

Dealing with Cynicism (Part 2)

As mentioned in part 1, Cynicism is a defence mechanism our brain uses to actively protect us from disappointment and pain. I mentioned that a cynic tends to be sceptical, pessimistic, and distrustful of people's intentions, often expecting the worst in others and believing that people are likely to act in their own self-interest, even if it means harming others. The result of this is often, less satisfying relationships, anticipation of pain, resulting in anxiety and depression. We spoke about how our goal as believers is to remain in the Word and to abide in the truth. *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."* **We tend to talk more about what we shouldn't think about than what we should.** In this message I will highlight the consequences of cynicism, including how it affects our relationships and the decisions we make. I will also explain how one can be free from cynicism.

A. What are the consequences of cynicism?

1. Cynicism will negatively influence the company you keep.

Your chronic negativity and suspicion will contaminate others. You will also end up spending a lot of time with fellow cynics. Often, they need support.

Psalm 1:1 – "Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers."

Your relationships can be built around having common enemies. You can have joint cynicism about the same people. I saw this between one of my sons and a friend of his. They sat on the back seat of my car having a very stimulating conversation about who they didn't like. I also saw this when I attended a conference with a group of people from the same church, afterwards the pastor we went with began to ask us to highlight the issues we had with the conference. I was triggered by this and challenged all of them.

2. Cynicism will influence your level of knowledge and wisdom.

Proverbs 14:6 – "The mocker seeks wisdom and finds none, but knowledge comes easily to the discerning."

Cynics tend to become mockers and they short circuit what God wants to teach them. Cynicism often causes people to be unteachable. They don't receive the Word in faith and expectation. The verses below demonstrate how the Word must be received with faith and eagerness.

Psalm 119:18 "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law."

The law has wonderful things, but cynical people see things differently. Their eyes need to be opened.

Hebrews 4:2 "For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed."

Acts 17:11 "Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."

This is the balance we are called to have; full of expectation whilst checking what people preach.

3. Cynicism affects your faith in God and is often rooted in unbelief.

James 1:6-8 – *“But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.”*

Psalm 73:11 – *“They say, ‘How would God know? Does the Most High know anything?’”*

- This verse captures the voice of cynics who doubt God's knowledge and concern, questioning His awareness of human affairs.

Receiving God's word and breaking out of unbelief requires humility. Cynicism often leads to pride.

James 1:21 “Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.”

4. Cynical feelings are often associated with familiarity that hinders blessing.

Mark 6:2-3 – *“Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What's this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing? Isn't this the carpenter?”*

Mt 25:24 – 30 “Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. 25 So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ 26 “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? 27 Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. 28 “So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. 29 For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. 30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” **The starting point was this man's cynicism. The others believed they would be rewarded, he didn't. The difference does not seem to be skill or competence but attitude and emotional state.**

When your pastors preach from the Word, do you see it as just people speaking or do you receive it as God's Word for you for now?

1 Thessalonians 2:13 “And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.”

John 20:25 – *“So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.’”*

Cynicism is often masked in maturity and experience. Thomas' doubt, or cynicism, prevented him from immediately accepting the truth of Jesus' resurrection, highlighting the limitations that cynicism can impose on faith. Jesus went on to highlight that there is blessing in believing without seeing the empirical evidence.

B. How can one coach those struggling with cynicism?

1. Acknowledge the Cynicism

Coach - “I hear that you're feeling disillusioned with things right now, and it's understandable given what you've experienced. Can we explore what led to those feelings?”

2. Get them to reflect on their emotional state to become more self-aware.

Psalm 139:23-24 – "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

This scripture encourages openness to understanding one's emotions.

Proverbs 4:23 – "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."

This Proverb highlights the importance of emotional awareness and its impact on actions.

Coach -

- What are you really feeling? What's the degree of the emotion (a lot or a little)
- What are the debilitating rules you have created that are impacting your current emotional state?
- "Is this emotion empowering you or debilitating you?"
- "Is what you are doing helping you or harming you?"
- "Is this emotion contributing to your health or contaminating your health?"
- Do you know how you are poisoning your body by being emotionally triggered continuously?
- What's the real message this emotion is trying to give you?

3. Encourage them to take ownership.

"Paul, our bosses do come to our meetings when we invite them, but they don't really listen, they just pretend."

Coach – What makes you think they are pretending to listen? What else could be true?

Coach - "You've mentioned how external factors have let you down. What aspects of this situation can you take ownership of to create a different outcome?"

Romans 12:18 – "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

Promotes taking ownership of one's role and actions, regardless of others.

Ephesians 4:31 – "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice."

We are responsible to get rid of toxic emotions.

4. Question their thinking

Get them to write out their cynical statement and then next to it make a list of counterarguments.

"Paul, they have ear marked positions for their own people. There is no room for me here."

Coach - "I notice you're assuming the worst outcome. What if we considered a scenario where things turned out differently? How might that feel?"

Coach – Even if your statement is true, if they never change, what can you still do differently as you manage your own career?

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."

"Paul I am not qualified to speak at this level."

"Says who? I have done so before at my previous organisation. I am a specialist and actually know more than my superiors on this topic."

5. Help them to become an Asset-based thinker

Positively framing their world is crucial. McKinsey did some research on men and women who were successful and healthy. They found 5 common denominators and one of them was that they positively framed their world. ***"It sounds like you've been disappointed, but what can we learn from this situation that could still add value or meaning to your journey?"*** One of the ways of doing this is through learned optimism. A powerful vehicle for this is learning to become an asset-based thinker. Asset based thinkers focus on the opportunity in a calamity whilst deficit based thinkers focus on the calamity in an opportunity.

Personal Assets - What are your value adds that no one can take from you?

Relational Assets - Whose support can you enlist?

Situational Assets - What's the opportunity in the calamity?

6. Appeal to their values

"Paul, I no longer speak up here. If you speak up here, you get walloped. I will just keep my head down and wait for my pension." – A 44 year old said this to me some years ago.

Coach – "You love adding value to teams and going the extra mile. How does this new attitude align with this value that you are known for? Is there anyone you are trying to punish passively aggressively? Who else will suffer in the process? How will your silence be interpreted by those who don't have context? How will this affect your brand?"

Matthew 5:16 – "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Challenge them to act in alignment with their values and positively influence others.

Colossians 3:23-24 – "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward."

Here you are straightened towards God and not bent towards man.

7. Leverage past strengths

Coach - "Remember a time when you overcame a tough situation despite feeling like the odds were against you. Share with me that story. How did you manage to push through then?"

Here you are reminding them of demonstrated success which boosts their self-efficacy which is a pillar of self-esteem.

1 Samuel 17:37 – "The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine."

David recalls past victories, strengthening his confidence to face current challenges.

Psalm 77:11 – "I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago."

Reflection Questions

1. How has cynicism impacted your relationships? Can you identify specific ways it has influenced the company you keep?
2. In what areas of your life has cynicism made you less teachable or hindered your growth in knowledge and wisdom?
3. How does your attitude toward receiving God's Word align with faith and expectation, as described in Psalm 119:18 and Hebrews 4:2?
4. Can you recall a time when familiarity with someone or something caused you to miss out on a blessing? How can you avoid this in the future?
5. What internal beliefs or emotions might be fuelling your cynicism? How do these align with the truth of God's Word?
6. When faced with disappointment, how do you balance scepticism with hope and faith in God's promises?
7. Reflect on moments when you assumed the worst in a situation or person. What alternative narratives could you consider?
8. How might reframing your current challenges with an asset-based approach change your perspective or outcomes?
9. What personal, relational, or situational assets can you identify that could help you navigate through your current struggles?
10. How do your current attitudes and actions align with your core values? What adjustments might help you live in greater integrity?