

Think on Right Things

Lesson 7 in "More Like Jesus"

Lesson Aim: To show us that the activity of our minds plays an important part in our becoming more like Jesus.

Key Verse: Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. Col. 3:1-2

The Battle of Life

It is generally true that our spiritual and emotional condition is an indication of the kinds of things our minds have been dwelling upon. Much of the battle of life takes place in the mind!

Peace, joy, positive expectation and cheerfulness are all very much the result of what we have been thinking about. So are discouragement, fear, bad moods, frustrations and confusion!

Often we say that circumstances or people "made me angry." That's not true! It's our response to the situation, and the way we have been thinking about it, that makes us angry! Until we learn to assume personal responsibility for what we set our minds upon, there is little chance of changing how we feel!

Thoughts focused on the following will produce victory in our minds and emotions and in our life in general:

God's Power	Our eternal reward
God's faithfulness	Things worthy of praise
The love of God	Health, friends, provision
God's forgiveness	Blessings of the past

Likewise, thoughts centered on negative things will produce defeat in us.

Injustice	Satan's power
The failures of others	Rejection by others
Our past defeats	Sickness, other needs
Difficulties	Fearful imaginations

Again, our thoughts directly affect our feelings and actions. And what we think about in the physical world shapes our spiritual experience in important ways.

Our personal joy, relationships with others, and usefulness to God all depend very much on the kinds of things we spend our day thinking about!

Scriptures to Consider

Many people don't realize the power they have over their thoughts. They act as though they are at the mercy of their mind; following it around like a herdsman trying to walk a frisky young bull on a rope.

That's not true! Numerous scriptures give us the responsibility to determine what we set our minds on, and others identify the fruit of that. What is the key thought in each of these scriptures?

Isaiah 26:3 - You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. (nkjv)

Matthew 22:37 - Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind

Romans 8:5-8 - Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind

governed by the Spirit is life and peace.⁷ The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.⁸ Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

Philippians 3:18-19 - For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.

Colossians 3:1-2 - Our key verses

Think on These Things

Philippians 4:4-9 is a rich text, with its simple principles and clear instruction.

Verse 4 calls us to always rejoice "in the Lord." That doesn't mean that we're excited and joyful about difficulty itself. (In a certain way though, James 1 *does* call us to that!) It means that in the midst of the difficulty we rejoice in God's faithfulness, power, mercy, sovereignty and knowledge, for example, rather than focusing on the problem. If we center our thoughts on *Him*, and rejoice in our hearts that such a God is caring for us in this difficulty, things will look a lot better!

Verse 5 tells us that our Lord is near; He is at hand. We can persevere, knowing that He will take care of things in the right way at the right time. This can bring us stability and joy.

Verse 6 says that we're not to be anxious about things. Certainly we recognize the need or difficulty, but we're not ruled by anxiety. In earnest prayer and supplication we lift our concern to God, thanking Him for taking care of it as He knows best. This brings release to our emotions and allows us to walk peaceably through the circumstance!

We're told in verse 7 then, that if we do this, the peace of God will actually guard our hearts and minds. It will protect them from intruders of fear, worry and doubt, and their resultant depression and ulcers.

This "peace of God" is something we can't understand. It's too big for our minds. But if we do what God says, He will send it as a watchman to guard the door to our heart and mind. Fantastic!

Verses 8 and 9 tell us specifically what we are to set our minds on. They are things which are:

True - Too often, much of what we set our minds on is not true. It is imagination, or the result of misunderstanding or lack of information. How often have you fought a battle in your mind, only to realize later it was based completely on paranoia, suspicion or imagination?

Consider this. Fear is based on imagination; the imagination of something that is often untrue, or which won't ever happen as we imagine it.

Further, fear is often present only because we imagine the event taking place without the grace of God, which will most certainly be present if the feared event actually does take place! We don't have grace and strength for that event yet, because we don't need it yet! We don't have grace today for tomorrow's challenges. It's the Mt. 6:31-34 concept.

Let's also remember that the materialism of our world offers a false hope of pleasure, lasting satisfaction, and peace. The promises of advertising are frequently *not* true. We become frustrated when we seek "life" in things that can't truly give life. We are drawn away from God and His peace, when we allow ourselves to be drawn into the vanities of this world. Genuine peace and satisfaction are found only in a walk with God, through Jesus Christ. *That*, is true!

Noble, Honest, Honorable - Things that are worthy of reverence. That in life which demonstrates God's sovereignty and rule, and draws our hearts toward Him. We must refuse to let our minds dwell upon this world's evils, corruption, crime, and other bad news.

Right, Just - That which is right in *God's* mind. Whatever is in harmony with righteousness and justice. We reject thoughts that center on vengeance, contention, or unrighteous gain.

Pure - Uncontaminated, undefiled. Has same root as "holy". Certainly deals with immorality. Possibly addresses motives and affections too. Consider Psalm 24:2-5.

Lovely, Loveable - Pleasing, agreeable. Things that promote peace rather than conflict. Refusing to dwell upon anything that stirs up negative feelings; which are often based upon imagination, suspicion or self-interest anyway!

Admirable, Of Good Report - Dwelling upon that which is positive and constructive, rather than negative and destructive. Things which speak well of another; their strengths rather than their weaknesses. Thoughts which if spoken, would cause another to think more highly of the one you are thinking about.

The next two may summarize the first six, or they may be additional points.

Excellent, Virtue - Pondering that which promotes our thinking highly of another.

Praiseworthy - That which is worthy of praise in ourselves, others, our church, family, nation, and so forth. Refusing to dwell upon the negative.

Certainly this text does not call us to ignore the bad around us, but we are not to let our minds dwell upon those things. We are to center our thoughts upon God and godliness.

Closing Thoughts

Truly the battle is in our mind! Developing the discipline of thinking about the right things will profoundly shape our life.

We must deliberately choose to set our minds on that which is true or pure. Satan constantly sets thoughts and imaginations before us, to defeat us.

It's not sin to have an evil thought come to your mind. That's simply temptation, and temptation isn't sin. But it becomes sin, or at least can lead to sin, when we dwell upon something that is contrary to righteousness.

We all have patterns of thought which we repeatedly follow and they produce life or death depending on their source. We must learn to recognize the path that Satan leads us down toward the pits of discouragement, anxiety, confusion, grouchiness, or fear. We don't have to go with him!

Consider this too. Don't we often experience defeat when we dwell upon something in ourselves or others that we can't change anyway? Isn't that ridiculous!

Satan has gained an entrance into the mind of many, to stimulate overwhelming negative thought patterns through the sins of others against them. Often counsel and prayer are needed before victory comes. This is an important ministry of the church.

So what will we do? We know that if we are to grow into the image of Christ, we must flee evil and pursue righteousness.

Applying that truth here; the best (only?) way to get the victory over negative thoughts is to consciously set our minds on positive, edifying thoughts! That responsibility rests with each of us. With me. With you!

Picture yourself picking up a potted plant and moving it from one place to another. It is true, that in a similar way you can take your mind off of one thing and place it on another! *Set your minds on - - - !*

There are certainly Christians who struggle with negative thought patterns because of demonic strongholds. Those who are part of a vibrant, God-loving and truth-honoring community will find powerful resources at their disposal to help gain the victory.

Prayer:

Jesus, your Word is quick and powerful, and reaches into my innermost being. I need your help to respond to these important truths.

I hereby accept responsibility for my thoughts at a new level, and I need your help. Please remind me when my mind is set on negative, untrue or unlovely thoughts. Help me to actually move my mind to the kinds of things that qualify in Philippians 4:4-9.

Please show me the negative thought patterns in my life and lead me to life-giving ways of thinking. Help me to see life through your eyes, and in light of your presence and power in me. Thank you, Jesus.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

- 1) How important and practical do you think this lesson is?
 - a) Oh, there's some truth to it but it's not a big deal.
 - b) It's something I'll need to think about further.
 - c) Actually, I think it's a matter of life and death.

- 2) What is Paul telling us to do in the midst of difficulty (in Philip. 4:4), and upon what basis can he give such radical instruction?

- 3) What does "noble/honest/honorable" mean in Philip. 4:8?

- 4) What does it mean to set our mind on things that are "lovely/loveable"?

- 5) What have we meant in this lesson by saying "the battle is in the mind"?

- 6) How realistic is this thing of deliberately taking your mind off of one thing and setting it on another?
 - a) It sounds good but life just doesn't work that nicely.
 - b) Some people can probably do that but I simply can't.
 - c) It is within reach of all who surrender to the rule of God in their life and who truly want to be more like Jesus.

- 7) What do you think about this statement? "It's clear, we *do* have the responsibility, and obviously the power, to set our minds on right things; and that's half the battle of spiritual victory and Christian growth."

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