Christians Relationship with Themselves

Most Christians understand, or have at least heard, about how relationships are either horizontal (with others) or vertical (with God). We also can benefit from recognizing we have an internal relationship with ourself. Internal Family Systems (IFS) is a form of therapy that aligns well with the Christian world view. IFS believes we have internal "parts" that have various roles to help us navigate life. If we think about the Holy Trinity and the fact that we are created in Gods image, we can see why IFS is an accepted therapeutic intervention among Christian therapists. Engaging in therapy with a licensed therapist at various times in our lives is necessary and biblical however everyone can benefit from learning about IFS and these internal parts relationships even outside of professional counseling. Let's draw our attention for a moment to our internal relationship with ourselves and the power of our inner speech. Inner speech or self talk refers to something different than just thinking. Typically the term "thinking" includes everything the mind does. There is a certain category of thinking that we call verbal thinking, and that's essentially inner speech, the stuff that we do in words. One researcher found that people engage in self talk at an average pace of 4,000 words per minute—10 times faster than verbal speech. And it's often more condensed—we don't have to use full sentences to talk to ourselves, because we know what we mean. From a mental health perspective it is important to recognize what our self talk sounds like because If you mainly think positively about yourself, you will feel good and optimistic most of the time. Research shows that positive self-talk can: improve self-esteem, stress management and wellbeing. reduce any symptoms of depression, anxiety and personality disorders. On the other hand if the pattern of self-talk we've developed is negative it will fuel feelings of anger, fear, guilt, hopeless and the like. Where do these self talk messages come from? Well we remember the positive and negative things we were told as children by our parents, siblings, or teachers. We remember the reactions from other children that impacted how we felt about ourselves. Throughout the years, these messages have played over and over in our minds resulting in our playing of

these self talk tapes without even realizing we are doing so. If negative self talk is a problem for us, and it is for many of us, how can we change it? One of the most critical avenues we use in therapy is to identify the source of these messages and then work with the person to intentionally "overwrite" them. In IFS this is known as healing or unburdening parts. Other Mental health professionals call this Cognitive Behavior Therapy or CBT but we did not invent this - God did! We see this in the Bible as David engages in CBT over and over in the Psalms. He begins with despair and negative self talk then uses his internal dialog to remind himself of Gods truths. Try the following exercise. Write down some of the negative messages inside your mind. Be specific, whenever possible, and include anyone you remember who contributed to that message. Now, take a moment to intentionally counteract those negative messages with positive truths in your life and scriptures. Don't give up if you don't find them quickly. For every negative message there is a positive truth in Gods word that will override the weight of despair. These truths always exist; keep looking until you find them asking the Lord to reveal His truth to you. Positive self-talk is not self-deception it is not mentally looking at circumstances with eyes that see only what you want to see. Rather, positive self-talk is about recognizing the truth, in situations and in yourself as a child of God. One of the fundamental truths is that you will make mistakes. To expect perfection in yourself or anyone else is unrealistic. To expect no difficulties in life, whether through your own actions or sheer circumstances, is also unrealistic. God's word clearly tells us in this world we will have troubles but it also tells us that He has overcome the world so we are to take heart and be of good cheer or joyful. Recognizing and working to improve our internal dialogue of self talk is one way of obeying Gods word and improving our mental health. I encourage us to give it a try! If you want to learn more about IFS here is a book I recommend: "Altogether You" by Jenna Riemersma, LPC , 2020 Pivotal Press, Marietta, GA

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