

Think about What You Think About

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Day One

I want to examine one of the most critical areas of your life—your thought life. Our thought patterns are controlling us in ways we often do not even realize. Truly we must learn to think about what we think about.

In 2 Corinthians 10:5 Paul says we are to *bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*.

Honestly, we are in a daily battle as to who will control our thoughts. And when we practice this most important principle of bringing every individual thought into captivity—making certain our thoughts stay within biblical guidelines—it is absolutely transformational. Most of your problems begin with wrong thought patterns, and so often you are unaware of it because you don't think about what you are thinking about.

Philippians 4:8 gives us some clear guidelines for our thoughts.

Finally, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things (Philippians 4:8).

The secret to controlling your thought life is to agree to these limits and to bring your thoughts into these parameters. These are guardrails for your thought life, and when you stay within those guardrails, you avoid lots of accidents, lots of problems.

If you're driving on a mountain road that is curvy with steep drop offs, staying within those guardrails is the difference in life and death, right? In the same way, God has set boundaries for our thinking, and within those boundaries we have tremendous freedom. But when we choose to ignore the guardrails and drive wherever we wish, we lose our freedom because we become victims of our own wrong thought patterns. We find ourselves in a mental wreck of some kind, allowing wrong thoughts and thought patterns to steal our joy, ruin our peace, and cause us to say and do things that are not helpful.

This is one of the most important and critical spiritual disciplines in the Christian life, and not too many of us take it seriously, to our own detriment.

Day Two

Did you realize being open-minded can be very harmful if that means your thoughts are out of control and take you places you really don't want to go. As Christians we need to learn to bring our thoughts into captivity and think within biblically prescribed limits, because what we think is what we are. I'm encouraging you to think about what you think about.

In Philippians 4:8 we are given clear boundaries—important guardrails for our thought life. The first one is true. Untrue thoughts are not allowed, and that includes the untrue speculations and imaginings that

we often indulge in. For example, do you imagine the worst and worry about things that have not yet occurred? You are not thinking true thoughts when you do.

The second guardrail is noble, which means honorable, dignified, excellent. It's possible to think something that is true, but not honorable. For instance, thinking "gossipy" thoughts about others, even if the facts are true, is not honorable thinking.

There's a third limit set on our thinking, and that is right. All of us dislike unfair treatment. And yet how often do we allow ourselves to think unfair, unjust thoughts about others. Sometimes we have prejudiced thinking toward people, even toward other races and cultures. That kind of thinking is not right.

Then, our thoughts must also be pure. This covers immoral thoughts and sexual fantasies. No one is immune to these thoughts, and our society certainly promotes them. It is necessary to make certain our thoughts are pure.

Next comes lovely. Is your thought life full of love, inspiring love or affection? Many times, our thoughts may pass all the other tests, but they'll fall short on this point.

In addition to true, noble, right, pure and lovely, our thoughts must be admirable or worthy of praise. If we could read what you were thinking, would we admire your thoughts?

The guardrails are clear. Now, our challenge is to bring our thoughts into captivity—to stay within these guardrails.

Day Three

I'm examining our thought lives—the thought patterns we are often in bondage to because we have not learned to bring every thought into captivity and make our thoughts obedient to Christ. Philippians 4:8 gives us clear parameters for our thoughts. They are to be true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable. Let's look at how to begin that process.

First, you have to truly begin to think about what you are thinking about at any given moment. You must literally examine individual thoughts, one by one to make sure they fit within the Philippians boundaries.

I can testify captive thinking becomes more attractive the more you practice it. I remember once starting to get into some self-pity thoughts. And as I realized it, I said to myself, "I don't want to be depressed. I don't want to feel sad. I will not think these self-pity thoughts." I brought those specific self-pity thoughts into captivity, refusing to let them intrude my mind, and I then was free from the burden of self-pity. That was when I began to actually practice this principle of bringing individual thoughts into captivity. It was a new reality to me—that I could actually decide not to think about what I should not think about!

Now, once you screen and test those individual thoughts, the question is, how do you stop thinking the wrong thoughts? You can determine they're wrong, but you can't stop thinking them! You have to use what I call the Replacement Theory. Replace the wrong thought with a right thought.

You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you (Isaiah 26:3).

We have a replacement thought as Christians that is guaranteed to work every time. And that replacement thought is Jesus Christ. When in doubt, think about Jesus!

You may have to replace wrong thoughts every minute or two. But don't let that discourage you. Just keep replacing. You're changing habits that are ingrained; you're addressing thought patterns that have

dug ruts into your brain, and you keep getting stuck in those ruts. Bringing thoughts into captivity, forcing yourself to refuse to get in those wrong thought ruts, is a battle. The enemy of your soul will continue to trap you in those ruts, but if you're a Christian, you have the power of the Holy Spirit to refuse to let him win. Don't give up; just replace the wrong thought with the right thought, as many times as necessary.

Day Four

You've heard the phrase that our computer age generated: garbage in, garbage out. It's not only true of computers, it's also true of our minds. We're examining how we can bring our thoughts into captivity, how we can change wrong thought patterns that keep us mired in deception and lies and misery.

One important element in creating a right thought life is to carefully guard what you put into your mind. If you allow garbage in, your thought life will reflect that input.

What do you read? Trashy novels, junk on the internet? Do you spend more time reading God's Word and good Christian material than you do reading the world's literature, even if it's not necessarily evil? You will never change your thinking if you're reading trash or failing to read the Bible consistently with top priority over all other reading.

What do you look at on television and videos? What you see with your eyes has a stronger impact on you than what you read or hear—combined! If you're pouring visual junk into your mind and not screening what you allow yourself to watch or see, your thought life will be filled with those images, and it is very difficult to get rid of them. Believe me, what you look at is determining to a large degree what you think about.

What do you listen to? Are you soaking up the world's music? Much of the lyrics are not within the guidelines of Philippians 4:8. What kind of conversations do you listen to? Do you subject yourself to off-color conversations, gossipy conversations, critical conversations? Your thinking won't change with that kind of input going into your mind.

If you will change the input into your mind, you'll be amazed how your thinking will change. Of course, an essential is the Word of God, poured into your mind regularly and systematically. Scripture memorization is a fantastic way to program your mind correctly. Good reading has helped me immensely.

I simply can't overemphasize the importance of guarding your mind closely. The world we live in is full of garbage, and we've become desensitized to it. Remember, garbage in, garbage out.

Day Five

I've been urging you to think about what you think about—to become more and more aware of wrong thought patterns. Those wrong thoughts are keeping you in bondage—in bondage to fear and doubt and sin of all kinds. I've been talking about bringing your thoughts into the captivity of Philippians 4:8, thinking about what is true, noble, right pure, lovely, and admirable. I want to examine the great benefits that come when you practice this biblical mind control.

For right thinking we are promised two wonderful things in Romans 8:6:

The mind set on the flesh is death, but the but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace (Romans 8:6).

Life and peace. You can't buy them, you can't earn them, you can't manufacture them. They come to you as a result of having a mind set on the Spirit of God, having a thought life that stays carefully within biblical boundaries.

This is such an important Christian principle, that I've written a book on it entitled *Think About What You Think About*. I am convinced that in my own life, the pathway to freedom and joy has been greatly impacted by learning to think about what I think about and bringing my wrong thought patterns in line with Philippians 4:8.

The book, which is newly updated and edited, gives you much more help in how to be set free from the wrong thought patterns of your life. Believe me, whether you realize it or not, you may be suffering greatly because you've developed some truly wrong thought patterns and they are holding you in bondage. You may have some deep ruts in your brain caused by wrong thought patterns that have caused you sadness and all kinds of problems. But you can learn to put this spiritual discipline in your life that will reverse those wrong thought patterns and set you free.

I can testify to you, as one who is still learning this principle, that it has been probably the most life-changing guideline for me. It took me years to realize I needed to control my thought life, by God's grace and to his glory. I just never thought about what I thought about. But when I began, I was amazed at how making some real changes in my thought patterns changed me, for the good! I recommend it to you very highly.

If you think my book, *Think About What You Think About*, would be helpful, you can order it on amazon.