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July 2010

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## **GUARD YOUR THOUGHTS**

What have you been thinking about?.....When you first awoke this morning?.....As you lay in bed last night?.....As you work in your yard?.....As you drive down the street?

You have been thinking about something, and it is probably a pattern, a habit of thinking. Our little brains never shut off, there is always an inner conversation.

I have a message titled, "Guard Your Hearts," and the Proverb that goes with that message is Prov. 4:23, *Out of the heart come the issues of life.* Today's message is titled, "Guard your Thoughts," and the Proverb is Prov. 23:7, *As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.* A paraphrase of that verse is, "Whatever a person thinks about, that is what he is becoming," because what you are thinking about is what you are depositing in your heart, and out of the heart come the issues of life.

Is this really important? Romans 8:5-6 says, *"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."* To set your mind on something is to think about it, and according to the Bible it is a life and death matter.

The Scriptural basis of this teaching is Psalm 19:12-14 (AMP): *Who can discern his lapses and errors? Clear me from hidden (and unconscious) faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then shall I be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord my Rock and my Redeemer.*

Note the word "meditation" in the last verse of that passage. When I tell people it's a good idea to meditate on the Bible, they say, I don't know how to meditate. I respond: Oh yes, you do! Do you ever worry about anything? You are meditating on your fears.

People think, meditate about a great variety of things: money, sports, their job, their physical appearance, etc. I want us to briefly consider a few things that people commonly think about: The first is things that cause you to have **ANXIETY, WORRY, and FEAR.**

A few days ago several of us went to pray for a lady out in the Redlands. She is unable to work because she is very sick, she is threatened with the loss of her income, and the fear she expressed was palpable. About a month ago a man said to me, I haven't worked in over a year. We are going to lose our home. We have two kids in college. We don't know what to do.

Things like this are happening again and again in our church, and everywhere. These are scary times, and things may get worse. If you are the one that loses your job, things will get worse for you in a hurry. **HOW ARE YOU NOT GOING TO THINK AND WORRY ABOUT THAT?**

Several families in our church have lost sons or daughters to the drug culture, to meth or cocaine or alcohol. Some don't know where their child is, if he or she is alive or dead. **HOW CAN THEY NOT LIE IN BED AT NIGHT IN AN AGONY OF WORRY AND FEAR?**

I have a dear friend who is in the process of dying of cancer. I have friends whose grandson has been in a hospital for over a year with cystic fibrosis. Other friends live with chronic, debilitating pain. **IS IT REALISTIC TO EXPECT THAT WE CAN LIVE WITHOUT WORRY AND FEAR?**

I have been spending a lot of time recently in Hebrews, chapters 2, 3 and 4, meditating about rest, because I have a tendency to worry about things. The words in Hebrews 4:9-11 are powerful: *There remains a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered his rest has ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent (or strive) to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.*

The "example of disobedience" refers to the Jews who would not trust God and enter the land of Canaan, and fell, died in the wilderness. The "rest of God" for the Hebrews was a place, a land, the Promised Land. The Promised Land for us is a place of inner rest and peace. God is saying to us, **Be diligent, strive, to enter my rest**. In only a few places in the Bible are we told to strive for something, and this is one of those places.

I have a CD, a teaching by Graham Cook, and he says that he has come to the place that no matter what happens in his life, or in the lives of his loved ones, or in the world, that within fifteen seconds he can return to a place of rest and peace inside. Wow! If he can do that, can't we? In the past, if something really upset me, for instance with my family, it took me several days to return to a place of inner rest. Nowadays, sometimes I can do that within a few minutes. Not always, but I'm getting better at it.

This is the question: Are we going to trust God or not? I put it to you: Does it do any good to fret and worry and make yourself sick? Isn't your God big enough to deserve your trust? If He's not, your God is too small, you need to get rid of Him and find yourself a bigger God. Right? Friends, the God of this Book, the true God, the living God, the Creator of the universe, is big enough to trust no matter what happens!

Hebrews 3:14-15 says, *He (Christ) destroyed him who had the power of death, that is the devil, and released those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.* We don't have to fear death. Jesus rose from the grave and conquered death. Amen? WAIT! This is not just "church talk" or "religious talk." This is reality. If we haven't settled this, we will never achieve rest or peace, because we're all going to die. (I'm certainly not afraid of death, but you will probably think, Yeah, but you've already lived long enough for two people.)

If we meditate on things that cause fear, we are going to be miserable, fearful persons. And God will not be pleased! There is an implicit warning in this Scripture passage that you and I can wander around in the wilderness until we die without ever coming to our Promised Land, that place of inner rest and peace that only God can give us. We must choose to meditate on God's promises until we truly trust Him. We must strive to enter that place of inner rest.

Second, people meditate on **OFFENSES and RESENTMENT**. People usually have resentments against those closest to them, because we are most vulnerable to them - a spouse or ex-spouse, father, mother, step parent, or sibling. It messes up their whole life because they won't forgive. But people can also work up resentments against other folks. Awhile back a man in our church said, "I'm so angry I don't know what to do!" I asked what was going on, and he said he had been listening to talk radio and TV, political stuff. I told him my experience: a number of years ago I got where if I saw certain elected officials on TV, I would feel hatred well up in my heart. One day I said to myself, "Wait a minute! What am I doing? I'm a Christian. Didn't Jesus say something about loving people, even loving your enemies?" Those political shows, right or left, spew out criticism, character attacks, suspicion, conspiracy theories. (And remember that the people throwing this stuff at you are celebrity entertainers making millions of dollars) You might ask, Aren't you concerned about the direction of our country and our government? Yes, I'm terribly concerned. It's like watching a slow-motion train wreck. But I determined that my priority is to live as a Christian and to strive for His rest and peace inside, so I can't feed on that stuff. It affects me. If this has been causing problems for you, you might pray about it.

Third, people meditate on **SEXUAL FANTASY**. This is a huge problem for guys. It was a problem for me for many years, so I understand what a trap it is for men. Different surveys show that at least 50% of men in Bible-believing churches are involved in internet pornography. I have ministered to a lot of guys of all ages who are bound in this addiction.

A couple of months ago I held a seminar in a prison of 1,500 men in Canyon City. (Only about 50 or 60 attended the seminar.) I was told that 70% of the men in that prison were there because of sexual crimes against women or children! And some of the men that attended the seminar told me they had been active in their churches. Every one of them admitted to being deeply addicted to pornography. "As a man thinks in his heart, that is what he is becoming," and that is what he going to do. A lot of guys think, "Oh, well, I know it's not good, but it's not hurting anybody." What! You are defiling yourself, and you are defiling your wife and even your children. Inside your heart you are becoming what you are looking at and thinking about. That is very scary!

There is an ancient poem that has a lot of wisdom:

**"Two natures live within my breast; one is foul, one is blest; one I love, one I hate;**

**the one I feed will predominate."**

That poem is true whether you are a Christian or not.

I have a newspaper article about teen pregnancy. They discovered that girls who watched a higher percentage of certain shows on TV - like Friends, That 70's Show, Sex in the City, the higher percentage of sexual activity, pregnancy, abortion, and STD's. Well, duh! What you watch, what you think about affects the way you act. Maybe that's why companies spend millions of dollars on advertising.

Fourth, a lot of people think about **SELF-HATRED AND SELF-CONDEMNATION**. They constantly think thoughts such as: "I'm stupid! I'm guilty! I'm unlovable! I'm evil! It was my fault my parents got a divorce! It was my fault I was molested! Nobody likes me! Even God is against me!" If you are one of those people who have thoughts like that, I have a word for you from God: "How dare you think evil and speak evil of someone I love so much! Stop it!" To be honest, if you have a lifetime habit of self-condemnation, it is not that easy to stop it. I have a teaching on my website about this subject: "Overcoming Self-Hatred and Self Condemnation". I encourage you to read it and maybe it will help you. Go to: [www.glennbrownministries.com](http://www.glennbrownministries.com) - - Chapter 14.

Psalm 19:2 says, *Who can understand his errors, cleanse me from secret faults*. Secret faults are those thoughts and lies in your mind, those negative things you have been thinking about.

Psalm 19:13 reads, *Keep your servant also from presumptuous (willful) sins; may they not rule over me, then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression*.

What is a **presumptuous** sin? It is a sin that you know is a sin but you choose to do it anyway; it is rebellion and disobedience against God; defiance to God.

- Two people might commit the same sin, but one person does it in ignorance while another knows very well what he is doing. There is a difference when God judges those two people.
- When a Christian, knowing the teaching of Jesus that we must forgive others, refuses to forgive, I believe that is a presumptuous sin.
  - I have read that 30 to 40% of high school seniors admit to shop-lifting. It is wrong for anyone, pagan or Christian, to steal from stores, but I believe it is more serious for Christian young people to do it.
  - When an employee, a Christian, starts stealing from his company, or when a Christian executive cooks the books in order to steal from the government or from stockholders, that is willful, presumptuous.
  - Big or little, stealing is stealing. A number of years ago I borrowed a hand-saw from a neighbor, an old gentleman who was a widower. I kept it for a long time. Then we moved to another city where I was to be pastor of a new church. As we were packing, I noticed that hand-saw and thought, "I should return that saw. But that old guy has a lot of saws and doesn't need this one." So I took it with me. When I put it on a hook in my new tool shed, something mystical happened to that saw. I think it got possessed. Every time I looked at it, it said, "Thief! Thief!" I tried to ignore it. A year passed and I learned that the old man had died. The saw still said, "Thief!" so I took it down and donated it to Good Will. I know that God has forgiven me, but I learned something from that experience: I am not cut out for a life of crime. It makes me miserable.
  - I am talking about presumptuous sins: When Christian young people, or not-so-young people, start cohabiting without marriage, that is a different proposition than for a couple raised without any Christian teaching.
  - When a Christian husband or wife makes a willful decision to abandon his or her spouse and children, that is presumptuous. (Please, it is not my intention to put condemnation on anyone. I have counseled hundreds of folks and understand there can be mitigating circumstances: abuse, cruelty, and even violence.)

This is important: People don't fall into sin like they fall into a swamp. No big sins happen suddenly. They had been thinking about it, meditating about it for a while, perhaps quite a while, before they did it. **WHATEVER A PERSON THINKS ABOUT IS WHAT HE IS BECOMING, AND THAT IS WHAT HE WILL START DOING.**

- When an employee starts stealing from his company, or an executive starts cooking the books, he had been thinking about it, rationalizing, justifying, taking little steps of compromise, step by step.
- When guys go postal, kill their boss and fellow employees, or when there is a school shooting, or a family massacre, the killers leave notes, messages on Facebook, telling what they plan to do. Their anger and hatred grows until it consumes them, and they purpose to do it!

▪ Before that pedophile in prison committed incest, he had been meditating on pornography and on the sexual fantasies in his mind. The desire grows and grows until he is hypnotized, in a trance, and he becomes what the Bible calls "a slave of the devil." But it did not happen instantly, it came about over a long period of time when he willed in his mind to do those things.

▪ When a husband leaves his wife and children, that was not a sudden impulse. He had been meditating about it, fantasizing about a new, exciting sexual relationship, and finally he chooses to take that step. It is an act of his will, and it is a presumptuous sin and a "great transgression" for which he will stand before God in judgment.

By the way, some people rationalize: "Since Jesus said that adultery in the heart is tantamount to actual adultery, I may as well go ahead and do it." That is an insane conclusion! Then it becomes a PRESUMPTUOUS SIN and a GREAT TRANSGRESSION. God is concerned with our hearts because that is what precipitates the decisions we make, but God tells us again and again to RESIST TEMPTATION! Is it all the same to God that a person thinks about killing someone as if he actually does it? That you have temptations of immorality as if you start visiting prostitutes? Or commit suicide? Don't be ridiculous!

I ask again, what have you been thinking about? What do you meditate on during the day or lying in bed at night? That is what you are becoming.

So what do you do about temptations, negative, destructive thoughts when they come? Turn to 2 Corinthians 10:4-5, which is addressing spiritual warfare and specifically strongholds in the mind. That is what these destructive thoughts are. The last part of the 5<sup>th</sup> verse reads: ***bringing every thought into obedience to Christ***. That is what we must do: seize those thoughts and make them bow down to Christ. But how do we do that? I was talking about this verse with my ministry partner, Lynne Cumming, and she said she always thinks of the way she trained her little dog, Tibbett. She had him outside in the yard, she placed him by her right foot and said, "Stay, Tibbett!" He promptly ran off to smell the flowers. She went to him, led him by the collar back to the same spot and repeated, "Stay, Tibbett!" A butterfly flew past and away he went, so she went after him again and repeated, "Stay!" She said she had to do that probably fifty times before he started to catch on.

That is the way we have to do our thoughts. Frankly, our minds are undisciplined, and we allow every wandering thought to distract us. We must run after those thoughts again and again and command them, "Stop that! I will not think those negative thoughts. Stay!" If we are going to be followers, disciples of Jesus, it takes work and discipline. I'm weary of hearing people say, "God loves you just as you are." Yes, He does, but He doesn't leave us as we are, for crying out loud. We need massive renovation when we become Christians, and if we have not cooperated with His work in changing us into the image of Christ then we are not really disciples, we are just Jesus fans, like we can be Bronco fans. We are responsible for our thoughts.

What next after you stop the destructive thoughts? You can't think of nothing, you have to replace the negative thoughts with something positive. I'm going to teach you a poem I learned 40 or 50 years ago: **"When in a fix, Philippians 4:6."** (Please repeat this poem four or five times or as long as it takes to memorize it.) Now let's look at Philippians 4:6-8 -

- ***Be anxious for nothing*** - - God is telling, exhorting, commanding us not to allow thoughts that cause anxiety, worry or fear to stay in our minds.
- ***but in everything*** - - I think that means in everything.
- ***by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving*** - - Underline the part about thanksgiving.
- ***let your requests be made known to God*** - - Hallelujah! There is someone who cares, and someone who can do something about our needs.
- ***and the peace of God, which passes all understanding*** - - God is promising us that if we will trust and obey Him that we will enter into our Promised Land, that inner place of rest and peace that only He can give.
- ***will guard your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ*** - - My messages were Guard Your Heart, and Guard your Thoughts (minds), and this is exactly what our Savior will enable us to do. This process is not something we are doing in our own strength, the Holy Spirit is working with us, He is helping us (He is our Helper), because this is important work for a disciple of Christ.
- Verse 8 then tells us what to meditate about: ***Finally, brothers*** (note that this is addressed to Christians), ***whatever things are noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, praiseworthy - meditate on these things.***

One other example of how to meditate: Grass and hay are very difficult to digest, so God built cows with four stomachs.

Elsie gets a mouthful of grass, chews it awhile and swallows it into Stomach No. 1. In a while she burps up a ball of semi-digested stuff called a cud. She chews on her cud awhile and swallows it into Stomach No. 2. Etcetera. When the grass or hay is fully digested it mysteriously turns into Elsie: it becomes hide and bones and milk.

Whatever you and I eat also becomes us, physically. But whatever we think becomes us, spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically. So you think, meditate on a passage of Scripture: *Be anxious for nothing*, etc. You think about, reflect on it, repeat it, memorize it. You swallow it for awhile, then burp it back up and reflect on it some more. It will truly be assimilated into your mind and heart and personality and will become you, and you will be transformed into what you have been thinking about.

God is encouraging us today: Bring your every thought into obedience to Christ. Don't be anxious or fearful about anything, but bring your needs and requests to God, with a spirit of thanksgiving, and the peace and rest of God will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Choose to meditate on pure and lovely things. Incrementally, you will become Christ-like!

### **THE SMARTEST MAN IN THE WORLD**

If you were asked the question, "Who is the smartest man in the world?" what would you say? Einstein, Edison, Socrates, Newton? Most people would never even consider Jesus. To the "real" world, Jesus can only seem otherworldly, a good-hearted person out of touch with reality. In his book, The Divine Conspiracy, Dallas Willard says that Jesus wins that distinction, hands-down. Following are some quotes from Mr. Willard:

Our commitment to Jesus can stand on no other foundation than a recognition that he is the one who knows the truth about our lives and our universe. It is not possible to trust Jesus, or anyone else, in matters where we do not believe him to be competent. Can we seriously imagine that Jesus could be *Lord* if he were not smart? If he were divine, would he be dumb? Or uninformed? How could he be what we take him to be in all other respects and not be the best-informed and most intelligent person who ever lived?

The biblical vision of Jesus was of one who made all of created reality and kept it working, literally "holding it together" (see Colossians 1:17). And today we think people are smart who make light bulbs and computer chips and rockets out of "stuff" already provided. He made the "stuff!" Small wonder that the first Christians thought he held within himself all of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3)

Jesus knew how to transform the molecular structure of water and make it wine, how to take a few pieces of bread and some little fish and feed thousands of people, how to transform the tissues of the human body from sickness to health and from death to life, how to suspend gravity, interrupt weather patterns with a word. He showed cognitive and practical mastery of every phase of reality: physical, moral, and spiritual. He is not just nice, he is brilliant. He is the smartest man who ever lived.

He is now supervising the entire course of world history (Rev. 1:5) while simultaneously preparing the rest of the universe for our future role in it (John 14:2). The best of good news is that he is our friend and our Savior

God Bless,

Glenn

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