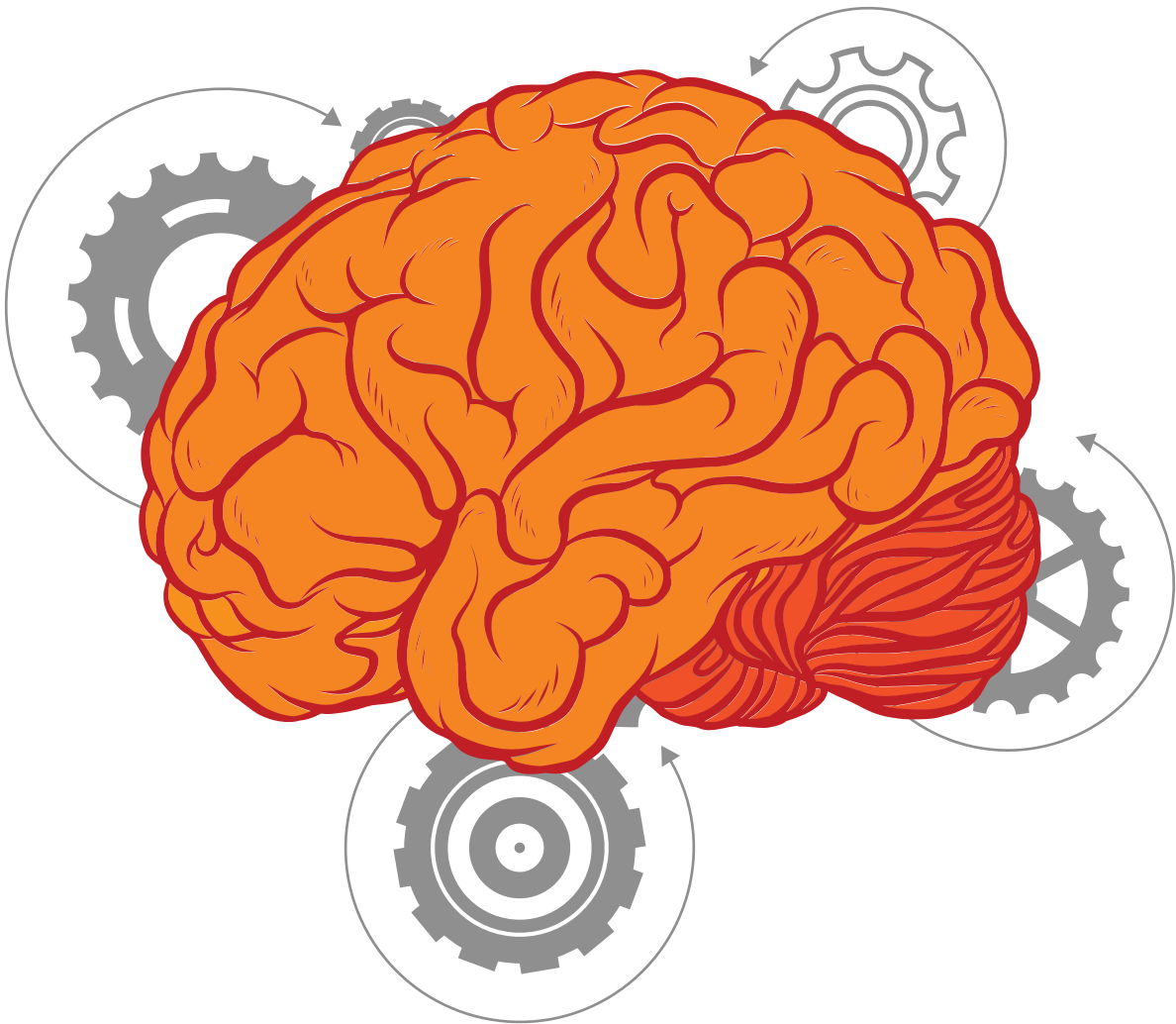


THE IMPACT OF
OUR THOUGHT LIFE



STUDY BY RICHARD ELWELL



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WHY IDEAS MATTER.

www.ultimateoutcomes.org

Ultimate Outcomes is a non-profit organization founded on the fruit of the 30 plus years Pastor Richard Elwell and his wife Marty spent in church ministry, developing studies that would help their congregants discern and apply God's truth. Richard was a firm believer that the outcomes in our lives are a result of what ideas we choose to believe and follow.

After Richard died of a rare liver disease in 2018, Ultimate Outcomes has taken on the mission of sharing the Elwells' insights with all who desire to live a better life and are willing to look to God for understanding of the way they are to go. To that end, it makes available for free download on its website: Bible studies, Sunday school curriculum, and sermon podcasts.

Richard earned a Master of Divinity degree from the International School of Theology and was the founding and senior pastor at University Park Church, San Bernardino, CA for over 30 years. His passion was always to make God's truth understandable and applicable to all who hunger for it. Marty holds a Master's Degree in Teaching Processes from Claremont Graduate University. Her passion has been to train women and provide curriculum for parents who want to raise their children up in the ways of the Lord.

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THE EFFECTS OF OUR THOUGHTS

INTRODUCTION

WHAT ARE THOUGHTS?

Illustrations:

- **House Guests:**
Our thoughts are the companions of our minds, like house guests who we talk to and spend time with.
- **Computer Software:**
Our thoughts are like the software of the computer. Software has no material substance but it is what determines what the computer does. With bad software the hardware would still be the same but wouldn't function correctly.
- **Road Map:**
Our thoughts are like a road map that sets the direction our lives are going to take. Our thoughts choose the road we are going to travel on.

Explanation:

Our thoughts are the internal influences that lead to our decisions and actions. They are the immaterial aspect of us that controls the material aspect. They are the foundation of what becomes realized in our lives. They are the invisible source of what become our visible beliefs, attitudes, emotions, and behaviors. **Our thoughts are the most powerful determiners of who we become and the way we perceive reality.**

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

HOW DO OUR THOUGHTS AFFECT US?

Romans 8:5-6

⁵Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.

1. What is a mindset?

Our mindset is our default setting, what our minds are oriented toward, the model with which we approach the world, the lens we see through. A Christian mindset would want what God wants and would be oriented to look at the world from a biblical model.

2. What does our mindset determine?

How we interpret and experience life. The outcome of our life. The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind set on sin leads to death.

Luke 6:43-45

⁴³No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. ⁴⁴Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. ⁴⁵The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.

1. What do we store in our hearts?

Our thoughts, perceptions, ideas about things

2. How does what is in our heart relate to our mindset?

Our mindset determines what we put in our heart. What is in our heart determines what comes out of our mouth and the actions we take.

Proverbs 4:23

²³Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

Proverbs 6:20-23

²⁰My son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching. ²¹Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck. ²²When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. ²³For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life.

1. What is a wellspring?

The source from which water (things) flow.

2. How are we to guard our hearts?

By paying close attention to what we are letting in. We examine the things we think about. We are to do it vigilantly; nothing else is of a higher priority. (above all else)

3. Why should we guard what we store in our hearts?

It is what our life comes from. Everything we say or do is determined by what we have stored in us. Everything we do is authored by our thinking. Good thoughts will guard and protect us. Wrong thoughts will lead us down wrong paths. It will determine how we experience life.

Isaiah 59:4

⁴No one calls for justice; no one pleads his case with integrity. They rely on empty arguments and speak lies; they conceive trouble and give birth to evil.

Proverbs 6:14-15

¹⁴ (He) who plots evil with deceit in his heart-- he always stirs up dissension. ¹⁵Therefore disaster will overtake him in an instant; he will suddenly be destroyed--without remedy.

1. What do evil thoughts give birth to?

Evil thoughts give birth to evil.

2. What makes something evil?

It brings harm to us or someone or something else. It is against God's will and his good design. It doesn't glorify God..

3. Why can't we think evil thoughts and not bring harm to ourselves and others?

Evil only can give birth to evil. Nothing good can come from evil thoughts.

Our thoughts create the climate of our present life's experiences as well as being the foundation for our future life's experiences. What we dwell on has the single, most profound effect on how we experience life. If we want to change our lives then we need to change our thinking. Our daily prayer should be for God to help us have a right view of things.

ILLUSTRATION: WRONG THOUGHTS

If you're having a bad day, it is because you are thinking wrong thoughts about what is going on. If you are anxious or upset, it is because you are thinking wrong thoughts.



THINKING IT THROUGH

1. Are we subject to our thoughts or are our thoughts subject to us?
Both, the thoughts we let in control us, but we are the gatekeepers of our minds, we can either keep them out or let them in. We are controlled by the thoughts we let in. If we change our thoughts, we will change what we are subject to.
2. Do God's thoughts (truth) or the world's thoughts (deception) more easily take us captive? Why?
The world's thoughts. They appeal to the sinful nature. They seem easier to live by. They let us off the hook. They are the default mode. It requires an active choice and more effort to meditate on truth. The world's thinking is what we are bombarded with from the outside. What are examples of the world's thinking that teens take in?
3. Why do we allow false ideas or wrong thinking into our minds?
They appeal to our sin nature. We think they will bring us benefit and lead us to where we want to go. They don't require submission to God or cause us to look at our own sin.
4. How do we recognize wrong thinking?
We examine our thoughts and weigh them against God's word. We reflect on our life and identify the fruit of the thoughts and where they are leading us. If the ultimate outcome is negative or bad then, the thought must be wrong. We need to ask whether a thought draws us to or away from God, builds up or tears down.
5. What do we do once we recognize wrong thinking?
We examine our thoughts in light of the truth of God, reject worldly thinking and replace it with biblical truth. We confess our sin and ask God to cleanse our heart. We get rid of wrong thoughts and replace them with right ones.
6. How do we protect ourselves against wrong thinking?
We think about what we are thinking about. We consider where a thought will take us. We saturate our minds with God's truth, so there is no room for wrong thinking. We put ourselves under solid teaching and associate with right thinkers. We examine our motives and uncover the evil desires in our hearts that would lead us down a wrong path. When we have a question we ask someone who is wise and holds to a biblical worldview.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

⚙️ THINKING ABOUT THOUGHTS

Matthew 15:18-19

¹⁸But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man `unclean.' ¹⁹For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

What do these verses say about our thoughts?

Our thoughts defile us and lead us into sin. Sin always begins with entertaining a wrong thought. There is a motivating thought behind every action.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

³For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

What do these verses say about our thoughts?

They are the spiritual battlefield of good and evil. The enemy's stronghold is arguments that set themselves up against the knowledge of God. The truth demolishes them. We have the capacity in Christ to say no to wrong thoughts.

ILLUSTRATION: LIES

A lie has just as much power as the truth if we believe it. For example if someone calls fire in a theater and people believe it even if in reality there is no fire, it will cause them to act.

We are subject to our thoughts but our thoughts are also subject to us. If we change our thoughts we will change what we are subject to. What are examples of this? If we believe that sin will benefit us (anger, adultery) then we will indulge in it. We have to demolish the lie that there is any benefit to sin. We bring truth to it and recognize the outcome of the lie.



⚙️ CHANGING OUR MIND

Isaiah 55:7

⁷Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

What does it mean to forsake our thoughts and turn to the Lord?

You give up your way (your mindset) and take on the Lord's thoughts. You gain a new mindset. The Greek word for forsake is metanoia, meta (change) and noia (mind).

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE



PERSONAL EVALUATION

1. Do I see myself as the gatekeeper of my mind?

Do I look at most ideas as not being neutral but as being right or wrong?

Do I recognize what thoughts I need to keep out?

2. Do I want the consequences of the thoughts I like to think about; is it a path I want to go down?

Are my thoughts taking me down a path I want to go on?

A gardener is vigilant as to what seeds he plants because that is what will grow.

3. Do I want to purify my thought life by filling my mind with truth, reading the Bible and meditating on God's word?

Am I looking for true and life-changing ideas through God's word?



PRAYER

Write out a prayer for greater awareness of your thoughts and how they are affecting you.

LESSON 2

VAIN THOUGHTS

INTRODUCTION

REVIEW

1. What are thoughts?

The ideas that we entertain, the internal influences that produce external behavior.

2. What do the three illustrations show us about our thoughts?

House guests Our thoughts are the companions we keep company with.

Software Our thoughts determines what we do and how we function.

Road map Our thoughts set the direction we will go.

3. How do our thoughts affect us?

We are led by our thoughts. They determine who we are, what we will become and how we will experience life.

LESSON FOCUS

This lesson will study how to identify and avoid vain thoughts. Vain is defined as empty, useless, fruitless, worthless and aimless, without profit or benefit. What are vain thoughts?

Thoughts that don't serve a positive purpose, lead us down a wrong path away from God. Even what we think of as neutral thoughts aren't really neutral as they keep us from thinking about things that are better.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

THE CAUSE OF VAIN THINKING

(As you read the following passage, underline the causes of vain thinking.)

Romans 1:18-32

¹⁸The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

²¹For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

²⁴Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

²⁶Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

²⁸Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³²Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

1. What causes vain thinking?

- Vs. 18 **Suppressing the truth by wickedness.** Trying to do away with truth by denying its existence, because of a desire to do wrong.
- Vs. 21 **Not glorifying God or giving thanks to him.** Since God inhabits the praises of his people, not being grateful denies him his rightful place and what is good and true.
- Vs. 22 **Claiming to be wise.** Being arrogant and boastful keeps us from God. Thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought.
- Vs. 23 **Exchanging the glory of God for images made like man.** Trusting in something God has created more than God himself. Focusing on natural world, not spiritual.
- Vs. 25 **Exchanging truth for a lie and worshipping and serving created things.** Denying God is the source of all good things. Exchanging the potter for a pot.
- Vs. 28 **Not retaining knowledge of God.** Thinking that God is irrelevant and not needed for life. A denial of natural law. Denying God as creator and sustainer of life.
- Vs. 32 **Approving of people who practice depraved things.** Thinking that what is bad is good and what is good is bad. Making own morals rather than submit to God's.

2. What is at the heart of all vain thinking?

Denial of God's truth and reality. All the causes of vain thinking are things that push God away.

3. What is the ultimate outcome of vain thinking? (vs. 29-32)

The ultimate outcome is retaining no knowledge of God, which leads to depraved behavior (doing and approving of things that shouldn't be done).



AVOIDING VAIN THINKING

(As you read the following passage, underline what we do to avoid vain thinking.)

Ephesians 4:17-25

¹⁷So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. ²⁰You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. ²¹Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²²You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. ²⁵Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

What are we to do to avoid vain thinking?

- Vs. 22 Put off the old self and way of life. Turn away from the old view of life. Don't follow the world's ways.
- Vs. 23 Be made new in the attitude of our minds. Change our thinking, let the truth transform us. Think like Christ.
- Vs. 24 Put on the new self. Die to self and become a new creature in Christ.
- Vs. 25 Put off falsehood and speak truthfully. Be a person of integrity. Acknowledge what is true about self. Be the same on the inside as the outside. Be real; don't pretend to be something that you're not.

THINKING IT THROUGH



WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF VAIN THOUGHTS?

Write out what characterizes each of the following types of vain thought. Then write examples of that type of vain thought in the bubbles on the next page.

Fearful thoughts:

Thoughts that demonstrate a lack of trust in God.

Thinking that God isn't in control (Bubble: worrisome, anxious, doubtful, irrational)

Deceitful thoughts:

Thoughts that misrepresent the truth or reconstruct the truth for personal benefit (excuses, deception) The suppression of truth. Attempting to be in or gain control (Bubble: manipulative, lying, fraudulent)

Godless thoughts:

Thoughts that suppress the truth, exclude God, or elevate something other than God to the position of God (man). (Bubble: idolatrous, humanistic, naturalistic, self-dependence)

Ungrateful thoughts:

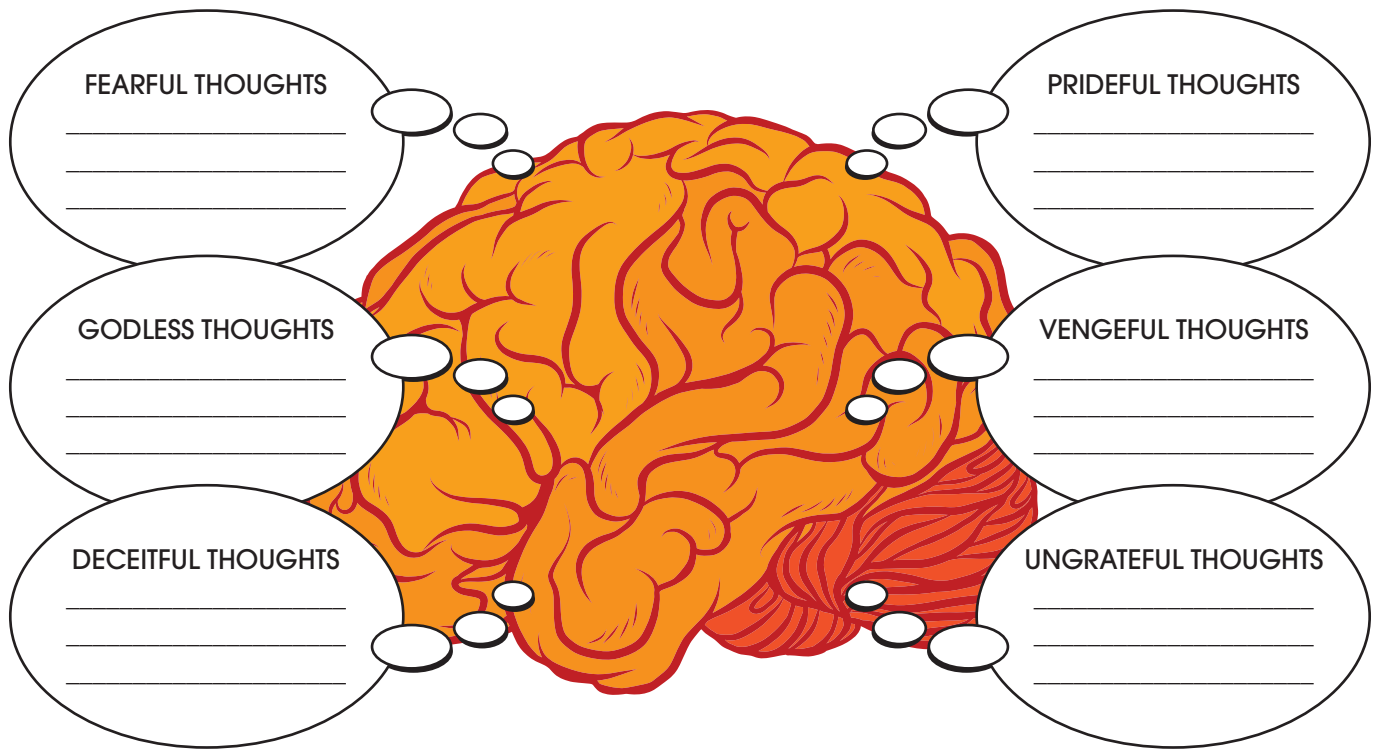
Thoughts that lead to discontent, discounting God's provision. Thinking that you have been cheated or need more to be content (Bubble: lustful, covetousness, envious, greedy)

Vengeful thoughts:

Thoughts showing a lack of forgiveness or seeking to harm another, ideas of payback
Thinking that you are the one to exact justice (Bubble: hateful, bitter, malicious, retaliatory)

Prideful thoughts:

Thoughts of lofty self-imagination or self-aggrandizement. Thinking that you are better than others (Bubble: self-righteous, boastful, arrogant, judgmental)



1. Why do people engage in these vain thoughts?

They appeal to the natural man. People think these thoughts will benefit them and accomplish what they want.

2. What do these vain thoughts lead to?

Misery, conflict, discontent, distrust.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

HARBORING VAIN THOUGHTS

Jeremiah 4:14

¹⁴O Jerusalem, wash the evil from your heart and be saved. How long will you harbor wicked thoughts?

1. What does “harboring” wicked thoughts mean?
We allow wicked thoughts to come in and anchor in a safe place. We act like the port authority. We protect and watch over them.
2. According to this passage how is salvation related to our thought life?
Evil thoughts keep us from God and his sanctification. Salvation is having the evil washed from our hearts and receiving a clean heart. We will be completely saved when we stand before God justified, but by dealing with our thoughts we speed the process of sanctification (being made holy). Sin has no power if we don't believe the idea behind it.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

PERSONAL EVALUATION

1. Would you associate with a person who would publicly promote the same thoughts you ponder privately?
2. Why would you feel repelled by the wicked words of a vile person, but at the same time be unmoved by your private musings?

PRAYER

Write out a prayer to uncover and overcome vain thinking in your life.

FRUITFUL THOUGHTS

INTRODUCTION

REVIEW

1. What is the outcome of what we think about?
Our actions, our words, our mindset, our emotions, attitudes. Every thought has the possibility of coming to fruition.
2. What are vain thoughts?
Empty, worthless, thoughts that have no benefit. We think them because we believe they have benefit, but they keep us from thinking fruitful thoughts that really have benefit.

LESSON FOCUS

This lesson will reveal the relationships between a good life and good thinking. If our thoughts can lead us into empty futility, they also can lead us into abundant blessing.

What would be fruitful thoughts?

Thoughts that produce good results, that lead to where we want to go, have value.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

MEDITATING ON GOD'S LAW

Psalm 119:97-104

⁹⁷Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. ⁹⁸Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me. ⁹⁹I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. ¹⁰⁰I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts. ¹⁰¹I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey your word.

¹⁰²I have not departed from your laws, for you yourself have taught me. ¹⁰³How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! ¹⁰⁴I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path.

1. In general, what do God's laws and statutes teach us?
Principles of how we are to relate correctly to God, to others, and to ourselves.
How things really work. How to live well.
2. What does it mean to meditate?
Think deeply on something. Fill and inform your mind. You take thoughts in and make them part of you. It is like digestion; you extract the nutrients that give life.

3. What are the benefits of meditating on God's law?

We gain wisdom, insight, understanding. It keeps us on productive paths rather than following unproductive or destructive paths.



IDEAS FROM HEAVEN

James 3:13-18

¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. ¹⁶For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

¹⁷But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

1. How do we measure the fruitfulness of our thoughts? (vs. 13)

By what they produce.

2. What are worldly ideas like? (vs. 15-16)

They are unspiritual, of the devil and create disorder and evil practices.

3. What are ideas that come from heaven like? (vs. 17)

Pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy, good fruit, impartial (doesn't put one person above another), sincere.

4. How do ideas from heaven differ from those that don't come from heaven?

Heavenly thinking puts the honoring of God and the needs of others above self-interest.
Humble vs. Arrogant

5. What do ideas from heaven produce? (vs. 18)

A harvest of righteousness.

6. What is a harvest of righteousness?

That which is of God and is right and good. Right relationships, attitudes, behavior, etc.

Philippians 1:9-11

⁹And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God.

1. What was Paul's prayer for the Philippians? (vs. 9)

That their love would increase and they would gain more knowledge and insight.

2. What would be the result of that? (vs. 10)

They would be able to discern what is best and would be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness to the glory and praise of God. They would be able to see the difference in outcomes. Being able to distinguish right and wrong is critical to being pure and blameless. Love and knowledge of Christ and his Word is what enables us to be discerning.

THINKING IT THROUGH

PLANTING THE SEED

Luke 8:4-15

⁴While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: ⁵"A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. ⁶Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. ⁸Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown."

When he said this, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

⁹His disciples asked him what this parable meant. ¹⁰He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, " though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand."

¹¹"This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. ¹²Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. ¹³Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. ¹⁴The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. ¹⁵But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

1. What is the seed? (vs. 11)

The word of God, God's thoughts and ideas, his truth and revelation of himself to us.

2. What is the soil? (vs. 12)

The condition of the heart of men.

3. What is the relationship between the heart (soil) and the mind?

The condition of the heart is a result of the thoughts of the mind.

4. Is there any difference in the seed that is sown in the different types of soil?

The truth is the same for everyone. It goes out through the whole earth; both the Bible and creation speak it. It is the soil that is different.

5. What is necessary for the word of God to take root?

The heart has to want God's ideas. A person has to have a desire to see God and what is true about himself. A person has to recognize the value of God's way and want to think God's thoughts.

ILLUSTRATION: PLANTING A GARDEN

To plant a productive garden the soil first has to be plowed and made ready. If the soil isn't fertile and prepared and the weeds continually removed, the seed will never grow into a productive plant. How does the planting of crops relate to our thoughts?

To be ready to receive God's word, we need to prepare our minds by getting rid of incorrect ideas and allowing good thoughts to grow. Humility is also crucial in this process because it helps us to have a positive and respectful relationship with God.



CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

THE PROTECTION OF THOUGHTS

1 Peter 4:1-2

¹Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. ²As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.

1. What was Christ's attitude toward suffering? (vs. 2)
It was according to the will of God and would produce good results, therefore he didn't resist it.
2. How would having the same attitude toward suffering as Christ protect us?
We would focus on overcoming the challenges. We would be able to see past the pain and think about and focus on the beneficial result. We would experience delight and liberty in Christ in spite of what we were going through.
3. How does having Christ's attitude relate to fruitful thinking?
We keep our thoughts focused on God's will and what is right and true. Therefore we have fruitful thoughts even in the midst of bad circumstances.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

PERSONAL EVALUATION

1. What seeds of truth do I plan to intentionally plant in my heart this week?
Refer to the list of ideas that come from heaven.
2. What vain thoughts do I have that are threatening to choke out my fruitful thoughts?
What kind of weeding do I need to do?
3. What actions am I going to take to plant good thoughts and root out vain ones?

PRAYER

Write out a prayer for a discerning heart that is receptive to seeds of truth.

CONTROLLING OUR THOUGHTS

INTRODUCTION

REVIEW

1. What are thoughts and how do they affect us?
They are the internal companions that direct us. We are our thoughts. Road map (what lead us), software (determine who we are), companions (our influencers).
2. What are vain thoughts?
Useless or destructive ideas that have bad outcomes. Bad guides, bad companions, bad software.
3. What are fruitful thoughts?
Thoughts that are beneficial and produce good results. Good guides, good companions, good software.



Remember: All thoughts are like seeds that germinate and produce something.

LESSON FOCUS

The focus of this lesson is taking control of our thoughts. Since our thoughts are the underlying determiners of our emotions, our beliefs, and our actions, the most important choice we can make is the choice of what we choose to think.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

TAKING CAPTIVE OR BECOMING CAPTIVE

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

³For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Ephesians 6:10-12

¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹²For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.



Note: The word for schemes in verse 11 is *methodeia* which means craftiness, seductive tricks or false teaching, beliefs, or ideas.

1. What is the nature of the battle we are engaged in? (vs. 5, 11-12)
The battle is one of ideas or ideology. It is not between flesh and blood. Other people aren't the enemy.
2. What are we to fight against? (vs. 4-5)
Lies, strongholds, arguments that set themselves up against the knowledge of God, Devil's schemes. Wrong ideas that come from Satan and that capture the mind. Things we think are good for us but aren't really good. Example: abortion
3. What is the divine weapon we fight with?
Truth, right ideas from God. Ideas that are truly good.
4. What are we to do with our enemy? (vs. 5)
Take it captive and demolish it.
5. How do we take our thoughts captive and make them obedient to Christ?
Recognize what we are thinking about. (Do I want to go where that idea is taking me?)
Recognize the lie and the motivation behind the idea, the deceptive idea that is controlling us, and bring the truth of Christ against it. Our minds need to be filled with truth and we need to pray for wisdom and conviction.

Colossians 2:8

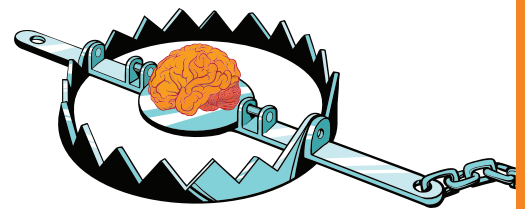
⁸See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

1. What can false ideas do to us?
Take us captive.
2. How does that relate to 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 in terms of captivity?
If we don't take our thoughts captive, they will eventually take us captive. The thoughts we let in will end up controlling us.

ILLUSTRATION: TAKE CAPTIVE OR BECOME CAPTIVE

Israel was told by God to completely conquer the land. In fighting for the land Israel did not destroy all the people there as God had instructed. The peoples that Israel didn't conquer caused her problems throughout her history.

We will either take false thinking captive or we will become captive to it. We become subject to the thoughts we subject ourselves to. The question to ask in terms of our thoughts is, "Do I want to be a servant to this thought?"



RIGHT THOUGHTS

Philippians 4:8-9

⁸Finally, brothers, 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. ⁹Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

1. What do the things we are told to think about consist of?

True thoughts: Faithful, reliable, trustworthy (like a true friend), truth of God (stated or declarative truth), not human fantasy.

Noble thoughts: Upstanding, subordinates itself to right principles, higher things. Puts others above self, how to be a blessing to others and act rightly.

Right thoughts: What lines up with moral truth, what leads where you want to go and choose correctly.

Pure thoughts: Ones that would please God, that you wouldn't be ashamed of, clean thoughts

Lovely thoughts: Uplifting, delightful to the soul, what brings wholesome pleasure.

Admirable thoughts: Beyond reproach, what can be looked up to, good things about people. Thoughts that you would be proud to express.

Excellent thoughts: That which is valuable and builds up. Smart, wise, discerning thoughts

Praiseworthy thoughts: Thoughts of God and that which is worthy of praise.

2. What would the totality of these thoughts represent?

The mind of God. This would be the way Christ would think all the time.

3. What does thinking about and practicing the truth result in? (vs. 9)

The God of peace is with us resulting in understanding, blessing, energy. We have the blessing of Christ's holy presence with us.

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. Why is deceptive thinking able to take us captive?

We are led by whatever we believe. If we believe ideas they cause us to act. If we believe that a lie is true, it has just as much power as the truth by virtue of the fact that we believe it. What we believe informs our mind.

2. Romans 8:5 says, *Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.* What do we do to keep ourselves from being taken captive by wrong ideas?

We set our mind on what the Spirit desires. We then become captive by and led by the Spirit. If our mind is filled with the Spirit, there is no way we can be led by the sinful nature.

3. How does thinking about what is right and true protect us?

We're controlled by truth which leads us along God's path which protects us. If you are thinking about what is right you will do what is right. You can't sin if you are not thinking thoughts that will lead you to sin. Christ never sinned because his mind was only filled with God and his truth.

4. Why can't the truth be in our mind and God be absent?

Because God inhabits his truth. He is the embodiment of truth.

5. Why can't God be in our mind and truth be absent?

God and truth are inseparable

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

INTERNAL OR EXTERNAL CONTROL

Psalm 32:8-9

⁸I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. ⁹Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.

There are the two forces that control our actions, internal conscience (understanding) or external force (bit). What does God want us to be controlled by?

By right ideas, a good conscience, a right heart, truth.

Why?

We will do what is right in all circumstances.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

PERSONAL EVALUATION

1. Identify a thought that has taken you captive.

2. Form a battle plan for taking that thought captive and bringing it into obedience in Christ.

PRAYER

Pray that God would reveal to you wrong thoughts that have taken you captive. Pray that you would want to fill your mind with God and his truth.

THE POWER OF GRATEFUL THINKING

INTRODUCTION

REVIEW

1. How is it that we are subject to our thoughts and our thoughts are also subject to us?
Our thoughts take us captive but they can't come in unless we allow them. We are only controlled by the thoughts that we embrace. God tells us to take every thought captive and make them obedient to Christ.
2. How do we take our thoughts captive and bring them into obedience to Christ?
We identify wrong thinking and bring the light of truth to our thoughts. We think about the implications our thoughts: Are my thoughts in alignment with truth? Are my thoughts good? Are my thoughts pleasing to God?

LESSON FOCUS

This lesson will look at the power of grateful thinking. Gratitude can change everything before anything about our circumstances has changed.

1. Why doesn't gratitude come naturally?
Sin is the default mode. Complaining is the inclination. We easily focus on what is wrong rather than what is right. Like children we think we are deserving of more.
2. If we nurture grateful thoughts what happens to us?
Our whole attitude changes. We become joyful and even more grateful. We gain the benefit of what we have. If we focus on the negative, we forfeit the blessing.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

THE JOURNEY OF GRATITUDE

Psalm 50:23

²³ "He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God."

1. According to this passage what does thankfulness accomplish?
It honors God. It prepares us for the way of God's salvation. It moves the sanctification process along. (It prepares us to enter into God's presence.)
2. Why does the psalmist use the word sacrifice in terms of thank offerings?
It requires something of us. It doesn't just happen. We have to give up wrong thinking.

Psalm 100:4-5

⁴Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.
⁵For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

According to this passage what does thankfulness accomplish?

It allows us to enter into the courts of his presence. Gratitude is the means by which we enter into God's presence.

Colossians 2:6-7

⁶So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

According to this passage what does thankfulness accomplish?

Overflowing gratitude protects us from the covetousness or ingratitude that would pull us away from Christ. It enables us to continue to live in him. Covetousness, wanting something God hasn't given you, or ingratitude, not appreciating what you have, will pull you out of God's way.

Philippians 4:4-7

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

According to this passage what does thankfulness accomplish?

Gratitude brings us protection. It guards us in Christ. The word for guard is the action of a military garrison, soldiers placed around you to protect you. It keeps us from being captured by wrong thinking.

2 Corinthians 4:13-15

¹³It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, ¹⁴because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. ¹⁵All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

What does God desire from us as a result of his grace?

He wants thanksgiving to overflow from us for his glory. He wants us to be a fountain of gratitude.

The Journey of Gratitude

Gratitude p_____ us to enter into God's way of salvation. prepares

By gratitude we actually e _____ into God's way. enter

Through gratitude we c _____ in God's way. continue

With gratitude we are p _____ from being pulled from God's way. protected

Ultimately it is gratitude God d _____ from us as a result of traveling in his way. desires

THE JOURNEY OF INGRATITUDE

Romans 1:21

²¹For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

How does the result of ingratitude compare with the result of being grateful?

You keep yourself out of God's presence through ingratitude. It causes futile thinking. Your heart is darkened. You end up empty rather than full. You won't know God's way.

AN EXAMPLE OF THE JOURNEY

Luke 17:11-19

¹¹Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance ¹³and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

¹⁴When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

¹⁵One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him--and he was a Samaritan.

¹⁷Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

1. What effect did gratitude have on the one leper who returned?

It drew him to Christ. It brought him into Christ's very presence.

2. If the leper had already been healed physically, what did Jesus mean by "your faith has made you well"?

He found salvation and spiritual healing. He was put on Christ's way. The others weren't. The physical healing didn't benefit them. Spiritually, they were still in a dead condition.

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. What does gratitude show about us?

That we are in right relationship with God. It reveals our perspective on life, that we are humble and subject to God and his will. We appreciate who God is and what he has done. We accept God's provision as being enough.

2. Why do we engage in ingratitude?

We think that we deserve more than what we have been given and that by focusing on that we will somehow gain what we lack and then we will be happy.

3. What happens if we subject ourselves to ungrateful thinking?

We become more and more discontent.

4. What do we do to rid ourselves of ingratitude?

By recognizing that we don't need what God hasn't provided. We dwell on the fact that through gratitude we gain God, which is what we really need.

5. If gratitude prepares us to receive God's grace and if it enables us to enter into and remain in his grace, how do we nurture thankful thoughts?

By focusing our minds on what we have to be grateful for and meditating on the truth and character of God. Focusing on God's kindness and provision and that which is good about our lives. Just being grateful for the gift of life and the opportunities that lie before us in Christ.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS



THANKSGIVING, OUR PROPER RESPONSE

Hebrews 12:22-29

²²But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, ²⁴to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

²⁵See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? ²⁶At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." ²⁷The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken--that is, created things--so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

²⁸Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, ²⁹for our "God is a consuming fire."

1. What does it mean to refuse God? (vs. 25)

We withhold our gratitude; we don't accept what he wants to give us, which is the gift of himself.

2. What is our acceptable response to God? (vs. 28)

Gratitude that leads to acceptable worship which is filled with reverence and awe. We recognize who God is and acknowledge that all we have is a gift from him.

3. How are reverence and awe an important part of thanksgiving?

They give God proper honor for who he is, not just gratitude for what he has done or can do.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE



PERSONAL EVALUATION

1. What are grateful thoughts I harbor?

What are the results of those thoughts?

2. What are ungrateful thoughts I harbor?

What are the results of those thoughts?

3. What do I need to do to rid myself of ungrateful thoughts?



PRAYER

Thank God for who he is and all the wonderful things he has done for you. Pray that you would learn to focus more on what you have to be grateful for.

LESSON 6

THE INFLUENCE OF OUR THOUGHTS ON ONE ANOTHER

INTRODUCTION

REVIEW

1. How do our thoughts affect our destiny?

They set the direction of our path; our destiny is determined by where the path leads.

2. Fill in the blanks to describe the journey of grateful thinking.

Gratitude p_____ us to enter into God's way of salvation. prepares

By gratitude we actually e _____ into God's way. enter

Through gratitude we c _____ in God's way. continue

With gratitude we are p _____ from being pulled from God's way. protected

Ultimately it is gratitude God d _____ from us as a result of traveling in his way. desires

LESSON FOCUS

This lesson focuses on the influence of our thoughts on others and the thoughts of others on us. Just as we underestimate the effect of our own thought life, we also underestimate the influence of our thoughts on those we associate with and the influence of their thoughts on us.

If we had never learned anything from another person what would we be like?

We wouldn't have sophisticated language and we wouldn't know how to do very much.

The difference between who we would be and who we actually are is the influence of other people. We are going to be influenced by others; our choice is who we will let influence us.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

THE WORDS OF LIFE

1 John 1:1-7

¹That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ²The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴We write this to make our joy complete.

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

1. How is life transmitted? (vs. 1-2)
Through words, proclamation, one person shares life with another.
2. What does like-minded mean?
Sharing the same ideas or interest.
3. What is the result of believers being like-minded? (vs.3)
We have fellowship with each other and Christ.
4. What creates fellowship of any kind?
Shared ideas, having things in common, being able to encourage one another in the way one is going.
5. When is our claim of fellowship with Christ false? (vs. 6)
When we walk in darkness and don't live by the truth.
6. Why can't we have fellowship with God when we walk in darkness?
We are not sharing or embracing his ideas. The ideas we hold wouldn't be compatible with his.
7. What does it mean to walk in the light?
We have fellowship with Christ. We are sharing in and are living out his ideas.

Matthew 5:14-16

¹⁴You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

How do those who have the light of Christ transmit that light?

By living out the truth, the truth becomes visible through their actions.



THE WORDS OF DEATH

2 Timothy 2:14-17a

¹⁴Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. ¹⁵Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. ¹⁶Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. ¹⁷Their teaching will spread like gangrene.

1. What is quarreling about words?
Focusing on little things that aren't important. Distorting the truth. Getting hung up on inconsequential particulars.
2. What does quarreling about words result in? (vs.14)
It ruins those who listen.

Why?

It is a waste of time and keeps your thinking focused on the wrong thing. It blocks the correct handling of the truth. It doesn't build up or edify. It hardens the heart and blocks the work of the Spirit.

3. What are we to avoid and why? (vs. 16)
Godless chatter, we will become more ungodly (more unlike God).
4. What is godless chatter?
Any speech that is not of God and therefore harmful. Vain talk that has no value and leads people away from the truth.
5. What does false teaching spread like? (vs. 17) *Gangrene*
6. What do you have to do with a gangrenous body part and why?
You have to cut it off or it will poison and destroy the whole body.
7. What do you have to do when someone in your sphere of influence is spreading false teaching?
You have to consciously cut off the ideas they promote. You may have to break fellowship with them.

Matthew 16:11-12

¹¹How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." ¹²Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

1 Corinthians 5:6-11

⁶Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? ⁷Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast--as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth. ⁹I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people-- ¹⁰not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. ¹¹But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.



Note: Before the Passover meal the Jews rid their homes completely of any speck of yeast. Yeast was likened to sin.

1. What is the yeast that can easily spread in us?
False ideas, deceptive thinking, sinful ideas, worldly thoughts.
2. How much yeast is too much?
Any, a little will increase and leaven the whole lump. Bad ideas multiply. They appeal to the sinful nature.
3. Who are the people we should not even eat with and why? (vs. 11)
We shouldn't even associate with people within the church who claim to be godly and are spreading evil or deceptive thinking. They will corrupt our thinking and lead us away from God.



Remember: Life and death is transmitted from one person to another through the influence of ideas. We can't avoid being influenced by others or influencing others ourselves. Our only choice is who we are going to let influence us and what kind of influence we are going to have on others.



THE COMING OF GOD'S KINGDOM

Isaiah 32:1-8

¹ See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice. ² Each man will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in the desert and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land.

³ Then the eyes of those who see will no longer be closed, and the ears of those who hear will listen.

⁴ The mind of the rash will know and understand, and the stammering tongue will be fluent and clear.

⁵ No longer will the fool be called noble nor the scoundrel be highly respected. ⁶ For the fool speaks folly, his mind is busy with evil: He practices ungodliness and spreads error concerning the LORD; the hungry he leaves empty and from the thirsty he withholds water. ⁷ The scoundrel's methods are wicked, he makes up evil schemes to destroy the poor with lies, even when the plea of the needy is just. ⁸ But the noble man makes noble plans, and by noble deeds he stands.

1. When God's kingdom is fully established what will there no longer be? (vs. 3-4)

There will no longer be ignorance of truth. People will see and understand who God is and believe that what he says is true.

2. Before God's kingdom is fully established what does the fool who is called noble and is highly respected do? (5-6)

He speaks folly, practices ungodliness and spreads error concerning the Lord. He leaves people hungry and thirsty. He doesn't give them what they need for true life.

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. What are foolish ideas prevalent today that we should avoid at all costs?

The popular ideas of the culture: humanism, relativism, transgenderism, the ideas of Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud.

2. Who are the "respected" people that are promoting those wrong ideas?

Professors, celebrities, media, those who claim to be wise, the "experts".

3. Why have those ideas spread?

They are yeast. They appeal to people's fallen desires. They don't hold people accountable for their own actions.

4. Why do those ideas leave people who are hungry empty?

They are contrary to God's truth. They are vain and empty so they can never bring benefit or satisfy. They won't fill their emptiness. They don't give life. They are godless

5. How do we avoid being influenced by those ideas?

We fill ourselves full of the truth. We associate with those who live by the truth. We recognize wrong ideas and get rid of them. We put ourselves under teachers who teach sound doctrine. We have to recognize the ideas that we are susceptible to. We pray for discernment.



Remember: If we don't know and incorporate the truth of God into our thinking, we will follow the pervasive ideas of the culture.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

FOLLOW THE RIGHT TEACHER

Proverbs 6:20-24

²⁰My son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching. ²¹Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck. ²²When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. ²³For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life, ²⁴keeping you from the immoral woman, from the smooth tongue of the wayward wife.



Note: Solomon, the one who spoke these words of wisdom, was led into foolishness by his many foreign wives. God had warned him of that.

1. What is the responsibility of parents?
They are to pass on right ideas to their children.
2. What is the responsibility of the child?
They are to grab and hold onto their parents' teaching.
3. How will following the right teaching be of benefit to both parents and children?
They will know the way to life and be protected from destructive ideas. The truth will watch over and protect them. They will have fellowship with one another.

PREACH THE TRUTH

2 Timothy 4:2-4

²Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction. ³For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

1. What does it mean to preach the word out of season?
When it's not in vogue. When people want something else and it's not popular.
2. What do we have to do to be able to preach the truth?
We have to know it and live it out ourselves. It has to be what we value and hold on to.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE



PERSONAL EVALUATION

1. Consider who is influencing you:

a. Who do I admire?

Do I want to go where that person I admire is going? Explain.

b. How is the example of others affecting me?

c. Are there any people in my life whose influence needs to be more limited?
Why?

d. Are there any people in my life whose influence needs to be increased?
Why?

2. Consider who you are influencing:

a. Am I being a good influence on those I'm close to? How?

If not, what are the ideas I need to stop sharing?

b. Are people gaining life as a result of being around me? How?



PRAYER

Pray that you would become more aware of the influence of wrong thinking on your beliefs. Pray that you would be convicted of any wrong way you are influencing others.

LESSON 7

GOD'S KNOWLEDGE OF OUR THOUGHTS

INTRODUCTION

REVIEW

1. Are our thoughts subject to us or are we subject to our thoughts?
Both. We're the gatekeepers of our mind, but we are affected by our thoughts.
2. How is our destiny connected to our thoughts?
Our thoughts are the roadmap we follow. They lead us to our destination.
3. Fill in the blanks to describe the journey of grateful thinking.
Gratitude p_____ us to enter into God's way of salvation. *prepares*
By gratitude we actually e _____ into God's way. *enter*
Through gratitude we c _____ in God's way. *continue*
With gratitude we are p _____ from being pulled from God's way. *protected*
Ultimately it is gratitude God d _____ from us as a result of traveling in his way. *desires*
4. How do the thoughts of other people affect us?
They influence us. Our choice is who we will let influence us. Whoever we want to please is who we will let influence us.

LESSON FOCUS

This lesson will look at our thought life from God's perspective. God knows our thoughts and is affected by them.

How is productive or fruitful thinking aided by the knowledge that God knows our thoughts?
It is an incentive to take our thoughts captive as God holds us accountable for our thoughts.

Being in the presence of others modifies what we say; knowing that God hears our thoughts should modify our thinking.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

GOD KNOWS OUR THOUGHTS

Genesis 6:5-6

⁵The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. ⁶The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.

1. How did God know that every thought was evil?
He knows every thought of every person. No thought is private or kept hidden from God.
2. Why was God grieved?
Their thoughts were evil. God is a person and has a heart and feelings. He cares about people and their well-being. They, however, did not care how they were affecting God by their thoughts.

GOD CARES ABOUT OUR THOUGHTS

Psalms 139:1-2, 23-24

¹⁰ LORD, you have searched me and you know me. ²You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.

²³Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.



Note: An anxious thought is any thought that does not trust God.

1. What did David know about God? (vs. 2, 24)
He knew that God knows him completely and cared about his thoughts. He was aware that his thoughts could offend God.
2. What did David ask God concerning his thought life? (vs. 23-24)
To search and test his thoughts and lead him in the way everlasting. He asked that God evaluate his thoughts and reveal them to him. He wanted to go God's way and to do that he had to know his own thoughts and motivations.

GOD JUDGES OUR THOUGHTS

Hebrews 4:12-13

¹²For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. ¹³Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

1. What happens to every thought? (vs. 13)
They are uncovered and laid bare and must be accounted for.
2. How should the knowledge of our accountability for every thought affect us?
It should cause us to think about our thoughts. It should give us greater appreciation for the depth of our need for God's mercy when we recognize the depravity of our own thinking. It should cause us to want to think God's thoughts.

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. Why does God care about our thoughts?

God wants life to go well for us. He knows our thoughts set the direction of our lives.

2. How do our thoughts affect God?

We either please him or grieve him by our thoughts. Just as a parent is affected by the choices a child makes, God is affected by us. As a parent, he loves us and wants us to do what is right. When we think God's thoughts, it pleases him; when we reject him and think bad thoughts he is grieved because he knows where those thoughts will take us.

3. Why will God judge our thoughts?

Our thoughts reveal what is in our heart. Even if we don't act upon our thoughts they show what is real about us.



Remember: God knows our every thought. He is affected by what we think. Because God loves us, we grieve him when we entertain evil thoughts. We please him when our thinking is right. We are accountable to God for our thoughts and will be judged according to them because they reveal what is true about us. We can be covered by the blood of Jesus by putting our faith in him, or we can be judged on the merit of our own thoughts. No one can stand before God justified based on his own thoughts. Everyone needs his heart to be made clean. Everyone is in need of a savior.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS



GOD BLESSES THOUGHTS OF TRUTH

Psalm 1:1-3

¹ Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

What happens to the person who thinks thoughts that please God?

He is blessed. He will produce fruit and flourish even in bad times.



PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE



PERSONAL EVALUATION

1. What are thoughts I think that please God?

2. What are thoughts I think that grieve God?

3. Do I care about how my thoughts affect God?

In what way?

4. Am I willing to seek God's help in purifying my mind?

How?



PRAYER

Pray that you would become more aware of how your thoughts affect God and truly want to rid yourself of thoughts that displease him.

THINKING GOD'S THOUGHTS

INTRODUCTION

REVIEW

1. What would our lives be like without our thoughts?
We would have no meaningful life in us as our thoughts are what give meaning and direction to our lives. We'd really be dead because we are our thoughts.
2. How often do we appreciate how much our thoughts affect us?
Not as often as we should, as what we think is what we are.
3. What makes some thoughts fruitful and other thoughts vain?
Every thought leads to a destination (an ultimate outcome), some are good destinations and some aren't. Every thought reaps a harvest. Fruitful thoughts produce a good harvest; vain thoughts produce a bad harvest.
4. How does gratitude affect us?
Gratitude prepares us to enter into God's way of salvation. By gratitude, we actually enter into God's way. Through gratitude, we continue in God's way. With gratitude, we are protected from being pulled from God's way. Ultimately, it is gratitude God desires from us as a result of traveling in his way.
5. Can we control our thought life or does it control us?
Both. We are the gatekeepers of what we let in, however, we become subject to whatever thoughts we let in.

LESSON FOCUS

This lesson will look at God's thoughts and how we are affected by them.

Without the influence of God's thoughts, what would we be like?
We'd be insufferable, self-centered, arrogant, lost.



SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES



LIKE RAIN FROM HEAVEN

Isaiah 55:7-13

⁷Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

⁸"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. ⁹"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. ¹⁰As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, ¹¹so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. ¹²You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. ¹³Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the LORD's renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed."

1. What are God's thoughts compared to? (vs. 9-10)

Rain that produces a harvest of food. Rain and snow that saturate the earth and have a purpose to produce fruit and bring joy.

2. What is the harvest that God's thoughts produce? (vs. 11-12)

Joy and peace, his desires and purposes. That which is good and beneficial.

3. What does that mean should happen to us when we read God's word?

We should find peace and joy. We should expect it to delight and refresh us.

4. Why aren't God's thoughts equally productive in all people?

It depends on the condition of the heart (soil), whether a person will receive them or not. Rain can't soak into hard pan soil.

5. If there is an absence of peace and joy in your life, what do you need to consider?

What is the condition of my heart? Am I receiving God's word and letting it work in me or am I suppressing or discounting the truth? Am I yielding myself to God's thoughts? Am I hungering after God?



PLANS TO PROSPER



Note: The Israelites were exiled to Babylon for seventy years because they had disobeyed God. They had hard hearts. God spoke to them through the prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 29:10-13

¹⁰This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. ¹¹For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹²Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

1. What were God's thoughts toward his disobedient children? (vs. 11)
He still had plans to prosper them, to give them a hope and a future.
2. What can we extrapolate from what God told the Israelites?
As his nature remains the same, his plans are for us to prosper in him even though we tend to be a stubborn and rebellious people like them.
3. What is the promise in this passage? (vs. 13)
If they sought God, they would find him. God won't stay hidden from those who are searching for him. God can be known by anyone who wants to know him.

Summary: If we seek God, we will receive the blessing and refreshment of his Word. If we fellowship around his thoughts, we will receive the joy and delight he wants to give. If we seek him, we will find him and his word will produce fruit in us.



GOD'S THOUGHTS TOWARD THE UNRECEPTIVE

Isaiah 65:2

²All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations—

1. What are God's thoughts towards those who are unreceptive to him?
He continues to hold out his hand for them. He desires them to come to him.
2. What are the unreceptive pursuing instead of God?
Their own thoughts, own imaginations, things not of God.

Where will that lead them?
Away from God, down destructive paths.



NO ROOM FOR GOD'S THOUGHTS

PSALM 10:4

⁴In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.

1. Why are God's thoughts unproductive in some people's lives?
There is no room for God, they are too full of themselves. They think too highly of themselves. They don't think they need God.
2. What does having no room for God produce?
Wicked godlessness

GOD'S PLAN FOR US

Psalm 40:5

⁵Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare.

Psalm 33:10-12

¹⁰The LORD foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. ¹¹But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations. ¹²Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people he chose for his inheritance.

1. What are God's plans for us? (vs. 12)

To be an inheritance a chosen people, to gain all that God has to give, the riches of his abundance, his presence in us now and eternally.

2. How enduring are God's plans for us? (vs. 11)

They are continual, forever. God never stops wanting to give what is good.

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. How does thinking God's thoughts affect God's plan for us?

It helps bring it to fruition. It is God's thoughts working in us that bring his plan to realization. God's thoughts show us his plan and knowing his thoughts enables us to experience his plan of peace and joy.

2. If we have no room for God's thoughts, how does that affect God's plan for us?

We forfeit his plan because thinking his thoughts is the means by which his plans are realized. His plan won't be executed as there is no activity moving us forward in him.

3. How can we more fully realize God's plan for us?

Empty ourselves and make room for his thoughts. The more we seek him and the more his Word soaks into us, the more we will experience all he wants to give. We need to conform our thoughts to his thoughts.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

BEING LIKE-MINDED

Philippians 2:1-5

¹If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ²then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. ³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

1. What did Paul say would make his joy complete? (vs. 2)

For the people to be like-minded, having the same love, spirit, purpose as he had from their unity in Christ.

2. In Isaiah 55:12-13 it says, "You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. ¹³Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the LORD's renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed." What will be the outcome of being unified with Christ and like-minded with other believers?

God's people thinking God's thoughts brings joy and abundance. We will experience the fullness of the joy and peace he wants to give. We will produce his fruit for his honor and glory. We will have a positive effect on other people and the community where we live. We and other people will flourish.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE



PERSONAL EVALUATION

1. What do my current priorities reveal about how much room there is in my heart for God's thoughts?

2. Am I willing to change my priorities to make more room for God's thoughts?

How?

3. Do I have a full appreciation of the potential benefits of thinking God's thoughts?

In what ways?

4. Am I full of self or full of God?

In what ways?



PRAYER

Thank God that he has revealed his thoughts in his Word to bless and benefit you. Pray that you would seek to know his thoughts more and live them out in your life.

