

# Right Thinking

## The Challenges We Face Today

One of the challenges disciples face today is the lack of discipline in controlling our thought life.

- We often entertain thoughts we know we shouldn't and these thoughts affect what we do and say.
- Our minds for the most part are undisciplined and they have been that way for so long that we can no longer control what we think.
- We are not aware of the impact that uncontrolled thinking is having on our lives and the lives of those around us.
- We are not aware of the impact of our thought life on our spiritual walk and we do not realize that we are dishonoring God in our thinking.
- We don't realize that negative emotions such as fear, worry, doubt, and stress are symptoms of an undisciplined thought life.

## Lesson Truth

God created us and gave us a wonderful, powerful mind. As we learn to harness our mind for God's purpose, we will experience spiritual transformation and more of God's peace and joy.

## Lesson Goal

The goal of this lesson is for you to learn how to gain control of your thought life and to begin taking every thought captive to make them obey Jesus.

## Lesson Discussion

### Take Every Thought Captive



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2 Corinthians 10:5 ESV "We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ"

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Here Paul is saying that we must constantly pay attention to what we are thinking about and bring every thought that comes into our mind captive so that it obeys the commands and teachings of our Master.

Our minds can be our greatest ally or our strongest enemy. An undisciplined mind is Satan's doorway into the life of a believer. Our mind provides Satan plenty of opportunities to keep a foothold in our lives and keep us from becoming what God says we must become.

It may seem like an impossible task to obey God's command to take every thought captive. But we already know that God never expects something of us that is not possible to do.

The tendency is to live our lives with no thought or intent toward Spirit-controlled thinking. We often allow our minds to go in whatever direction it chooses. Although we have the ability to focus, much of our thinking is wasted on valueless thinking.

Satan fights our attempts to bring our minds under the control of the Spirit because He knows that will demolish his foothold in our lives. Many of Satan's tactics are aimed at our undisciplined minds.

## Our Thoughts Affect Our Behavior

How many thoughts do we have each day, or every hour or even every minute? We ponder thousands of thoughts throughout the day. Our mind is continuously thinking about something all the time.

The fact that we have so many thoughts is not in itself bad. The number of thoughts a person has varies by individual. Some will have more difficulty bringing every thought captive because their minds are racing along at the speed of light.

One dynamic of our thought life is that our thoughts influence our emotions, which in turn influence our behavior. Negative thinking can create negative emotions, which then can produce ungodly behavior.

The only way to live a godly and holy life is by entertaining godly and holy thoughts. As we develop the “mind of Christ” in our thinking, our behavior will reflect His life more and more.

Temptation usually comes to us in the form of thoughts. It may begin with such physical senses as seeing or hearing, and our mind interprets what our physical senses experience.



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Ephesians 2:1-3 ESV “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”

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Many of the thoughts that come to us are worldly, carnal, godless, useless, and frivolous, and they do not honor God. Cravings, desires, wants, and other temptations are constantly bombarding us.

How much of our daily life is wasted entertaining useless or godless thinking? How

much more would our life bring value to God if we replaced those thoughts with God-honoring thinking?

For instance, if I happen to see a sensual ad on the television, I may immediately begin to think sensual thoughts, and it becomes very easy to give way to more godless thinking.

This can also happen with food, beverages, and merchandise ads; beautiful women; handsome men; and a hundred other things that are designed to engage your thinking, your emotions, and your desires.

But if I can take that first thought captive so that other similar thoughts do not immediately follow, I can stop the potential temptation to entertain sensual, lustful, or wanton thinking and avert potentially sinful behavior.

Today with the Internet, sensuality and pornography are only a few keystrokes away. Whenever we see something that triggers sensual thinking and physical desire, unless we bring that first thought captive immediately, we are soon overcome and give in to the temptation.

Another example is unjustified anger. Someone does something to us and the first thought through the gate is one of personal offense. Our thinking engages our emotions and then the accompanying angry behavior.

If that first thought can be taken captive and looked at in the light of God’s Word, we can avert the sinful behavior that usually results. We bring that first thought to be obedient to Jesus so that any other residual thoughts and the accompanying anger do not take hold.

So we see that our thinking has a direct affect on our emotions and our behavior. If we can learn to take our thoughts captive and not allow ourselves to entertain wrong thinking, we will begin to experience more godly and holy living and thinking.

## Our Thoughts Can Hinder Prayer

One avenue where our thinking can negatively affect us is in our prayer time. This is the place where Satan can gain a substantial victory over us and keep us in bondage if we're not careful.

Often we don't feel like praying and we don't think we have time to pray. This is a thinking process we go through. These are just excuses that Satan places in our minds. It is very easy to contemplate such thoughts, agree with them, and accept them.

As a result we end up having an ineffective prayer life and an ineffective Bible reading life. The same goes for other spiritual disciplines. We must refrain from entertaining such thinking by stopping these lies at the first thought and taking it captive to obey Jesus.

Even when we do take time to pray, often we don't know how to pray or we just go through the motions. Effective prayer requires focused, concentrated thinking about God so we can hear what He is saying to us.



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Hebrews 3:1 ESV "Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession."

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Thoughts will try to invade your prayer time and get your mind off of God. It requires discipline to control the flood of outside thoughts. You must force your mind away from ungodly thinking and keep it away.

The discipline you must develop is to recognize the intruding thoughts, realize you don't have to entertain them, and then discard them. When something comes in to interrupt your prayer time, simply take it captive and then get rid of it.

We must forcefully bring our thinking to line up with the commands and teachings of Jesus. We must discipline ourselves in our prayer life to

reject every thought that is not an expression of God's love and obedience to Him.

If routine or negative thoughts persist in your prayer time and you are being bombarded by them, then you will need to find simple ways to break the power of those thoughts. You must overpower those thoughts with the power of God's Word or Jesus' name.

What has worked for me when I am being bombarded by thoughts is to simply say "in the name of Jesus" over and over continuously and at the same time think about Jesus. Sometimes I may have to do this for several minutes before my mind is calm and the thoughts have slowed to a manageable trickle or stopped.



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Psalm 119:30 ESV "I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I set your rules before me.."

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Psalm 16:8 ESV "I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken."

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In your prayer time set your heart on Him and keep Him before you at all times. Prayer is a spiritual battle because Satan does not intend to let you concentrate on God.

Unless you are able to develop a regular and effective prayer time with the Lord, you will not have much success in following Jesus. You must develop controlled thinking in your prayer time first, and then throughout your day to bring every thought captive.

As you discipline yourself to take every thought captive, you will find that your day will go very differently. You will begin to experience more of His peace and joy throughout your day.

## Thoughts Affect Relationships

How we think about others in our lives is the primary determiner of how our relationships will turn out. Negative thinking toward others results in poor relationships.

You may have heard it said that if you cannot say something nice about someone, don't say anything. You can apply that to thinking as well. If you cannot think something nice about someone, don't think about them at all.

It is easy to have critical and condemning thoughts about others. We don't have to work very hard at finding another's faults, and thoughts about someone's imperfections can pop into our heads quickly, albeit uninvited.

As soon as we entertain the first negative thought, a host of other like-thoughts line up to help justify your negative thinking about the other person. Pretty soon your emotions are hooked and inappropriate words or behavior follows. Then everyone feels bad.

One of Satan's greatest weapons against the follower of Jesus is influencing our thinking negatively towards one another. By encouraging us in thinking negatively about each other, Satan can create division and bad feelings towards others.

Relationship problems in our churches today are at an epidemic level. We find them in our families, at our work, in our church activities, and anywhere else where relationships are important.

As we learn to bring every thought captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ, we will find relationship problems decreasing and love for one another increasing. The trick is to get that first thought captive and not to entertain it.

### **Circumstances Affect Thinking**

God is the master engineer of the universe. Every day He has a plan engineered for each one of us. Nothing surprises God, which means nothing is going to happen to you today that God does not know about. He engineers everything for your good even though it may not seem that way.

As each circumstance unfolds in our life each day, we have two choices. We can accept it as

being from God, or we can accept it as an event outside of God's control. Nothing happens randomly and whatever comes your way tomorrow, God already knows about.

When things are going like we want and we are happy, we don't have trouble trusting God. However, when things are not going like we want and we begin experiencing bad feelings, the first thought Satan will plant in your mind is that you cannot trust God here.

When bad situations happen it seems like God is nowhere to be found and therefore we stop trusting God. Our thinking turns negative and we begin experiencing fear, worry, doubt, and stress. Other emotions may be anger, jealousy, resentment, or other negative emotions that result in ungodly behavior.

What we must do is to take that first thought captive—the thought that we cannot trust God here and that He is nowhere to be found. We bring that thought captive to the truth that we can trust God here and now and that He is there with us.

### **Truth-Based Thinking**

There is right thinking and there is wrong thinking. There is godly thinking and there is evil thinking. There is spiritual thinking and there is worldly thinking. We choose what we think and we must discipline ourselves to think right, godly thoughts.



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Ephesians 4:17-19 ESV “Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.<sup>18</sup> They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.<sup>19</sup> They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.”

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The thoughts you allow your mind to entertain will determine your actions and speech. Ungodly and unholy thinking results in ungodly and unholy behavior while godly and holy thinking results in godly and holy behavior.

The Bible commands us to live godly and holy lives. Apart from developing the discipline of godly and holy thinking, we will never be able to do this. Remember, you can take every thought captive to make them obey Christ. Don't believe the lie that says you can't.

A lie is that which is not in accordance with the truth. All truth comes from God and all lies come from Satan. Your thoughts will either affirm the truths of God or affirm the lies of Satan.

If you do not know God's truth because you do not know His Word, you have a big problem. You cannot counteract Satan's lies unless you know God's truth. You cannot bring thoughts captive to obey Christ if you do not know Him or His Word.

Right thinking is maintained through knowing, thinking about, and obeying God's truth. Wrong thinking is maintained through knowing, thinking about, and obeying Satan's lies.

As we bring our thoughts captive to obey Christ, we are filtering each thought according to His truth. When the thought is in accordance with His truth, we accept it. When it is not in accordance with His truth, we must reject it immediately.

### **Frivolous and Useless Thinking**

Much of our thinking brings no value to our selves, to others, or to God. We often fantasize, daydream, or allow our minds to think about things that are frivolous and useless. What if that time was put toward thinking that was of value to us, to others, and to God?



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Colossians 3:1-3 ESV "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

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Our minds have a tendency to wander when they are not focused on God's will for the moment. It is amazing the kinds of things your mind will gravitate towards when your mind is wandering.

As you begin bringing your thoughts captive, you will soon realize just how much of your mind and life gets wasted through frivolous, useless, and spiritual destructive thinking. The goal is to minimize frivolous and useless thinking by replacing those thoughts with thoughts that honor God and add value your life and the life of others.

For many years you have allowed your mind to wander aimlessly for periods of time, and this has become an unconscious habit for most of us. It is a wide open door for Satan to use to influence and direct our minds away from God to ungodly things that don't matter.

You will soon begin recapturing this precious time and using it to think about things that bring peace and the presence of God. You will find yourself being much effective for God and producing a harvest of fruit for Him.

What if every thought we are thinking brings a blessing to our own lives, the lives of others, or brings honor to God? Think of the possibility of how different your life can be and the impact you would have against the kingdom of Satan.

We can and must reclaim our thinking and bring every thought captive to obey Christ and honor Him. Every frivolous, useless, and negative thought must be seen as an enemy and a thing that advances Satan's influence in our lives.

You will be amazed over time how much this useless thinking will diminish as you discipline your mind toward godly thinking. Your spiritual transformation will be dramatic as your thinking and your behavior become more godly and holy.

## Daily Influences

There are many influences every day that affect your thinking. These influences can come from television, radio, reading material, people, environmental events, the internet, false teachers, our own self-interests, and Satan.

Ever since you were a child your mind has been recording everything that has ever happened to you and tucking the memories away in your memory. You may not be able to recall everything, but everything is there.

These memories are a vast collection of influences throughout your life. Your mind sorts back through these memories to help interpret current influences and events. You cannot change these recorded memories, but you can make new, different memories by choosing what you allow your mind to think about now.

One way to begin changing what influences your mind is by choosing carefully what you watch on television, what you listen to on the radio, what you read, and who you spend time with. We must maximize good influences and diminish bad or evil influences.

Each influence we encounter throughout our day will push us away from God, pull us to God, or do neither. Our heart's desire as followers of Jesus should be to abide in Him continually and that everything we choose to encounter brings us and keeps us close to Him.

The problem today is that we very seldom restrict the influences that distract us or draw us away from His presence. We have very little self-discipline and we tend to do whatever we feel like doing, without any thought to how it will affect our relationship with Jesus.

## Managing Influences

In order to begin taking thoughts captive and making them obedient to Christ, it is important that we start by eliminating influences that result in ungodly or unholy thinking which push us away from the presence of God.

We do this by simple censure. We stop exposing our minds to those influences in television, radio, written media, and people that can have a negative impact on our thinking and thereby our relationship with Jesus.

As a disciple of Jesus, you will find that things that are okay for the world are not okay for a disciple of Jesus. If you are going to follow Jesus you must renounce the things of this world that are negatively impacting your relationship with Him. One by one the Holy Spirit will show you what you must work on next.

It is important to remember that you cannot force others to do the same or judge them for what influences they allow in their personal lives. You can only change you and change the things that influence you.

When it comes to your children, you most certainly can censure many of the influences that are impacting them and teach them early on why certain things must be censored. You must bring them up in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord."

Begin the censorship of influences in your life by taking an inventory of the influences that you expose yourself to each day. Start with those that you know are having the most significant negative impact on your relationship with your Lord. They won't be very difficult to identify.

Once you have identified those negative influences, begin the process of eliminating them from your life one by one. Start with one until you have gained mastery by refusing to expose your mind to that particular influence.

Be sure to replace those influences with positive, or at least neutral, influences. It is easy to go back to negative influences unless you replace

them with something else, so you don't have an empty void that begs to go back to the negative influences.

## Mind Gate-Keeping

As you successfully reduce the number of negative influences trying to press into your mind, the amount of godless thinking will decrease over time. But you must still focus on bringing captive any other thought that Satan may try and press into your mind.



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2 Peter 3:1-2 ESV "This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles."

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We must stimulate our thinking and that of others towards wholesome thinking. We must focus our mind on things above throughout our day and resist any unwholesome thinking.

We must not forget that the Bible commands us to take "every" thought captive. Not just some thoughts, but every thought. This discipline will take time to develop, but eventually it will become a habit that won't require so much discipline and effort.

Remember, ungodly and unholy thinking brings about ungodly and unholy attitudes, speech and behavior. You become what you think. In order to change your present life circumstances, you must first change what you think about.



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Philippians 4:8 ESV "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

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As you take your thinking captive, you allow only thoughts that are fruitful, loving, kind, and godly. Every thought contrary to the teachings of Jesus must be rejected and cast out immediately.

The Bible teaches that we should not follow the patterns of this world, but that we should renew our minds so that our thoughts honor God. There is a lot of worldly thinking that is contrary to God's truth and we must renounce anything that is contrary to His truth.

You can and must control your thinking. You are the only one who can control your thinking. No one else can do it for you. It is a discipline you can develop over time and you must develop it if you want to be a faithful follower of Jesus.

Unless you learn to bring your thoughts captive to obey Jesus, your Christian life will degrade into a life that is just going through the motions of Christian activity. True transformation can never take place.

Be patient with yourself as you are developing this discipline. Pace yourself and let the Holy Spirit help you work on the thinking areas that are most troublesome to you. God will empower you as you step out in obedience to His Word.



## One Step for Living This Truth

The foundation of the *One Step* series that you have been reading is to be able to live God's truth, one truth at a time, one step at a time.

Next we will suggest the specific action steps you can take to allow the truth taught in this lesson to be lived in your own personal life.

You only have to do these steps to master this lesson. Your focus and effort should be to make sure you consistently and persistently do the steps as directed below.

The goal of this lesson is for you to learn to develop the discipline of bringing every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. We must learn to live this truth if we are to walk in obedience to our Master.

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## **ACTION STEP**

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**Continue to spend at least 30 minutes each day with God in prayer and reading a chapter a day in the Gospels and letters.**

**Remove at least two negative influences from your life. The Holy Spirit will show you what ungodly or worldly influences He wants you to forsake.**

**As you go through your day, be alert to streams of meaningless, useless, ungodly, or unholy thinking. Initially you will probably only be able to catch yourself after you have already allowed several thoughts to creep in.**

**Streams of negative thinking include imaginations, daydreaming, worries, thinking that leads to bad feelings, frivolous thinking, and thinking that is self-focused, sensual, or unloving.**

**As you begin to catch yourself in these streams of thought, force yourself to stop the thought stream immediately. Take those thoughts captive and push them out of your mind.**

**As you are pushing out thoughts, turn your thoughts to focus on something godly and holy. You might say a short prayer for someone, quote a Scripture, begin praising God, or put your mind on the task at hand.**

**You will have completed this lesson when you have completed the following steps: (1) remove two negative influences from your life (forsake them), (2) notice a definite lessening of useless and ungodly thinking, (3) are impacting your community in a more positive way, and (4) are focusing more on God's truths in your day to day living.**

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**Review this lesson on occasion and keep these action steps as a high priority in your life until you are living them more consistently.**

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Continue to read a chapter in the Gospels each day. The Gospels are where you find the teachings and life of your Lord. As you continue to practice living this truth, you may need to come back to this lesson often. Don't be in a rush to start the next lesson.

Remember, the most common problem with Christians today is that they know many truths about the Christian life, but are not able to live them.