

The Power of Choice
As Presented by Lisa Bishop
Air Dates: January 23-27, 2023

Day One

If I were to plug into your mind, what would I hear? What thoughts do you find yourself playing on repeat?

If your thoughts were a Spotify playlist, what would the title be? Think about it. You know, it's been said that your thoughts determine your life. In other words, where your thoughts go, your life will follow. Where are your thoughts leading you? What thoughts do you find yourself dwelling on? What words do you find yourself regularly rehearsing? Are they life-giving, producing gratitude, hope, and peace? Or do your thoughts lead to worry, anxiety, perhaps even anger, self-pity, or self-defeat?

There's a quote that says, "Each day stand guard at the door of your mind." As challenging as it is, you have the responsibility to be the curator of the information you consume and the things you dwell on. Now it's not possible to choose every thought that enters your mind: some will slip through the cracks. But you totally have the power to pick the thoughts you will allow to penetrate your heart and mind.

So, stand guard at the door! Picture yourself like a bouncer at a concert venue. Be ready to kick out any thought that is not allowed a ticket of admission! When a thought enters your mind that does not align with God's thoughts, ask God to help you give it the boot. Thoughts like:

- I will never amount to anything.
- I am a failure.
- I don't have what it takes.
- God doesn't really care about me.
- I am not lovable.
- I will always be alone.
- I will never measure up.
- I will always be stuck in this addiction.
- My life will never change

These thoughts do not deserve renting space in your head and just because you think something, it does not make it true.

Choose what you will focus on. Notice I used the word choose. Oftentimes I think we take the position of being a casual bystander of our thoughts, we leave our thoughts unchecked and let them consume us and ultimately rule us. We can get captured by our thoughts rather than holding our thoughts captive to Christ. Second Corinthians 10:5 instructs us to, "...*Demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*"

Subject all of your thinking to Jesus. Examine your thoughts to see if they align with God's thoughts and choose to do something with the ones that are not well-pleasing to God before they enter your heart and become a part of you.

In the next 24 hours, take inventory of your thoughts. Are they life-giving or life sucking? Are they worthy of praise or do they cause a panic? Being mindful of what you meditate on is a really important discipline as followers of Jesus.

Day Two

Have you ever thought about the choices you make on a daily basis? Proverbs 18:21 says, *“Words kill, words give life; they’re either poison or fruit—you choose”* (MSG).

You choose.

Now I know you are very aware of what it means to choose but here is a refresher. The dictionary definition of *choose* is, “To select from a number of possible alternatives; decide on and pick out. To determine.”

I want to share that definition with you because I think sometimes it can be easy to forget that you have the ability to be selective about what you say. All too often you can find yourself saying everything you think before putting your words through a holy filter. Minding your words takes intention.

Do your words—the things you say to yourself about yourself, the things you say to your co-worker, spouse, friend, neighbor—act as poison, bringing destruction and death to a soul? Or are your words life-giving to those who hear them?

In the workplace it can be all too tempting to have loose lips that spew gossip, criticism, and complaining. When you are with your friends you can easily fall into the trap of dissing someone who is not around and talking behind their back. Don’t do that. You do not want to be the person dragging others down with their words. And if you find yourself in a group that is getting their kicks by criticizing others, run for the hills. Refuse to join in. Words are a slippery slope.

In Luke 6:45, Jesus says, *“A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.”*

The words you say in your head and out loud reflect something deeper. They flow from what’s in your heart. If there is bitterness, greed, jealousy, pride, anger, superiority, or inferiority in your heart, your words will follow suit. But when there is love, joy, gratitude, peace, trust and confidence in Jesus in your heart, your words will be like fruit. Sweet and soothing to the soul.

At any given moment you have a number of possible alternatives when it comes to choosing what comes out of your mouth. Choose your words wisely and remember that today you have the power to decide if you will bring life to the people you interact with or death. Choose life.

Day Three

Are you speaking the language of heaven or hell? “Grumbling is the language of hell.” That statement stopped me in my tracks. It felt so poignant, so in your face, so true. And grumbling comes directly from your disposition, your attitude.

Philippians 2:14-16 says, *“Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, ‘children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.’ Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.”*

So what is attitude anyway? It's the mental state or position you take as it relates to your life, and circumstances surrounding you. Your attitude is not what you think but how you think it, and your attitude frames every event in your life whether you realize it or not. Out of your attitude flows your enjoyment of life and gratitude for all your blessings or your disappointment and anger at how things have turned out. Everyday your attitude is challenged by other people and by external factors.

My attitude tends to be challenged when I am driving, when a coworker is getting on my nerves, or when someone is in the self-checkout lane at the grocery store with 50 items! Your attitude might tend to go sideways in similar ways or maybe it's the weather that you let affect your attitude or the fact that it's Monday... again. The point is, while you cannot control everything that happens in life you can control your attitude. You can choose your disposition on a daily basis.

If you were to monitor your attitude, what would you notice? Is your attitude set on positive or negative? Glass half-empty or half full? Is your disposition dialed to joyful in all circumstances, patient, forgiving, sacrificial. Or is your attitude's automatic response set to grumpy, impatient, bitter, critical, or self-serving? When things are not going as you planned or people are not acting in the way you want, how will you react? Will you let a negative or inconsiderate person ruin your day or tempt you to lose your cool? Or will you be in control of your own internal weather? I am not saying it is always easy, but it is possible. You are the master of your internal world and you have a Master who will help you when you ask him, Jesus.

As a matter of fact, Philippians 2:5 is an imperative for every follower of Christ. The apostle Paul says, you should have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. As ambassadors of Christ, we are called to be like Jesus. And a Christlike attitude will make a difference in you and enable you to make a difference in the world around you.

Day Four

A few years ago, I was sitting in a coffee shop and there was a pen on the table that read, "Choose the pain of discipline over the pain of regret." I think it was marketing a weight loss program but isn't that a powerful statement that can apply to just about anything in life? The choices you make today will impact your tomorrow. And while the decisions and actions you choose today may be hard and require all of the strength, determination and willpower you can muster, they will ultimately lead to your future. Will you choose the pain of discipline over the pain of regret? All too often you can sell out to the pleasure of today and be left to deal with the consequences of your choices.

It reminds me of one of my favorite verses, 1 Corinthians 10:13: "*No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*"

Life will have its fair share of temptations. Whether it's the temptation to lash out at your spouse, get angry in traffic, fall back on your word, or flirt with a married coworker. The temptation to fail to follow-through on a project or forgo your healthy eating and workout plan because binging on Netflix or a bag of potato chips just seems more satisfying in the moment. Now let me be clear, I have been known to binge on potato chips so you are not alone. The point is, we all have desired outcomes for our marriage, our careers, our relationships, our physical, mental, and spiritual health. Achieving the things you say you want will require sacrifice. Becoming the person God created you to be will require you to overcome temptations rather than choosing to let them overcome you. You will need to exchange the pursuit of instant gratification for the pain of discipline.

Jesus will help you to master self-control rather than be mastered by lack of it. Don't think you are going to be able to endure a temptation when you are in the heat of it without a plan of escape. Making decisions in advance of temptations is critical. Avoid temptation when you can so you don't get caught up in it. Don't put yourself in situations that will lure you into compromise. And remember that when you

are tempted, not if, when, God will also provide a way out. He gives you the strength and the will to choose to endure the pull of the temptation, to bear the weight of it but not be weighed down by it!

Where is discipline lacking in your life? What new life-giving choices will you create in this new year? Choose the pain of discipline now over the pain of regret later.

Day Five

Have you ever felt fearful, anxious, or depressed? Overwhelmed by darkness that seems to be surrounding you on all sides? There have been times in my Christian journey that have felt dark. Stretches of days and sometimes weeks or months when weariness has weighed on me. And uncertain and painful times when I have worked hard to muster up hope while clinging to God trying to remember his faithfulness.

Have you experienced that? If you have been following Jesus any amount of time, there will come seasons in your life when the darkness will try to overwhelm you. It's in those times that choosing a new perspective will pull you through. We don't like dark seasons. They seem unfruitful and unproductive. But if you try to see darkness with new eyes it can produce hope.

It reminds me of a seed. When you are trying to grow a new plant or tomato garden, what do you do with the seeds? You bury them! The hope of producing something beautiful and fruitful begins with being buried underground and surrounded by dirt. It's in the darkness that over time the seed sprouts in the soil and starts to rise up, breaking through the surface. What was once buried becomes flourishing and fruitful.

Our seeds of faith are similar. This is when you must choose to see the darkness as a time where God is with you and providing for you in every season, even in the darkness. Because that is who God is. He is provider. So that means that even in the most difficult times there is provision, but it will require a new perspective and hope in the waiting.

Romans 8:26-28 (MSG) reminds us:

"The moment we get tired in the waiting, God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. He knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God. That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good."

Just like the seed of the plant needs to be watered, nourished and exposed to sunlight, so does your faith. To fully experience the hope-filled perspective of dark seasons you will need to nourish your faith by spending time reading the Bible, receiving God's love, rehearsing God's truth, and praying prayers of thanksgiving. These practices will be the nourishment, protection, and provision you need for your faith to flourish.

When you feel surrounded by darkness remember that Jesus is the one who is ultimately surrounding you, covering you and hemming you in on all sides. Seeds sprout in dirt. All you need is faith the size of a mustard seed.