” the “have to,” I’m controlled by them sometimes: I really should do that. I really ought to do that. I really have to do that. I really must do that. People expect me to do these things, and I am a worthless piece of junk, as you said, because I’m not doing everything that people expect me to be and do.

**Karen:** I know one of the “shoulds” and “oughts” I struggled with is, “I should be at the church every time the doors are opened.” And I don’t think that’s a “should” or an “ought” that Jesus meant for us to live under. So looking at the Bible, looking at that thinking that we have, and comparing that to the teaching that we have in the Bible, is a very important step in helping people change the way they think.

**Alice:** But isn’t there also a way in which I need, if you’re coming along to help me, I need to change any thinking that doesn’t fit with reality. I remember a friend who used to shrug off everything saying, “Que sera, sera, what will be, will be.” There’s nothing we can do about it. Well, that is not being a realist. We do have things that we can do, and we can look at life in a more realistic way.

**Karen:** Absolutely, and God has given us minds as we saw earlier, and we take the responsibility to make good decisions with these minds. So, for instance, if a person is looking for a job, and they say to themselves, “Well, I’m just going to let God bring me a job; I’m not going to send out resumes.” That’s thinking that does not fit reality. And the person needs to change that thinking in order to change the behavior which isn’t working.

**Alice:** And what is interesting to me in this conversation is that we started off saying that you have to change your thinking before anything else in your situation changes, but it seems to me that you have to see the importance of doing certain things before you sometimes make that change of mind.

**Karen:** I think it’s so interesting that one of the gifts that we give to people as we minister to people in pain is our objectivity. So, as people looking on the outside in to a person’s life, sometimes we see objectively what’s going on in a way that they aren’t able to see.

**Alice:** And you can help them make that change of mind that is going to lead them to changed behavior.

**Karen:** Right. So in this lesson we've been looking at intervention number two. We've been looking at helping people understand the kind of thinking that they're doing that does not fit the biblical record, that does not fit reality and helping people change that thinking. Now in subsequent lessons we're going to be talking about other interventions, and it's going to require wisdom on our part to know when it is that we help people change their thinking.