

## BETTER – MINDSET

Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch  
February 4, 2024

TEXT: Isaiah 26:3, II Cor. 10:25, Romans 12:2

Begin with Children's Sermon on bad thoughts and Jesus helping us control our thoughts.

Bad thoughts! Can you think of what some of those are? What are some of those thoughts you can think of? The kids came up with some.

I have been thinking a lot about them this week, as I have been preparing for this sermon...times when I know my mind has wandered away from the good and uplifting. And I reflected back to my growing up years – and how my family – especially my grandmother - and their comments often affected what I thought about myself and the world around me.

I know when I would get down or discouraged and would pout and start to have some self-pity, my mother and grandmother would often say, *"Nobody likes me - everybody hates me - I'm going to go eat worms."* I discovered that those words actually came from a nursery rhyme and an old camp song and are meant to be funny. In fact, there are several verses to the song – all about eating worms. But mother only said the first line: *"Nobody likes me – everybody hates me – guess I'll go eat worms."* I guess it was said to try to change my mood - but for me, it just seemed to accentuate the fact that I *was* feeling unloved and unimportant at the time! As I grew older, as a young teenager, I remember my mother telling me that I really wouldn't make friends if I went around thinking and acting like nobody liked me. I needed to look up and be more hopeful and happier and confident. People are more drawn to honey than sour grapes!

What you think about – what your mindset is – can affect your actions and reactions – and your relationships. It has been said that an average person thinks about 50,000 thoughts a day! And we have a choice on what those thoughts are. We can focus on what brings thoughts of good or evil, depression or joy, success or failure. Our thoughts can either draw out the best in ourselves and others – drawing us closer to what God has created us to be .... or our thoughts can draw out the worst. It is going to take some mental discipline – and some divine help of the Holy Spirit – to have a good thought life.

This new year – we are looking at ways we can be better – a new you for a new year. We've looked at better priorities and better relationships – and today we are looking at a better mindset and thought-life. Our hope and prayer is that our thoughts and attitudes will be more in line with Scripture and bring glory to God.

If there was ever one who surely went through a battle in his mind to find the right thoughts and mindsets, it would have to be the Apostle Paul. Being trained as a Pharisee and trained to hate Christians – his thoughts must have been negative – and focused more on destroying than of building up. But then Christ met him on the road to Damascus and truly changed his heart and his thinking. Where once there was hate – he now knew love. Where once he thought only of the world's ways and the way of thinking that tore down and destroyed –

now he built up and brought life and the light of Christ. All because Christ transformed his thinking!

Paul calls us to be transformed as well. We read in Romans 12:1-2 – *“Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.”*

We can be that better person – living more like God wants us to – by letting God change the way we think. You see, we can be so tempted to follow the ways of this world – and can listen so easily to the negative thoughts and lies of Satan – that we can fall into a self-absorbed, anxious - fearful or depressed mindset. But that is not the way of God. He wants to give us life – an abundant and joy-filled life, full of His love.

In Paul’s second letter to the church in Corinth, he says: *“We are humans but we don’t wage war as humans do. We use God’s mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning, and to destroy false arguments. We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.”*

We are truly in a battle in our minds – a battle for how we think and thus, how we live our lives. We have all sorts of human, sinful thoughts and reasoning that can enter our minds – thoughts of fear and doubt, worry, anger, vengeance and lust. And Satan tempts us to dwell on those thoughts and builds strongholds – barriers in our minds that try to keep us from finding God and knowing His love and peace. So, Paul says, we have to fight these strongholds with the weapons of the Spirit – and take every thought captive – capture those thoughts and yield them to Christ.

Have you ever found yourself having trouble going to sleep at night because you can’t get your brain to shut off? Your mind is just thinking too much – going over your worries and fears – your regrets and sorrow. Maybe you rehearse what happened that day – or maybe even last week or even years ago – and you try to figure out what you could have done differently or what you should say now to fix the problem. What is needed in those moments is to capture our thoughts for God! But how do we do that? It really isn’t enough to say to yourself, “Don’t think about this”. You really have to replace those thoughts with thoughts of God and His promises.

Not long ago, I read a devotional from Jesus Calling by Sarah Young, right before I went to bed. I thought it was very helpful in knowing how to capture those thoughts that can keep you up at night. It said to “Take charge of your night-thoughts before they take charge of you.” Take charge – capture those thoughts!

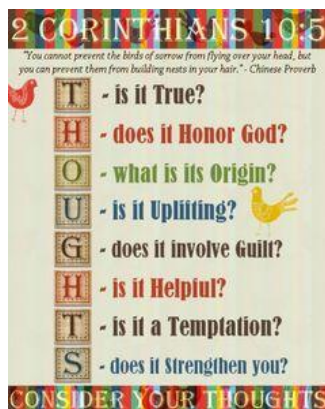
One way to do that is to dwell on promises of God – remembering His steadfast love and faithfulness. Knowing that as we cast all our cares on Him – He will carry those burdens and will give us a peace that passes all understanding. In fact, it says in Isaiah that God will *“keep in perfect peace all who trust in Him – who fix their thoughts on Him.”* Perfect peace means

that we can be calm knowing that God will be with us through our problems and trials. We can count on His promises because His promises never change.

In addition to changing our thoughts to the promises of God, we can also find comfort in God is: our Shepherd, Savior, Emmanuel, Prince of Peace. God is our anchor we can hold onto in the storms. God is our Hope and our Help – our Provider and Protector. Our eyes need to be on Him – and let these thoughts clear our mind and refresh our entire being.<sup>1</sup>

For a better mindset – and maybe even help with insomnia, we need to follow the advice of the psalmist in Psalm 63:6-8: *“I meditate on You in the night watches, for You have been my help, and in the shadow of Your wings, I sing for joy. My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me.”*

But obviously, it isn’t just at night where we find ourselves filled with “stinkin’ thinking” – and need to capture our thoughts and make them more Christ-centered and Spirit-filled. We have to begin our day and continue throughout the day asking God to renew our minds and get them focused on the right direction. I know I have to remind myself as I begin the day that God is my Shepherd and in Him, I have everything I need for that day. And when I start to find myself thinking negative or worrisome or fearful thoughts – I have to stop and think, “Is that how God wants me to think? Are the words I am hearing in my head congruent or like the words in Scripture? Does it reflect God’s glory?”

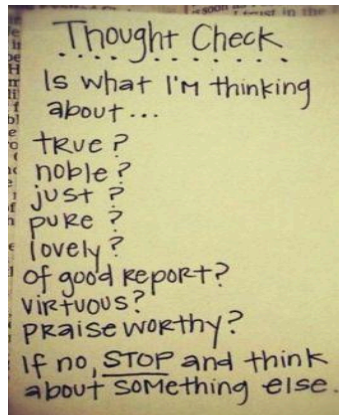


I ran across a slide on the internet that I thought was helpful – a checklist that we can use when we want to capture our thoughts. At the very top, you will see our Scripture from II Corinthians 10:5 – and then the words that are a little difficult to read are from a Chinese Proverb that say: *“You cannot prevent the birds of sorrow from flying over your head, but you can prevent them from building nests in your hair.”* Yes, we will all have bad or negative thoughts come into our heads from time to time – but we don’t have to dwell on them and let them take root! When they come we need to ask ourselves: <<Go through each of the questions – for thoughts>>

Ultimately, as writer Tim Talamentez says, *“the ability to have any success in taking every thought captive is rooted in spiritual disciplines, specifically to know the Word of God, to pray, to meditate .... Other disciplines will support these, but you have no means of distinguishing a God pleasing thought from a thought of darkness if you do not scrutinize it under the light of scripture. The desire to even think this comes from the Holy Spirit and prayer. As we have communion with God through His word and prayer, the Holy Spirit in us prays for us with groaning too deep for words.... and will help us have a better mindset!*

The Apostle Paul shares a checklist in Scripture we can use as well to help us find the right mindset. It is found in Philippians 4:8 and reads this way: <sup>8</sup> *And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.* <sup>9</sup> *Keep putting*

*into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.”*



If we find ourselves struggling in our thought life, we need to put all our thoughts through this filter that Paul describes here. Ask yourself – “Is what I’m thinking about:

Replace negative, damaging thoughts with positive, life-giving thoughts of God’s promises. Don’t listen to the lies of the world or self-deception – but to the truth of God’s truth and unending love for you. Focus on Christ more than yourself and trust Him to guide you and carry you through.

When I was growing up – all too often I would hear those words in my mind, “Nobody likes me, everybody hates me, I’m going to go eat worms”. Thankfully, because of the work of the Holy Spirit in my life – the words I can cling to now from Scripture are words from God saying: *“I have loved you with an everlasting love. With unfailing love, I have drawn you to myself.”* (Jeremiah 31:3) And I can replace those old negative thoughts with those uplifting words that: I am precious in God’s eyes and He takes delight in me with gladness. With His love, He will calm all my fears – and will rejoice over me with joyful songs! (Zephaniah 3:17)

What thoughts are you having this day?

Listen. Can you hear God’s thoughts?

## PRAYER

*Father, help me to trust You and have a steadfast mind. Thank You for the perfect peace that comes to me when I choose to trust You.*

## INVITATION

## RESOURCES

<sup>1</sup>Sarah Young, “Jesus Calling, Morning and Evening”, Thomas Nelson Press, 2015.

<sup>2</sup>Tom Talamantez, “Every Thought Captive, part 1”, June 28, 2016.

<https://foundationalknowledge.org/2016/06/28/every-thought-captive-part-one/>