

RENEWING OUR MINDS

AFTER WORKING WITH HURTING PEOPLE FOR MORE THAN FORTY years, I've found one glaring need that transcends age, gender, socioeconomic standing, or cultural background. It is the need to renew our minds with the Word of God.

I will be the first to tell you, that if my mind could have received renewing by someone laying hands on me and praying, I would have flown across the globe or driven thousands of miles to find that person to pray for me. In fact, I did.

Every meeting I had the courage to attend, I would have the speaker, pastor, or evangelist lay hands on me and pray. Often, I received a temporary reprieve from the tormenting thought attacks when people prayed for me, but the reprieve didn't last. The tormenting thoughts always eventually made their way back into my mind.

I was even fortunate enough to have Jesus appear to me in my home and talk to me about my thought life. Jesus

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revealed to me the one responsible for the hell I was living in mentally, and He set me on a pathway of peace and mental wholeness. But that didn't renew my mind.

Numerous times in our services, Amanda and I will have individuals who are living in mental torment ask us to pray for them that their minds will be renewed. We are happy to pray with them and watch the Holy Spirit saturate them with peace. But, at the same time, we tell each one that our prayers cannot renew their minds. Renewing the mind is not an event but a daily discipline, which we'll discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

Your mind—your pattern of thinking—has been programmed one way for years, and it will take time and discipline to renew your mind with God's Word.

Just think about it. For years we have allowed our minds to watch things, listen to things, meditate, and fantasize about things that

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often are not pure and godly.

We have entertained thoughts and images of lust, gossip, doubt, fear, jealousy,

revenge, and dozens of other things that are not Christlike. Then when our thoughts are nearly uncontrollable, we realize that God desires that we be sanctified, set apart for Him, not only spiritually but also mentally in our soulish realm.

So how do we go about renewing our minds? It will take an understanding of how God made each of us a three-part being and how each part affects the whole. It

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the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect (Romans 12:1-2, NLT).

In the Romans passage above, Paul wrote to Christians—not ungodly people—and he gave specific instructions on disciplines we are to maintain to live a life pleasing to God.

Let's look at another scripture so we don't take one specific verse and make a doctrine out of it. Paul emphasized the same theme to believers at Ephesus:

if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:21-24).

Here the apostle Paul told believers to cease from living in their old (before Christ) lifestyles and be renewed in their minds. Once again, I really like how it's written in the New Living Translation.

Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception.

also requires aligning our thoughts with God's thoughts. There's no question that God wants us walking in peace and freedom in this life, and His Word lays out precisely how to walk in those blessings. So let's examine what the Word says about each part of man and focus on a simple formula to renew the mind.

Pleasing God with a Sanctified Life

The apostle Paul writing to Christians in Rome informs us of something very insightful.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Romans 12:1-2).

I really like how this same passage reads in the New Living Translation:

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing

Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy (Ephesians 4:21-24, NLT).

Paul wrote to the believers at Thessalonica and gave them similar instructions:

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Paul informed the church at Thessalonica that God's highest and best for us is to live holy or sanctified lives. The word *sanctified* in the original New Testament language means "separated." It carries a twofold meaning: *separated from sin* and *separated unto God*.

Over the years, I have talked with numerous people who try to defend their moral goodness as their license for salvation. When I ask them about their relationship with the Lord or where they will spend eternity if they were to die today, a typical response is, "Well, I am just as good morally as those people who attend your church. I don't steal, cheat, or lie, so I am okay with God."

Being a morally good person is a wonderful trait, and sanctification includes good moral behavior. But not committing "popular" sins and being separate from sin altogether do not equal the full definition of sanctification. In other words, just because you are a "good ole boy"

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does not get your ticket punched to heaven. Your salvation is not dependent on what you do or not do but who is Lord of your life.

Paul also listed in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 the three areas in which God desires us to separate from sin and separate

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our lives unto Him. Those three areas are *spirit, soul, and body*.

Daily, I interact with people who years ago accepted Christ as their

Lord and Savior. They were born again, and their spirits or hearts were transformed. What happened in their lives is exactly what Jesus declared to Nicodemus.

There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you." Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God." "What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?" Jesus replied, "I assure you; no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don't be

surprised when I say, 'You must be born again'"
(John 3:1-7, NLT).

Jesus told Nicodemus that before a person can get into the kingdom of God, he must have a spiritual rebirth. Nicodemus was confused and couldn't understand the concept of going back into a mother's womb to be born again. To which Jesus said, "Nicodemus, you are thinking naturally, and I am talking spiritually." Jesus was referring to a spiritual rebirth, not a natural one.

Paul explained it to the Christians at Corinth like this:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The Living Bible Translation quotes this verse in a great way:

When someone becomes a Christian, he becomes a brand-new person inside. He is not the same anymore. A new life has begun! (2 Corinthians 5:17, TLB).

When we accept Christ as our Lord and Savior, a spiritual rebirth takes place, and we are born again on the inside. Our spirits become brand new. That's why we often see people's desires change once they're born again. They become new creations; old things pass away, and all things becomes new. But remember, Paul said God desires for us

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to be set apart not only in our spirits at salvation but also set apart in our souls and bodies.

Understanding Man's Three-Part Design

I was fortunate years ago to learn about the three parts of mankind. As one minister so eloquently stated, "You are spirit, you possess a soul, and you live in a body." The real you is your spirit or the person on the inside of you. When you are born again, your spirit man is the one who receives eternal life.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand (John 10:27-28).

Your spirit man is the one who lives on eternally once your physical man ceases to exist on earth. Paul said something very encouraging about this:

I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on

living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body (Philippians 1:20-24, NIV).

Paul said he was undecided about his future. He said, "I am torn between the two: I desire to depart...." Depart from where? He was referring to departing from his body and going to heaven. He said that would be far better for him, but it would be better for his friends if he remained in his body on earth. Who remained in his body? *His spirit*—the real Paul, the born-again Paul, the Paul who had eternal life.

Our Physical Bodies

As he continued to outline how man is designed, Paul explained to the Christians at Corinth that we have spiritual bodies and natural bodies.

...For just as there are natural bodies, there are also spiritual bodies (1 Corinthians 15:44, NLT).

Our spirits receive new life. They are born again when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. But our physical bodies do not get new life. They do not get born again. Our physical bodies continue to be subject to the pull of sin and fleshly desires.

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Even Paul struggled with the sinful desires in his flesh body:

So the trouble is not with the law, for it is spiritual and good. The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin. I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? (Romans 7:14-24, NLT).

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So, this presents a dilemma for us. We are born again, new creations on the inside, indwelt by the Spirit of God. But this new creation is housed and confined in a body plagued with sinfulness and selfish desires. These two forces—the Spirit of God and the pull of sin—war in our lives daily. The strongest force will win the day. Unfortunately, many Christians find themselves behaving in ungodly ways. It's not because they don't love God but because the born-again man on the inside is dominated by carnal, sinful desires in their flesh.

Paul found a workable solution to this challenge, which he told the Corinthian Christians:

I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:27, NLT).

The Living Bible translation interprets this verse like this:

Like an athlete I punish my body, treating it roughly, training it to do what it should, not what it wants to. Otherwise I fear that after enlisting others for the race, I myself might be declared unfit and ordered to stand aside (1 Corinthians 9:27, TLB).

Paul informs us that the born-again man on the inside takes control of the flesh man on the outside and tells it

Paul was an apostle of God, empowered and used by God to work miracles and heal the sick. He received revelations through dreams and visions and was caught up into heaven and heard and saw things no one else on earth ever experienced. Yet, even Paul, who was born again and mightily used by God, had a flesh problem. How could that be? Paul was born again, but his flesh was not.

Paul became so frustrated with his flesh that he called himself a "wretched man" (Romans 7:24). He also told the Christians in Rome that our physical bodies long for transformation and redemption.

Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us (Romans 8:18-23, NLT).

what it should do. In other words, Paul refuses to allow his flesh desires to dominate him.

Paul says the same thing to the Christians in Rome:

And so, dear brothers, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living sacrifice, holy—the kind he can accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask? (Romans 12:1, TLB).

Notice he told the Christians to “give their bodies” to God to be living, holy sacrifices. Don’t allow your body to be ruled by sinfulness. Take control over your sinful desires and make your body obey your born-again spirit instead of its sinful urges.

God wants us holy and sanctified in every way—spirit, soul, and body.

Look again at this familiar scripture:

Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again (1 Thessalonians 5:23, NLT).

God wants us holy and sanctified in every way—spirit, soul, and body. We understand our spirits are sanctified when we are born again; our bodies are brought under control by yielding them to God and allowing our born-again spirit man to dominate our bodies’ sinful urges. But what about our souls?

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The Soul of Mankind

One of the most misunderstood parts of mankind is the soul. Often in the church world, we have either combined the soul and the spirit as one, or we have errantly confused the spirit of man as being the soul of man. It's important to understand that the spirit and the soul are two different and distinct parts of man.

Our soul is the part of us that connects with our mind, will, and emotions. It connects with the mental and emotional realm. Our spirit connects with God because God is spirit. And our bodies connect with the natural realm because our bodies are natural.

The soul and spirit of man are so closely connected, it often takes the Word of God to divide and discern between the two.

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit (Hebrews 4:12, NLT).

The greatest need for Christians is for us to get our soulish area—our mind, will, and emotions—renewed with the Word of God.

That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind (Ephesians 4:22-23).

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no flight abilities. In fact, it clings to leaves, tree branches, or something stationary.

The caterpillar—not the most beautiful of species until a drastic change takes place—wraps itself into a sheath known as a cocoon. Four weeks and an amazing process later, the cocoon opens, and a remarkable transformation happens to the caterpillar. It becomes a beautiful butterfly with different traits and appearance than the caterpillar it was before.

Likewise, we become Christians or new creatures in Christ when we are born again. Our hearts or spirits become brand new. But remember we live in a flesh body that is not born again; it continues to desire selfish, sinful things. This is the war between the spirit and the flesh and your heart and your body. The entity that stands between the born-again spirit and the sin urges of the flesh is the soul or mind.

I like to say it this way: It is a simple matter of numbers. Our born-again spirit versus our sin-weakened flesh is one against one. The side that the soul—mind, will, and emotions—sides with will be the direction we will go.

If your mind has been renewed or made new by the Word of God, then it will side with your born-again spirit. Two against one wins every time! You will follow God's plan and purpose for your life. But if your soul or mind has not been renewed with the Word of God, it will side with fleshly desires, and two against one wins every time.

This is why so many Christians who have Jesus living in their hearts fall prey to sinful actions and attitudes.

The word *renew* means "to make new" in the original Greek language. I have often heard the word *renewed* used when explaining how an antique piece of furniture has its finish removed so the furniture can be *renewed* to its original state. Yet, in the Greek, the word *renew* has another facet, which means "to make new but totally different."

The Holy Spirit tells us to renew our way of thinking, making it totally different. In other words, renewing our minds is an intentional action on our part.

I grew up in the Pentecostal tradition, which placed a huge emphasis on apparel and appearance. I was taught that my hair length, my clothing, and the way I looked were a sign of holiness. It was understood that transformation from the world was symbolized by one's appearance. But in Paul's writing to the Roman Christians, he told us that transformation from the world is not achieved by appearance at all, but instead by what we think.

Renewing our minds is an intentional action on our part.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2).

The word *transformed* comes from the word *metamorpho*, which literally means to "transfigure or transform appearance." To understand this word, think about the metamorphosis that takes place when a caterpillar turns into a butterfly. The caterpillar is slow and slinky and has

They allow the unrenewed mind and flesh to override the born-again spirit who wants to follow God. So it's imperative for Christians to get their minds renewed and made new with God's Word.

Imagine a scenario where a born-again person continually renews his or her mind with God's Word. The person memorizes Bible verses and confesses those promises daily over his or her life. At the same time, the person keeps his or her body and its selfish urges under control. When Satan shows up with a temptation or a thought attack, what do you think will happen? That temptation and thought attack will not find a place in that person's life to establish a beachhead or launch an attack.

That's the reason Paul told us to submit our bodies to God, as a holy, living sacrifice and renew our minds to God's Word. A born-again, mind-renewed, body-disciplined individual is impenetrable to Satan's attacks.

A Simple Formula for Renewing Our Minds

As I mentioned earlier, it's critically important to recognize that renewing your mind is not an event but a daily discipline. Not understanding this vital point is the reason many Christians spend their entire Christian lives struggling and falling to temptations caused by mental harassment.

The truth is, too often Christians are unwilling to do the hard work of daily—hour by hour, week in and week out—disciplining their thought lives. Sadly, their unwillingness will cost them their peace of mind.

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If your mind—or pattern of thinking—has been programmed the wrong way for years, you will need to renew your mind to think in line with God's Word. It will require time and discipline, but it will be a gateway to God's best for you in every area of life.

Let me share a simple pattern that helped me get my mind renewed. As I was faithful to do these three things, my thinking began to change. It didn't happen overnight, but after several months, I took back control of my thought life. I call this simple pattern "The Three E's."

The Three E's

Evaluate Every Thought

Paul said if you're going to enjoy spiritual victory, you must cast "down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). In other words, you must make an intentional effort to evaluate and review what you think about.

Now, in my own case, I knew my lustful thoughts were sinful and that I shouldn't think those. But I had not considered thoughts of criticism, unforgiveness, slander, self-pity, jealousy, depression, or envy as thoughts I needed to evaluate. I thought that was just a part of life. And it is a part of life—a *defeated life*.

I still remember the day that I received the revelation of this verse, "...take every thought captive"

(2 Corinthians 10:5, ESV). I heard myself say, "My God, how in the world do I do that? It's impossible! I think thousands of thoughts a day. How can I take every one of them captive?"

It was days later when I stumbled upon the statistic I relayed earlier—that the average person thinks 50,000 to 60,000 thoughts a day. At first that didn't help me. How could I take 50,000 thoughts captive? As I continued studying, I discovered that the same average person repeats 90% of those thoughts. So, 45,000 of those thoughts are the same few thoughts.

This is actually good news! If you properly evaluate your thoughts and start taking captive the thoughts that are unhealthy and ungodly, you will soon discover the challenge is not so daunting after all. In reality, there are not that many different thoughts—they're usually the same fearful, lustful, doubtful thoughts over and over.

Let me encourage you to intentionally develop a plan or system to evaluate your thought life. If nothing more, when you find yourself thinking about something that is not God's best, stop yourself. At that moment, say, "Lord, forgive me for entertaining that thought. I take authority over it, and I refuse it access in my mind."

Most of us in the church world have never been challenged to evaluate our thought lives. We are encouraged continually to evaluate our motives and actions, but both of those are simply the product of the thoughts we have been entertaining. It all begins with the "thought life."

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If you don't take your thoughts captive, your thoughts will take you captive.

For example, have you ever driven several miles and finally reached your destination only to realize you couldn't remember passing certain places or taking certain turns or streets to get there? Your mind and thought life took you captive on the journey. Your mind was easily swept away by other things, and you were not conscious of what was taking place around your vehicle.

That's why the first step toward renewing your mind is the daily discipline of evaluating your thought life. You will renew your mind one thought at a time!

Eject Unhealthy Thoughts

Once you have discovered a pattern of thinking which is unhealthy, it's important to aggressively eject or remove those patterns from your thought database.

I have counseled wonderful Christians who have a very poor image of themselves. They have developed a pattern of thinking that daily keeps them sad and oppressed because they have entertained thoughts about themselves that are not true. If you think about yourself or view yourself in a manner that disagrees with what God's Word says about you, aggressively eject and kick out those thoughts. Ban them!

I remember walking through my house, repeating over and over, "I am not going to think that way. I refuse to think that way. I will not entertain that thought again because it is not true."

Once you have evaluated a thought pattern in your mind and found it deplorable, you cannot just casually pay it no attention. That thought pattern has established a beachhead and dug into your countenance. You must aggressively uproot it!

Often, we live with these unhealthy and negative thoughts so long that we become comfortable with them. We have learned to survive thinking wrongly. Listen to me! You can survive with wrong thinking, but you will never thrive with wrong thinking. To thrive in life, you must eject bad thoughts and replace them with God's thoughts.

You can survive with wrong thinking, but you will never thrive with wrong thinking.

Entertain God's Thoughts

Many years later now, I daily repeat to myself what God's Word says about me or whatever situation I am dealing with in life.

The renewing of your mind is a daily discipline that requires you to honestly evaluate the way you think, aggressively eject unhealthy thoughts, and eagerly entertain godly thoughts.

God specifically tells us what thoughts to think about and entertain.

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good

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report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things (Philippians 4:8).

Though it was many years ago, I still remember my third-grade class and Mrs. Knapton drilling the multiplication tables into our little brains. We had to memorize two rows of numbers a week. Week one was the ones and twos. It didn't take me long to get the ones memorized. The second week was the threes and fours. Week three we memorized the fives and sixes. We did that memory exercise until we had worked our way through the number twelve. Today, all these years later, I remember my multiplication tables perfectly. My little mind had the ability to capture a truth and hold on to it precisely for more than fifty years.

Likewise, if you will commit Philippians 4:8 to memory, it will be the guard—the gatekeeper—of your thought life. Thoughts that try to invade your thinking but don't meet the standards of Philippians 4:8 will be recognized and ejected. You then can start entertaining thoughts that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of a good report, and praiseworthy.

Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse (Philippians 4:8, MSG).

The Three E's—evaluate, eject, and entertain—changed my life and will change yours also.

Questions:

- ❶. What is the one glaring need for hurting Christians—for every Christian?
- ❷. If you don't take your thoughts captive, what will happen?
- ❸. List the three E's for renewing our minds. What thought have you entertained that you need to use the three E's on?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I thank You according to Your word in Romans 12:1-2 that I can renew my mind and change a lifestyle of unhealthy thinking. Help me to discipline my thought life and replace unhealthy thinking with godly and healthy thoughts. Remind me, Holy Spirit, of the importance of a sound and godly mind every day of my life. In Jesus' name, amen.