

Overcoming the trap of Delusion, Denial, Deception

By Dave Batty

Delusion, Denial, Deception—three words that speak of going down similar paths of false beliefs.

“For 17 years I denied what others saw so clearly,” one wife told me. “I refused to admit that my husband was an alcoholic. I told myself my husband drank too much. Finally after 17 years I accepted the truth, and began to respond to the truth.”

Jennie, a high school teen wrote, “I’m glad all the students at Teen Challenge are off drugs—but drugs help me. If it wasn’t for drugs, I couldn’t cope with life.” She’s in delusion—caught in a false belief that’s taking her into more pain and

destruction.

Alex grew up in a very average middle class suburban home with hard working parents. As a senior in high school, he bought a brand new sports car—paid cash for it. His parents never asked him, “Son,

Deception is often a lie wrapped in the truth.

where did you get the money to buy that car.” Alex had been running a drug selling operation out of his bedroom all through high school, and yet his parents knew nothing of this.

Alex deceived his parents, hiding from them his illegal business venture. But his parents also deceived themselves, ignoring some major signals that all was not well with Alex—refusing to believe their son could be involved in selling drugs. The truth came crashing down on the family when Alex was arrested and charged with selling drugs.

Jesus warned us, “Watch out that no one deceives you.”

(Matthew 24:4 NIV) But who deceives you the most? It’s probably not the person you dislike the most. Look closer to home. Those who are closest to us are more likely to deceive us.

But by far the most common form of deception is *self-deception*. We deceive ourselves and end up on a path of false beliefs.

Deception is often a lie wrapped in the truth. The oldest example is seen in the Garden of Eden, when Eve listened to Satan, accepting his version of the truth—which was part of the truth, mixed with a lie—yet it all sounded so good.

People don’t set as their goal in life—“I want to live in delusion.” Yet it happens all the time. Proverbs 14:12 NIV says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”

A young mother, abandoned by her husband, cried out to God, “I want to know you, please help me—send someone to tell me about you.”

The next day two people knocked at the door of her house, and came to tell her about Jesus, and invited her to church. Diane was

- ❖ **How easy is it for you to spot false beliefs in your own life? In the lives of others?**
- ❖ **How can you help your loved ones face the delusion in their lives?**
- ❖ **What are the steps you can take to overcome delusion and false beliefs in your life?**

overjoyed at the new friends she discovered and how much they cared for her and her young children.

Weeks later some of her relatives tried to convince her that her new found friends at the Mormon church were taking her down a path of false beliefs—away from the one true God. She was not convinced—“How could something that feels so good be so wrong?” was her reply.

Deception makes one vulnerable to attacks by their enemies. World War II provides many powerful examples of deception—and its role in helping to win the war. The Allies created an elaborate hoax to deceive the Germans on where they were planning to invade France. They leaked “secrets” to the Germans to convince them the attack would be near one city, while all the time planning for the real attack to take place at Normandy.

On the day of the attack,

Germany had many of their troops waiting for the attack in the wrong place.

Cultural deception

Our culture bombards us with many false messages. Businesses spend billions every year on commercials—hoping we will believe their messages and be motivated to buy their products.

You may remember a few years ago a TV commercial by a shampoo company. A handsome young man approaches a beautiful young lady. He’s looking at her, smiling—but then he sees dandruff on her shoulder! He turns abruptly and walks away without a word. She stands there devastated by the rejection.

The message the shampoo company wants you to believe is—“young lady you have a problem. Your dandruff caused you to be rejected by this incredible man.”

But I want to shout out, “Wait a

minute—young lady—stop the camera! Let’s take a closer look at this man. If he rejected you when he saw dandruff on your shoulder—can you imagine what he will do when he sees a real problem in your life? Count your blessings! Let him go. The guy is a jerk!”

But all too often we jump to the conclusion—the wrong conclusion. And we rush off to buy a new product, hoping it will solve our problems and bring happiness and fulfillment to our lives. But when we believe a lie, and chase after a false belief, it always disappoints us.

Deception by our families

In the name of love, we often help our family members continue down a path of delusion. Our heart of compassion goes out to those we love the most. The warning signals are there—but we are the eternal optimists. Things will get better! So we minimize the problems—ignoring the truth.

Many parents have faithfully served God, and raised their children with love. When the police came knocking at the door of one home, the parents refused to believe it was their child who had been arrested. They told the police, “You must have mixed us up with another family in our city with a teen who has the same name as our son.”

Parents and family are often trapped in delusion by offering the wrong kind of help to their loved ones in trouble. One elderly mother is still rescuing her son who is now in his forties. She gives him cash

Are you far-sighted or near-sighted?

Are you an expert at spotting the problems of denial, deception, and delusion in other people? Do you find it easy to see the error or deceit in others?

At the same time do you have a tough time seeing false beliefs in your own life?

Tony, now in his 20s, stated, “My father was an abusive alcoholic. He beat my mom and us kids many times. I vowed as a child that I would never touch

alcohol—and to this day I have kept that vow.”

But his friend sitting next to him in class blurted out— “But you became a drug addict!”

Tony was speechless. What was obvious to his classmate had never connected in his own mind until that moment. Even though he had stayed away from alcohol, he had chosen to become a drug addict, which also brought tremendous destruction into his life.

whenever he comes with a new crisis.

What started in his teen years continues today—the mother fails to see that her “help” is simply feeding the irresponsible behavior of her son. When we rescue our loved one, we often feed their delusion.

Self-delusion

Why is it we find it so easy to believe a lie? Why are we so often confused about what really is the truth—especially when it relates to ourselves?

Many of the lies we believe have been taught us from our earliest years—by our family, our friends, our culture. Just because millions of people believe a lie doesn't make it the truth.

How we deceive ourselves

God gives three examples of how we deceive ourselves. Each contains a lie wrapped in the truth.

1. Failing to apply God's truth

“Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” James 1:22 NIV. All too often Christians slip into the false belief that it is OK to just *listen* to God's truth.

We go to church on Sunday morning and listen to the sermon. Then come home and face the responsibilities of the week, and go back next Sunday to hear another sermon.

God makes it very clear—we must put His truth into action in our

lives. If we fail to do this we are deceiving ourselves. Knowing God's truth is not enough. Personal response is absolutely essential!

The Bible is full of God's truth that affects our daily living—how we spend our money, how we should show love to others, the need for compassion, kindness, forgiveness, integrity, faithfulness, patience, keeping our thoughts pure, and so much more. Daily reading of God's word is important—but it's not enough. We must consistently do the much more difficult task of personally applying these teachings to the problems and situations we face in our daily living.

2. Failing to control our tongue

“If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.” James 1:26 NIV.

“Worthless!” This is God's assessment of a very faithful, religious person who fails to exercise self control in his or her speech. The first 3 verses of 1 Corinthians chapter 13 give a similar assessment of the worthlessness of wonderful spiritual expressions if they are not accompanied by love.

God is making the same point here. The lack of self control is another way of saying the person is in delusion. Anger is often the door we open that leads us to talking our way into trouble. But gossip, jealousy, fear, discouragement, and pain can also easily take us down the paths where our speech gets us in trouble. Each of these

expressions demonstrate the need for us to learn how to see God's truth in times of trouble, and see how it applies to our problems, and how we can respond in a godly way.

Instead of cursing at our problems, we need to speak God's truth into the problem, and say,

Failing to control our tongue is an expression of delusion

“God, how do you want me to respond to this situation? What do you want me to learn from this problem?”

If we ignore God's truth in a situation, we are deceived. The sooner we acknowledge this, the faster we can get to God's truth.

3. Failing to see the only source of good gifts

“Do not be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” James 1:16-17 NIV.

This expression of deception may be the most difficult for many of us to accept. God makes it very clear that everything that is good for us comes from Him. But we find it so easy to believe the messages that come at us from a thousand other sources.

At Teen Challenge we

frequently hear students say, “As a teen, I went looking for love in all the wrong places.” They go on to describe the destruction and pain that came into their lives as they headed down these paths of false beliefs.

God says any sex outside of marriage is destructive. Instead we often choose to believe the messages seen on TV every day, that

*Offer up this prayer,
“God, do whatever it
takes to break through
the delusion in the life
of my loved one.”*

sexual intimacy can be a beautiful expression of love outside of marriage.

The message of James 1:16-17 is simple—God knows what is best for you. If you want what is good in your life—if you want what is perfect for you—then let God bring it into your life in His time. Don’t go seeking after it in what the world offers.

The world may label it as harmless—but God says it is destructive. Pornography often carries with it the promise of a beautiful expression of sexual fulfillment—a safe way without the risk of being rejected. But in reality it is a path of false intimacy—one that never brings true fulfillment. True intimacy will only be experienced in the context of a loving relationship with another person—inside God’s boundaries.

So what breaks delusion?

Whether it is self-delusion, or delusion by another person, there are two options we face in breaking the power of these false beliefs.

The easy way

The easy way to break down delusion is to listen to God’s truth, and act on it. We need to tell ourselves the truth. We need to be honest with others—especially about our weaknesses and problems.

We need to give permission to at least one trusted person to hold us accountable, and confront us when they see us living with a false belief.

We need to carefully read the Bible and discover God’s truth, and see how it relates to the problems we are facing today.

When Jesus was here on earth, He often would begin His teachings by saying, “I tell you the truth.” Then He would go on to speak the truth. It seems He had to inform people that what He was about to communicate was truth. Do people know how to distinguish between truth and a lie?

Every day we receive calls at Teen Challenge from families with a loved one trapped in addiction. “Can you help my loved one?” they ask. Our first questions are, “Does your loved one want help? Do they recognize the need to change their way of living?”

All too often the family sees the problem, but the one who is addicted has believed the lies so long that they are trapped not only in the addiction to drugs, but also trapped in the delusion of false beliefs.

The tragic deception of sexual abuse

Sexual abuse of children is an incredible expression of self-deception by the abuser.

The abuser is often seeking for intimacy, but unwilling to risk the pain of rejection by an adult of his or her own age. So they turn to children—innocent, loving, trusting, accepting—and take advantage of that innocence.

The abuser has come to believe the lie that it is OK to engage in sexual intimacy with this child, because it will bring

pleasure and fulfillment.

Little consideration is given to the tremendous damage this abuse will bring into the future of this child—perhaps even setting in motion the tragedy of this child growing up and also becoming an abuser of children.

The abuser can even convince themselves the child wants it. But this pursuit of happiness down the path of false intimacy always brings destruction into the life of the abuser as well as the one abused.

So how do we help our loved one come to the place where they see the truth and are willing to change? “Speak the truth in love!” Not just once, but over and over.

If they refuse to listen to you, pray that God will send others into their lives to speak the truth. Then offer up this prayer—“God, do

To break down a false belief, you must accept the truth and say, “I will hold on to this truth and make it a part of my thoughts each day.”

whatever it takes to break through the delusion in the life of my loved one.”

The easy way to break down a false belief is to see the truth, accept the truth, and say, “I will hold on to this truth, and begin to make it a part of my thoughts and actions. I will begin to live by this truth.”

Unfortunately, many of us do not choose the easy path out of delusion. Instead we stubbornly hold on to our false beliefs—ignore the truth—and set ourselves on the hard path to discovering truth.

The hard path to breaking delusion

When we choose to ignore God’s truth, we send ourselves down the paths of delusion and experience the painful consequences of those

choices. The longer we live with delusion, the more pain we will experience. Pain can become the power that helps break the delusion.

The truth is—pain is our friend, and it can break through our false beliefs, and bring us face to face with the truth.

But our culture tells us—pain is bad. Take our pill and you don’t need to feel any pain. So when we feel pain, we often say to ourselves, “Pain is bad. I need to get away from this pain.”

We need to use pain as an alarm clock—jarring us out of our sleep—out of our delusion—out of our false beliefs.

What is needed is a radically new thought towards pain—I need to carefully look at what is causing the pain and ask, “What part of God’s truth am I missing?” I need to look at the long term consequences of my actions and measure my life against God’s truth—not against my delusions.

Delusion does not have to be intentional. If you are cooking a meal and unintentionally put your

hand too close to the fire, you will feel pain instantly! The pain is the natural consequence of your delusion. You falsely believed that it was safe to move your hand in a certain way as you were cooking.

Even as you were doing a task of importance, your false belief led to an action that brought pain into your life in an instant.

Many false beliefs do not lead to instant pain. When we fail to

Pain is a powerful tool to break through delusion and help us see the need to abandon our false beliefs.

experience any negative consequences, it can easily reinforce the false belief and make it even stronger in our lives.

Many teens have heard their parents say, “Don’t use drugs—they will fry your brain and destroy your life.” Yet they go to school

Spiritual deception

Deception sometimes comes packaged in very spiritual language.

A married man who had recently left his wife told me, “In the last 4 months I’ve felt closer to God and experienced more of God’s anointing in my

ministry.” The focus of his prayer was in the company of a single young lady he was living with—even though he was still married.

He was choosing to ignore the very specific teachings of the Bible that prohibit such behavior.

every day and see other teens using drugs, and going through school with lots of friends.

At Teen Challenge, every young person here can tell you a story of tragedy, how drugs brought great destruction into their lives, often affecting their family as well.

Tracey, a mother with two young boys, was on a path filled with drugs and self-delusion. Her father always came to her rescue when she ended up in jail. Finally he stopped rescuing her—and she spent the next 7 months in jail.

“Jail was good for me,” Tracey told me. “I finally got the drugs out of my system. As my head cleared, I began to see how much damage I was causing in the lives of my two sons, and as well as in my own life.

“Jail was also where I first learned about Jesus and how He could change my life. Two Christian ladies came every week for a Bible study and helped me to discover God’s truth for my life. They also introduced me to Teen Challenge where I learned more of God’s truth.”

Delusion can strike in any area of our life. But God’s truth relates to every problem we face. God’s truth speaks to every false belief. The path to real life is not down fantasy lane. Real life is when we face God’s truth, and begin to apply it in our daily living.

The task of exposing our false beliefs may be a life long task. God’s truth will light the path to real life.

Overcoming the trap of Delusion, Denial, Deception Discussion Guide

The following questions can be used for your personal reflection on this topic, or it can be used as a guide for a group discussion. If this is used in a group setting, please understand that you are not required to disclose the specific details of past sins, failures, or personal experiences.

1. What are some examples in your life where others have deceived you? What set you up to be deceived?
2. What are some examples where you have struggled with self-deception or false beliefs? How have you become aware that you were living with these false beliefs?
3. Read Proverbs 14:12 and Proverbs 3:5-6. What are the difficulties you face as you attempt to apply these issues to your personal life?
4. Read James 1:22-25.
 - A. How big a problem has this been in your life—knowing God’s truth, but not doing it—not applying it in your life?
 - B. How does the illustration of looking in a mirror relate to what is going on in your life today?
5. Read Galatians 6:7-8. How have painful consequences impacted your life and helped you face the truth?
6. One of the powerful tools to help you break through delusion is making yourself accountable to another person who has permission to confront you when they see delusion in your life. Do you already have this person in your life? If not, who could you ask to fill that role in your life?



Global Teen Challenge
P.O. Box 511
Columbus, GA 31902 USA
Phone: 706-576-6555
E-mail: gtc@Globaltc.org
Website: www.Globaltc.org

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