TRANSFORMED: IN MY THINKING
Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch
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TEXT: II Corinthians 10:3-5, Romans 12:2, Proverbs 4:23

When Greg and I began our ministry together back in 1988, we were writing sermons on an IBM electric typewriter.   I loved that typewriter – but it soon died!   And Greg said, "I think it is time that we invest in a computer instead of a typewriter!"   I remember thinking, "Oh no!   I don't want a computer.   It will be too hard for me to use.   I won't understand it.   And Greg will be on it all the time."   I was VERY hesitant.   But we got our first computer that year – and our lives have never been the same!

I actually love my computer – and Greg says I am on it more than he is.   I love typing on it – but I also love how I can do research – like having a library at my fingertips.   And all the music and videos I can watch…not to mention the people I can connect with through email and Facebook.

But - there have been times when I have hated the computer – and that is when we have gotten a virus…or when someone hacks into our accounts.   Somehow or another, it seems we have opened some site or an innocent looking email, and it attaches a virus to our machine and wreaks havoc – taking control of our processing – and even sending out messages that we didn't write.

We had to make sure that we got a good virus protection plan.   And then update that virus protection because there are always new viruses coming.   It is a process of keeping up-to-date and taking those viruses captive – rather than the virus taking control and making us slaves.

We have been hearing a lot about that lately with the ransomware attacks that is affecting businesses like the Colonial Pipeline and even a pork and beef suppliers.   Companies are learning where they are vulnerable and trying to do what they can to protect themselves.   It is strongly recommended that they do regular back-ups of their data, do testing and to *"think ahead about how they will react should their networks are held hostage with ransomware".*[1]

You know, computers were at one time called "electronic brains".   They were designed to function a lot like our brains that God created in all its amazing intricacies and processes.   But our brains are different in that they feel or causes feeling – and processes and interprets data in a different way.[2]

Our thoughts – much like that data that is put into a computer – are really what controls our lives.   Everything we do always begins with a thought.   The Bible says the power of your mind, the power of your thoughts, has tremendous ability to shape your life for good or for bad.   Proverbs 4:23 says: *"Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts."*   We can think and believe ourselves into a positive life of joy and peace and happiness – or a negative life of bitterness, anger and despair.

Our minds are really a battleground for sin.   Sin is like the computer virus – coming in and wanting to control and shape your thoughts toward the bad.   Satan wants to destroy Christians by infecting their minds…with lies and temptations – with lures from the world's values and reminders of negative and painful words and events, repeated over and over again in our minds. These thoughts are false thoughts meant to distract you and disable you and make you incapable of living the life God has purposed for you.

God wants us to be mentally healthy – and transformed by the way we think – so that we can live that full and abundant life!   He wants to come in and be that virus protection for us.   He wants us to trade in Satan's lies and temptations for God's truth and blessings. He wants to provide a program to free our minds from destructive thoughts and direct our thoughts in the positive and uplifting direction.   And the best virus protection guard there is - is the Holy Spirit!

Romans 8:5-6 says, *"Those who are dominated by their sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. If your sinful nature controls your mind, there is death. But if the Holy Spirit controls your mind, there is life and peace."*

A managed mind – transformed by the Holy Spirit – will lead to peace of mind and confidence and hope and strength. But an unmanaged mind – will lead to conflict and stress and weakness and pain.

So how do we manage our minds – and transform them by the Holy Spirit?   The Apostle Paul tells us in our Scripture reading today from II Corinthians. Open your Bibles to II Corinthians 10 and let's hear verses 3-5:

³We are human, but we don't wage war as humans do.⁴We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments.⁵We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.

To have a managed and transformed mind, we can do that only through God's supernatural power.   Discipline alone will never lead us to victory in controlling thoughts that go in and are entertained in our minds.   We cannot do it by ourselves! We need to surrender our control to God's control – asking Him to fight for us - and give us the strength and power to tear down strongholds in our minds.

But what is a stronghold? A stronghold is a lie that I believe …any pattern of thinking that goes against the will of God.

One stronghold could be a personal attitude, something like unforgiveness.   I will never forgive that person.   Or I will never forgive myself.   That's a lie and a stronghold.

Or maybe they are voices spoken over you that you have come to believe.   I am no good. I will never amount to anything.   You're a failure and a burden and nobody loves you.   Those are strongholds and they are lies.

Other strongholds might be a value system that is in the world.   A view that says all that matters is money – or sex – or power. Or a view that is self-centered, ignoring or even hating our neighbors.   Racism and violence. Those are strongholds and they go against the will of God.

The Bible says we need to do all we can to knock all these strongholds out of our lives – and capture our thoughts and make them obedient to Christ. We don't have to be controlled by the negative and rebellious thoughts that enter our minds, but we can give them to God and let Him conquer them.

Martin Luther once said, *"You cannot keep birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair!"*

We all will have bad or negative or even untrue thoughts pop into our heads from time to time, but we have the power to choose what we will believe and allow to fill our minds. We may not be able to stop every single bad thought from coming to mind, but we have the power, through the Holy Spirit, to kick them out – and fill your mind instead with God's goodness and grace.

So let me share with you today, some ideas about how to take your thoughts captive to obey Christ.

1.   Pay attention to what you are thinking about.   What thoughts are you (or Satan) telling yourself regularly?   Make a list and write them down.   Ask yourself,

> "Where is this thought coming from?
>   Is it real or imagined?   And where is this thought taking
>   Me – to worry? To fear? To prayer?

2.   Once you have them written down – ask yourself – do these thoughts bring me closer to God? What would Jesus say if he heard you talking this way? Are your thoughts giving God glory and honor?

3.   And then take your thoughts to Scripture. How do they compare? We believe that Scripture is 100% true.   *"So, if God's word says one thing and your mind says another thing, you are the one who is wrong – not Scripture".*[3]

When we take our thoughts and capture them for Christ – we take the lies and trade them for the truth of Scripture.

For example, if I think, "no one will ever love me" or "I am no good and not worthy" …. those lies can be replaced with the truth of Scripture that says, *"You are precious and loved"* (Isaiah 43:4) and that *"Christ died for you, even when we were still sinners."* (Romans 5:8)

If we hear the lie the says, "giving up and resisting this particular sin is too hard.   I can't do it." – we can replace that lie with the truth that *"I can do all things through Christ who gives*

me strength." (Phil. 4:13)

4.   Once we have compared our thoughts and the Scripture, we need to speak those Scriptures over our lives again and again to change the pathway your brain has gone into pathway of hope and healing.

Write them down and post them around the house or in your car or anywhere you can see if frequently and start to hear that word of truth loudly in your mind, more so than the default words your brain has been saying. For example, if you are feeling judged or discouraged over past mistakes, start learning the Scripture, *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."* (Romans 8:1)

If you are feeling anxious or afraid, start learning the Scripture: *"Be strong and courageous and do not be afraid, for the Lord is with you – and God is faithful – He will never leave you or forsake you."* (Joshua 1:9, Deut. 31:8)

5.   Another important part of taking thoughts captive is sharing your struggles with a trusted friend or perhaps with a pastor or counselor. If we are struggling with our thoughts and fears – to keep them hidden inside you, they may flourish and overwhelm you.   But when we talk to another person and expose them to the light – we can start to take those thoughts captive and get the help we need to overcome them.

6.   And then, through prayer – put God right in the midst of all those thoughts and believe He is   there to give you the victory. God has promised that if we trust Him completely and not rely on our own thoughts and understandings – He will direct our paths.   (Proverbs 3:5-6) He will take care of us no matter what.

Begin each day – praying for God to be in your thoughts and in your thinking and understanding – and believe that He will walk with you and will be there to supply your every need.

And then end each day by looking at all that God has done for you. Rather than focusing on the negative and rehearsing all the worries or fears you have – count your blessings.   And follow God's plan for our minds: *"Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right.   Think about things that are pure and lovely and dwell on the fine, good things in others.   Think about all you can praise God for and be glad about."* (Phil. 4:8)   And what you will find is that you will sleep much better and wake up more refreshed and ready to start the day again with hope and the peace of God.

A prayer, written in the 16th century, sums this up this whole idea of God transforming the way we think – and being the center of all we do and say. I invite us to pray it together as we close today:

God be in my head and in my thinking.
God be in my eyes, and in my looking,

God be in my mouth and in my speaking.
God be in my heart and in my understanding.[4]

INVITATION

RESOURCES

I was inspired by Rick Warren and his book and sermon on Tranformed and My Mental Health.

[1] New York Times, *"White House warns Companies to Act Now on Ransomware Defenses"* by David Sanger and Nicole Periroth. June 3, 2021.
https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/03/us/politics/ransomware-cybersecurity-infrastructure.html

[2] *"Is the human brain like a computer, if so, in how many ways and why is it different?"*
https://www.researchgate.net/post/Is-the-human-brain-like-a-computer-if-so-in-how-many-ways-and-why-is-it-different

[3] I was very blessed by this article that gave me an outline that I could adapt and use.
Equipping Godly Women, *"Taking Every Thought Captive"*,
https://equippinggodlywomen.com/faith/take-every-thought-captive/

[4] https://hymnary.org/text/god_be_in_my_head_and_in_my_under