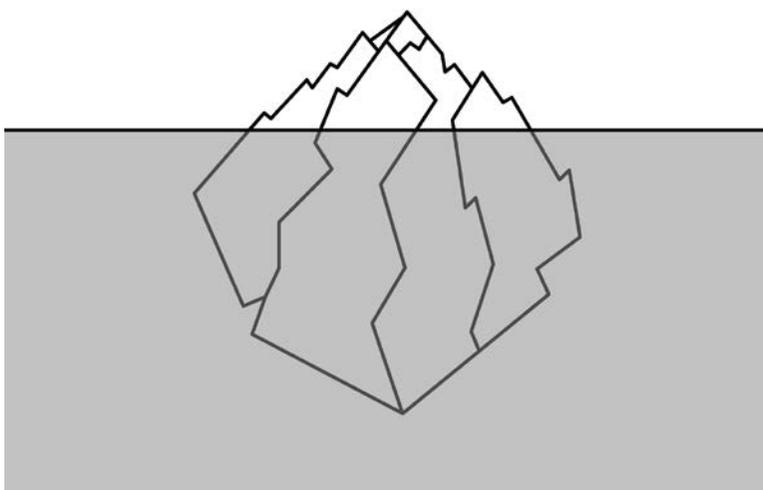


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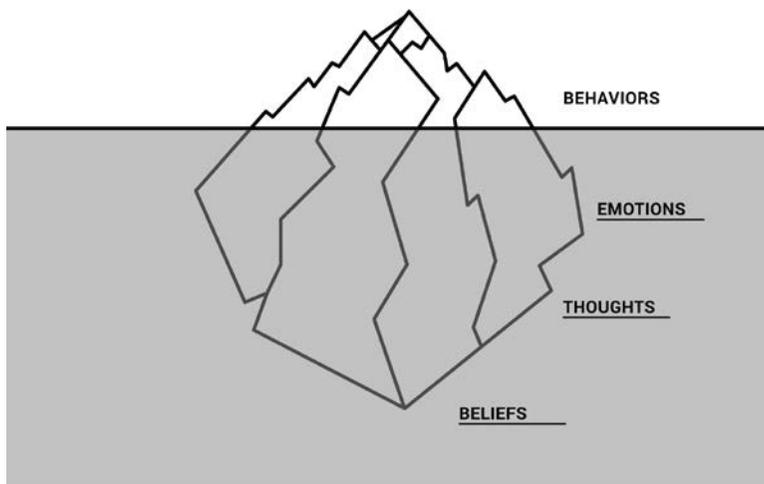
# 1

## *The Iceberg Model of Change*



“That’s just the tip of the iceberg!” This time-worn analogy is a simple and yet powerful tool for understanding what the counseling process entails. What is above the water most often is far less significant (and less dangerous) than what is below the water. Ship captains, navigating the waters surrounding icebergs, don’t worry as much about what they can see as about what they can’t see. What is below the water holds the greatest potential for damaging the hull of the ship and causing it to sink like the Titanic.

In counseling, people often feel blindsided by somebody or something; but what they identify as the problem is often only the tip of the iceberg. When they come to Crossroads Counseling of the Rockies, they begin to realize that addressing the real issues requires going under the surface.



In this Iceberg Paradigm, the tip of the iceberg is **behaviors**. Behaviors are the actions we perform, the way we interact with others. Problem behaviors are often the motivator for getting some form of counseling: drinking too much, having affairs, being abusive, spending money recklessly, skipping school, etc. When a person is confronted with a problem behavior, the first impulse is to ask, “What should I *do* about it? What do you want me to *do* differently?” The obvious expectation is that changing the behavior will take care of the problem.

Though behavioral change is very important – e.g., if you’re an alcoholic, you do need to stop drinking – simply trying to behave in different ways will not produce lasting change. If behavioral

change was the key to lasting change, God could have written a “behavior modification manual” instead of the Bible! Simply focusing on altering behavior to bring lasting change amounts to rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic!

The next layer of this iceberg is **emotions** – what you feel. People struggle with many emotional issues, like depression, fear, anxiety, shame, betrayal, etc. Some people have little control of their emotions, living on an emotional roller coaster of subjectivity. Others have learned that if, “I feel too much, I hurt too much,” and so learned to repress emotions and become good stuffers. Men are especially prone to over-controlling their feelings. As my good friend Terry Wardle quips, “Men have four basic emotions – mad, sad, glad, and hungry!”

Much of counseling today, especially in psychiatry, is focused on symptom relief, feeling better quickly: take this medication and you will get relief from your depression or your anxiety. There is a pill for everything. Pharmacology is big business! While the right medication can be an important assist at times in the process of healing, too often relief of a symptom is seen as the solution.

Obviously, emotions must be important because the favorite therapist questions seem to be, “How do you feel about that?” and, “How does that make you feel?” We do ask those questions because a good understanding of your emotions is very important. But just focusing on your feelings and trying to make yourself stop feeling them is not productive in terms of healing. While behaviors and emotions are both very important in a healthy life, trying to change or control them is not the key to lasting change.

The third layer of the iceberg is **thoughts** – the cognitive part, the intellectual, the mind. People experiencing a problem often become very analytical: “I need to think this through, figure this out, gather the right information, listen to the latest podcast, etc. I can solve the problem through better understanding.” For many Christians, this pursuit of knowledge has resulted in

having impressive self-help libraries! They have read book after book, trying to find the “Rosetta Stone” key that will unlock the mysteries of their hearts. While information is very important, it too is not the key to lasting change. At Crossroads Counseling, we emphasize that:

***Information does not produce transformation.***

Psychology primarily focuses on the first three levels of the iceberg model — behaviors, feelings, and thoughts — and the interplay between those three areas, all of which are important. Though this type of counseling can provide deeper understanding of the life-shaping dynamics in times of crisis or conflict, often it does not result in long-term changes.

At Crossroads Counseling of the Rockies, we concentrate on what we consider to be the deepest level of the iceberg: **beliefs**. What you believe underlies all your thoughts, feelings and behaviors. For everyone, there are significant differences between their **formal beliefs** and their **functional beliefs**. If you really think about it, what you say you believe is often incongruent with the ways you actually live and relate to others.

**Formal beliefs** are what you “know to be true.” **Functional beliefs**, however, are what you actually live out, what you do and say. That doesn’t mean your formal beliefs are wrong, but they may often be inconsistent with how you go about your daily life. Many Christians, though attending church regularly and affirming the truth of God’s Word, still live mired in dysfunctional relationships at home, at church and in the workplace. And this kind of functional hypocrisy is not reserved solely for Christians — every person is guilty at times of violating his or her formal belief system by saying or doing things that are in direct conflict with their formal beliefs.

What makes understanding the belief system so complicated is that your belief system is largely *unconscious*. Most of the

time you're not consciously aware of your beliefs. In dealing with a new situation, you do not need to push the pause button and go through your "filing cabinet of beliefs" to figure out how those beliefs should guide you. You act automatically, assuming you know the right way to respond. Like most people, you believe that what you learned from your parents, what they said and especially what they modeled, is true. Since as a child "you don't know what you don't know," you assume that all the beliefs you have assimilated are reliable, whether derived from parents, your own experience, teachers, or many others. You automatically trust this internal belief system.

When teaching, I often ask, "How many of you were raised in a dysfunctional family?" Of course, that is a trick question! Since the fall of Adam and Eve, there haven't been any truly functional families! We were all raised by imperfect parents, imperfect grandparents. Everyone who influenced the shaping of our life was imperfect, and therefore dysfunctional to some degree (some way more than others!). So, without your conscious awareness, the foundation of your functional beliefs was laid. Since that was your only frame of reference at the time, you naturally assumed that what you were learning was accurate and true (until you became a teenager!). Of course, functional belief systems vary from person to person, depending on where and by whom they were taught.

The word the Bible most often uses when referring to the belief system is the heart. Rarely is it referring to the organ that pumps blood, but rather to the deepest part of who you are as a human being. Jesus points out,

"For a man's words depend on what fills his heart. A good man gives out good – from the goodness stored in his heart; a bad man gives out evil – from his store of evil."<sup>1</sup>

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1      Matthew 12:35, *J.B. Phillips*

What is going on in the heart, the belief system level, is driving everything that you think, feel, and then do. A familiar proverb says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."<sup>2</sup> Or as an old southern man drawled, "What's in the well is what's going to come up in the bucket."

Isaiah scorned the Jewish leaders' strategy for dealing with threats of conflict or impending doom, "When an overwhelming scourge sweeps by, it cannot touch us, for we have made a lie our refuge and falsehood our hiding place."<sup>3</sup> But isn't that strategy similar to what you do when you shut down your heart, living in denial, or disengaging from life? Think back to a significant past failure or sinful choice you now deeply regret. Do you feel shame, guilt, even self-loathing welling up inside you, along with familiar condemning messages of being worthless, unlovable, or hopeless? At that point your strongest tendency may be to make a lie your refuge and falsehood your hiding place. Lying about your sin or going into hiding seems the best way to feel safe; perhaps no one will ever find out.

The Enemy of your soul, described in Scripture as a deceiver, a liar, and the father of lies, loves such secrets. He realizes the pivotal importance of the bottom of the iceberg, so he targets your heart. His desire is to contaminate your functional belief system with false (but enticingly plausible) beliefs, where they operate behind the scenes. False beliefs are like a computer virus – you only know a virus is present because your computer is not functioning the way it was designed to.

Counselors often warn, "You are as sick as your secrets." As you live in hiding, marooned on an island of your own self-protection, you will never find the freedom that you're longing for. If the Enemy can keep you stuck in the miry clay of lies, false beliefs and negative messages, he doesn't particularly care how those

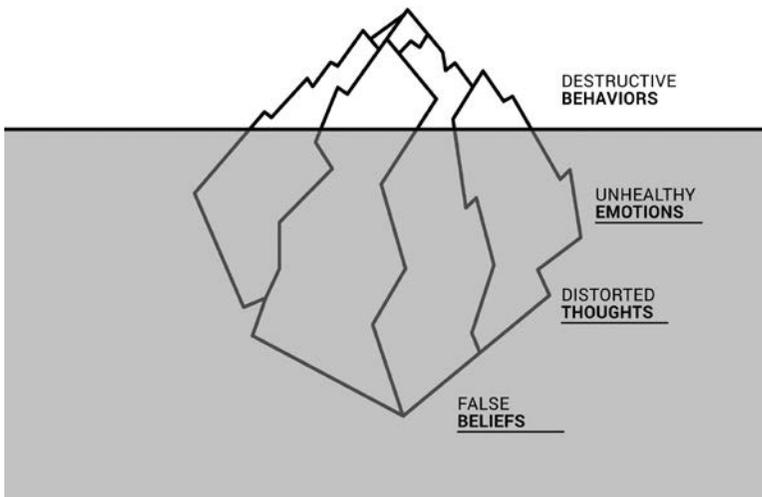
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2 Proverbs 4:23

3 Isaiah 28:15

deceptions then surface in your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. As long as your heart is disconnected from the heart of God, he knows the rest will take care of itself.

The heart is central to God’s design for human beings: you were made to love and to be loved. Jesus summarized God’s design as, “Love God above all else and love others as you love yourself.”<sup>4</sup> You were made to live in deeply intimate relationships, but the overall effect of living according to false beliefs is disconnection and fear-based relationships. What is the common denominator of the Enemy’s deceptive strategies? Preventing you from loving well by distancing you from your heart.



Starting from the bottom of the iceberg paradigm, your False Beliefs will result in thinking that is distorted to some degree. False Beliefs produce Distorted Thoughts. You can’t have accurate thoughts if they are based on what is not true. In counseling, we often refer to cognitive distortions as “stinkin’ thinkin’.” That

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4 Matthew 22:37-39, my paraphrase

term is used a lot in addictions counseling because of the propensity of addicts to excuse their behavior by false beliefs such as “It’s ok because I don’t drink at work” or “I wouldn’t have affairs (or view pornography) if my wife would satisfy my sexual needs” or “I’m not hurting anyone.” Relying on such false beliefs, they give themselves permission to use again, or resist admitting their need for treatment.

We could look down our self-righteous noses at addicts, but listen to what Jeremiah warns, “The heart is hopelessly dark and deceitful, a puzzle that no one can figure out.”<sup>5</sup> We are all prone to stinkin’ thinkin’ because if we want something long enough or bad enough, our penchant for self-deceit will find a reason why the harmful behavior is okay this time. Whether the behavior is eating too much, spending too much, cutting classes, shoplifting, or something else, those unhealthy choices are excused or rationalized by way of distorted thoughts and false beliefs.

To the extent that you have false beliefs and distorted thoughts, you will also experience Unhealthy Emotions. I define an unhealthy emotion as one that is either inappropriate to the situation or unnecessary. By that, I don’t mean that those feelings are not real or strong, but that they are in response to false information, to a false stimulus.

A phobia is an irrational fear, an unhealthy interplay between thoughts and emotions. For instance, let’s say you have a snake phobia. If I were to come walking up to you carrying a garter snake in my hand, your reaction would probably be to panic, fearfully backing up or running away, maybe yelling and screaming at me. With your anxiety level going through the roof, you’d probably be very angry with me.

But consider your formal beliefs about garter snakes. You probably learned in school that they’re harmless! They have no venom, they have no ability to bite you, or to squeeze you, or

to harm you in any way. And yet, if I were to walk towards you with that snake in my hand, you would experience very strong emotional reactions. What you know intellectually to be true is somehow overruled by what your heart believes to be true at a deeper level. As a result, a lot of emotional energy is being expended unnecessarily, since real danger is not present. That is an example of unhealthy emotions – real feelings, but in response to distorted thoughts and false beliefs.

False Beliefs, Distorted Thoughts, and Unhealthy Emotions will then result in Destructive Behaviors. When you live relying on a false belief system, the destructiveness of your choices may be obvious – but not always. In some cases, it takes time for the true extent of the damage to be realized: “There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.”<sup>6</sup> Perhaps you made a choice that seemed right at the time, but in retrospect, as you looked back on the wake left by that choice, you experienced great regret. You may have said to yourself, “What were you thinking?!” A better question would have been, “What were you believing?!” What beliefs led to the thoughts and feelings that gave you permission to behave in a way you now regret?

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At the end of each chapter, you’ll find some questions to stimulate your thinking and help you apply the principles you’ve just examined. Approach these questions with an open heart and take your time as you reflect on them. There is space provided for your answers in the book, or you may choose to write them in a journal, so you can go deeper with your reflections.

While there are very few who would say they had never heard these concepts taught before, nevertheless clients report that the clear and simple way that they are packaged and presented helped them to have light bulb moments, resulting in life-changing insights. As you read this book, my hope and prayer are that your experience will be equally life-changing.