

## Lesson One: What We Think

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*Scripture Reading: Philippians 4:4-9*

### **The Inner Life**

Our inner life is often a strange mixture of motivations both genuinely spiritual and completely human. Our inner life is so deep, so truly inner, that no one knows it but God. It is with this inner life, therefore, that God most concerns Himself.

### **Why is the thought life so important to God?**

Because it controls the rest of your life. What you think shapes how you **live**—and how you **feel**. Our thoughts, good or bad, control our **attitudes**. And our **attitudes** lead to our **actions**. According to the Bible, we are responsible for the direction that our thoughts take us. But through God's power and His help, we can change harmful thinking and habits. That's the theme of this year's series.

### **The Greatest Commandment:**

In the book of Matthew, Jesus was asked to explain what the greatest commandment was out of all the commandments: *You shall love the LORD your God with all your **heart**, with all your **soul** and with all your **mind*** (23:37).

### **1Thessalonian 5:23.**

The **body** is your physical life. The **soul** is your thought life—that part of you that involves your personality, your intellect, your emotions, your desires, your volition, your will—the part of you that makes decisions—how you respond and how you talk and how you think. The **spirit** is your spiritual life—how you relate to God and communicate with Him.

### **What's Happening in My Brain?**

**We are fearfully and wonderfully made by God, which definitely includes our brain. The brain is the control center of the body.** And what the brain does is to think. What we think, therefore, we become, because our actions and reactions become patterns, pathways in our minds . . . ultimately the way we live and feel.

Over the past 10-15 years, the word "**neuroplasticity**" describes how our brain is wired and works. With new technology, it's been discovered that the brain is made up of **neurons** that connect with each other and talk to each other. The word "**neuropathways**" has become a descriptive term. And when you think—neurons talk to other neurons and make a path of your thinking pattern.

Just like water poured on sand, too often, our lives love the path of least resistance: *"What I've done most often is the easiest thing to do again because it takes the least amount of work."* Thoughts included. *"Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts"* (Proverbs 4:23).

### **New Pathways of Thought**

Prior to our salvation in Christ, we could only program the brain to respond and to think selfishly and sinfully. We had no power to change our thinking. But since Christ freed us from the power of sin, we are now capable through the power of the Holy Spirit to think what is right and godly. But in this endeavor, a battle ensues. Just read Romans 6-8.

*For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down **strongholds*** (2 Cor. 10:3).

**"Strongholds" means "mental fortress."** A stronghold is something that is stuck in your head. It can be a fixation, a phobia, a compulsion, bitterness, lust, envy, worry, or a lofty opinion of yourself. Maybe it's trying to control things: to take matters into your own hands. Or maybe it's fear of the future.

### **Stuck in a Rut**

**Try as we might, by our own power or strength, we simply can't get ourselves out of harmful ruts of thought.** The strongholds have a **strong hold** on us. The Lord Jesus will help you get out of the rut. He can and He will. *"Call to Me and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know"* (Jeremiah 33:3).

*"Jesus Christ is able to untangle all my complexes and to transform even my fixed habit patterns, no matter how deeply they are etched into my subconscious."* ~Corrie Ten Boom

### **How does God pull down your strongholds?**

Strongholds are pulled or broken down when you first identify the strongholds in your life. Allow the Holy Spirit and Word of God to show you. **And then bring them to the Lord. Name them.** And then see what only Jesus Christ can do.

*Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity **every thought** to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).*

### **God made you where you can't think two things at one time.**

Since we can only focus on one thing at a time, when you're thinking what's right, you cannot be thinking what's wrong. I'm not talking about positive thinking. I'm talking about Christ-like thinking.

### **The 5 Second Rule**

When a defeating thought enters your mind, you have about 5 seconds to take that thought captive and not go down that pathway. If you don't, that thought is going to take you captive. So with the **fact** of God's Word and our **faith** in His Word, our negative **feelings** can change **if we choose to change them.**

*We have not been given the spirit of fear but of **power** and **love** and of **a sound mind** (2 Timothy 1:7). We can have a sound mind, but it takes the power of God to break the negative thought habits. Please take notice in Scripture how many times the word "power" is mentioned in relation to our Christian life.*

### **Rejoice in the Lord always.**

Rejoicing is something we choose to do—it is an attitude that we can cultivate our minds to think upon. Joy comes from knowledge. We know Romans 8:28, right? We know everything is going to work out for our good. When we know the Scriptures, it's that knowledge that produces joy in us. Not just some emotion that we have—it is an attitude that is based upon Truth—the Truth that comes from Scripture.

### **"Be anxious for nothing."**

When our minds are overtaken with worry, there's only one thing to do. **We have to remember.** We have to call to mind the truths we need. We have to remember God's promise: *"Casting all your care upon Him for He cares for you."* It's as if God is telling you: *"If you turn that problem over to Me, and not worry about it, I will take care of it."*

### **The Mind of Christ**

- **True:** Truth matters. That's why it's listed first of the things to think upon. Believers have a huge advantage because we believe in a God who IS Truth. **When God tells us something that settles it.** *"All your words are true"* (Psalm 119:160).
- **Noble:** worthy of honor and dignity; worthy of respect
- **Right:** morally right

- **Pure:** a reference to purity. God wants our minds to dwell on things that are pure. God's Word keeps our thoughts pure.
- **Lovely:** the root word is "love." The Lord Jesus is altogether lovely.
- **Admirable:** to esteem highly
- **A Good Report:** well-spoken of
- **Praiseworthy:** If anything is excellent or praiseworthy, it calls down the approval of God.

### **How Do We Think about Such Things?**

*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed **by the renewing of your mind**, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Romans 12:2).*

You are being metamorphosized, transformed, by the renewing of your mind as you meditate and take in the Word of God. When we learn to think the Lord Jesus' thoughts, the benefits come over us like a metamorphosis.

### **Put on the Helmet of Salvation.**

*And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:17).* The word "salvation" refers to "deliverance." We must allow the Holy Spirit to take control of our thoughts and deliver us from Satan's lies and deception. He and his world system want to deceive us into believing things that are untrue about God, so we won't trust Him in our day-to-day living.

We are engaged in a spiritual battle. Where do we fight this battle? In our minds. The battle is going from a distorted view of reality to seeing things the way God does.

*For the word of God is **living and powerful**, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and **is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart** (Hebrews 4:12).*

### **Gird up the loins of your mind** (1 Peter 1:13).

Gather up the loose loins of your thinking, so you don't stumble and can "*run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith*" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

***"In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us"***

(Romans 8:37). It would have been wonderful if God had said we were just conquerors. But He declares that we ***are more*** than conquerors. The victory over harmful thoughts is a gift through Christ which is ours to claim. Jesus Christ has already won the battle. He is our Overcomer.

May the mind of Christ my Savior

Live in me from day to day.

By His love and power controlling,

All I do and say. ~Kate B. Wilkinson