

Good Thinking



SABBATH—JANUARY 29

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Mark 7:21–23; Luke 6:45; Acts 14:2; Acts 15:24; Galatians 3:1; Psalm 19:14; Colossians 3:1–17.

MEMORY VERSE: “Finally, my brothers and sisters, always think about what is true. Think about what is noble, right and pure. Think about what is lovely and worthy of respect. If anything is excellent or worthy of praise, think about those kinds of things” (Philippians 4:8, NlrV).

ONE OF THE MOST COMMON METHODS USED IN TREATING MENTAL (MIND) HEALTH PROBLEMS TODAY IS COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY OR CBT. CBT attempts (tries) to solve mental health problems by helping people recognize and change wrong and negative thoughts and behaviors. People with depression (sadness) interpret (explain the meaning of) facts negatively. People with anxiety¹ are afraid of the future. People with low self-esteem (self-worth) praise the success of other people too much and do not value their own. So, CBT trains people to recognize their unhealthy thinking habits and change them into more positive thoughts. This helps encourage positive actions and remove unwanted ones.

The Bible teaches us about the connection between thoughts and actions (Luke 6:45). Good thoughts are healthy and lead to positive actions. “Those who plan evil go down the wrong path. But those who plan good find love and truth” (Proverbs 14:22, NlrV).

This week we will study some Bible truths that can help us gain control over our thoughts by allowing Christ to take charge of our minds.

1. anxiety—fear and worry over what might happen.

SUNDAY—JANUARY 30**THOUGHTS: THE ROOT OF BEHAVIOR (Mark 7:21–23)**

What do Mark 7:21–23 and Luke 6:45 tell us about the importance of controlling our actions, words, and thoughts?

People who suffer from impulse-control disorders² cannot resist (say No to) the urge (desire) to steal, to attack someone, or to gamble. Mental health experts know that these urges often happen after thinking a certain thought (or chain of thoughts), which leads to the negative behavior. As a result, people with these disorders learn to recognize those thoughts, remove them quickly, and turn their minds to something else. In this way, they gain control of their thoughts and avoid the negative actions caused by them.

Sinful acts often come from wrong thoughts. (After all, this is what temptation³ is all about.) It is the duty of every Christian to learn to recognize, with God's help, what the first steps of thinking wrong thoughts are. Thinking wrong thoughts almost always leads to sin.

In Romans 8:5–8, what does Paul suggest to help deal with immoral (sinful) behavior?

Paul shows that our minds and our behaviors are very closely connected. The Spirit-filled mind will seek good

actions. The sin-controlled mind will bring about sinful actions. It is not enough for us to change our behavior just to be accepted by others or to present a “holy” face to the world. The heart (mind) needs to be truly changed. If not, a person's actions will soon show the true nature of that heart.

“We need to recognize the ennobling [making something better] power of pure thoughts and the damaging influence [power] of evil thoughts. Let us put our thoughts upon holy things. Let them be pure and true. This is because the only safety for any soul is right-thinking.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, August 23, 1905.

Suppose you had to tell others the thoughts you have had during the past 24 hours. What would you say? How embarrassed would you be? What does your answer say to you about the changes you need to make?

MONDAY—JANUARY 31**THOUGHTS AS A CAUSE OF DISCOURAGEMENT (Acts 14:2)**

What are the things that really frighten (scare) you? What are ways that you can learn to trust the Lord, even though you are afraid? After all, the power of the Lord is greater than whatever dangers you face!

2. impulse-control disorders—mental (mind) health problems that include hotheadedness, stealing, fire-starting, a strong urge to pull out one's own hair, nail-biting, and skin-picking. People who suffer from impulse-control disorders cannot stop themselves from harming themselves or others.

3. temptation—a strong urge or desire to have or do something that is wrong.

Much suffering can happen through thinking. In his book *Psychology⁴ and Life*, psychologist⁵ Philip Zimbardo tells the story of a young woman taken to a hospital because she was afraid of dying. There was really nothing wrong with her, but she was admitted overnight for tests. Hours later she died. Later, it was discovered that many years before, a psychic (mind reader) had foreseen her death on her twenty-third birthday. This woman was so afraid that she died of her own panic (uncontrolled fear) the day before she would have become 23. No question, people can suffer seriously from their negative thoughts. So, it is very important to think wholesome (healthy) thoughts as we will read in tomorrow's study.

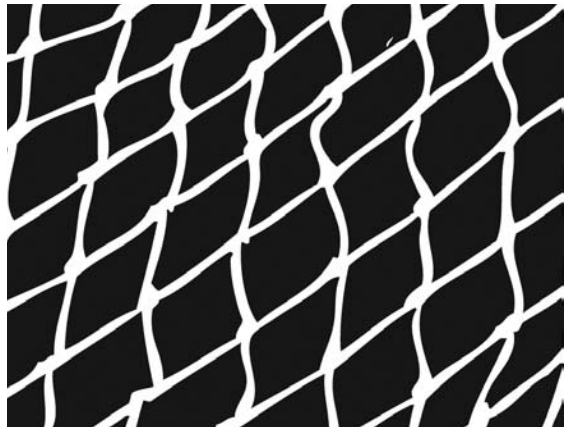
It is also important to remember that we can have a negative influence⁶ on the thinking of others by sharing our negative thoughts with them. Words are very powerful tools, either for good or for evil. Our words either build up or tear down. There is life and death in the words we speak. We need to be very careful with the thoughts and feelings that come out of our mouths.

What do Acts 14:2; Acts 15:24; and Galatians 3:1 tell us about the power to influence⁷ people negatively?

“If you do not feel joyful, do not talk of your feelings. Cast no shadow [dark

thoughts] upon the lives of others. A cold, sunless religion never leads souls to Christ. It drives them away from Him into the nets that Satan has spread for the feet of those who wander from Christ.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Ministry [Work Done for God] of Healing*, page 488.

Think about a time when someone's words tore you down in a big way. How can you be sure you never do that to anyone else?



A cold, sunless religion drives souls away from Christ into the nets that Satan has spread.

TUESDAY—FEBRUARY 1

**WHOLESOME (POSITIVE;
HEALTHY) THINKING
(Philippians 4:8)**

What is the important message of Paul's words to us in Philippians 4:8? What is the key to doing what he says? Read also 2 Peter 3:1, 2.

4. psychology—study of the mind.

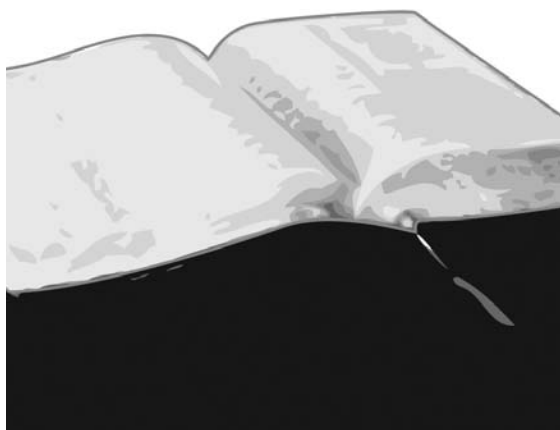
5. psychologist—a scientist who studies and treats the mind and behavior.

6. influence—the power to change or affect someone or something.

7. influence—to affect or change someone or something in an indirect but usually important way.

Remembering, repeating, thinking about, and studying the words in the Bible are some of the greatest spiritual blessings we have. And it is a sure way to develop (to build) what Peter called “wholesome [positive; pure] thinking” (2 Peter 3:1, NIV). Many people have received wonderful blessings by memorizing important Bible promises. When faced with moments of worry, doubt, fear, frustration, or temptation, these people have repeated such thoughts in their minds and have received relief and peace through the power of the Holy Spirit.

With so many temptations (TV, computer, and so on), this generation⁸ of believers is being tempted⁹ to forget the Bible. So, it is necessary to read and study the Word every day. The Word of God is the only true protection we have against the temptations that come from the world.

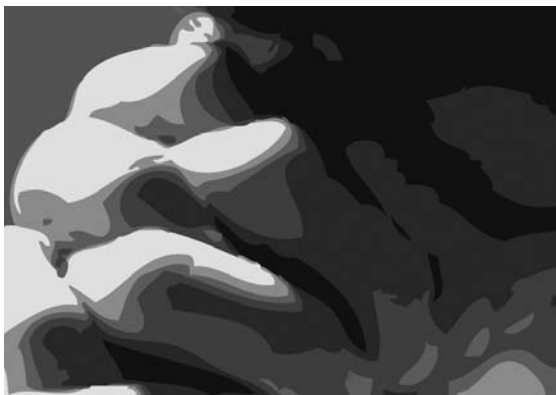


It is necessary to read and study God’s Word every day to protect ourselves against temptation.

Read Philippians 4:8 again. Make a list of things you come across in your life that are true, pure, lovely, and so forth. What does that list include? What do all these things have in common? Bring your list to class and share it with others on Sabbath.

Prayer is another way to keep the mind out of trouble. While we talk to God, there is little chance for lustful or selfish thoughts. Developing the good habit of prayer is a sure protection from sinful thoughts and actions.

The Bible is clear: God cares about our thoughts because our thoughts influence our words, our actions, and our health. God wants us to have good thoughts because good thoughts, or “wholesome thinking,” are good for both our bodies and our minds. The good news is that through studying the Bible, through prayer, and through Spirit-led choices on our part, we can keep our minds and hearts on things that will uplift ourselves and others too.



Prayer helps us keep our minds on things that will uplift ourselves and others.

8. generation—a group of people born and living during the same time.

9. tempted—to cause someone to do or want to do something even though it may be wrong, bad, or unwise.

WEDNESDAY—FEBRUARY 2**THE THOUGHTS OF OUR HEARTS (1 Kings 8:39)**

What is the important point that 1 Kings 8:39; Psalm 19:14; 1 Chronicles 28:9; and 1 Samuel 16:7 are making? More important, how should this truth affect how we think? Does this truth make you nervous and fearful? Or does it give you hope? Or both? Study the reason for your answer.

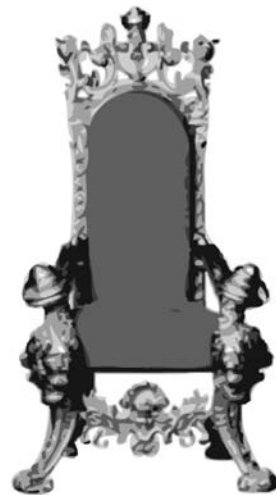
“For you alone know the hearts of all men” (1 Kings 8:39, NIV). The word *heart* often is used in the Bible as the seat (place) of thoughts and emotions (read Matthew 9:4). Only God knows our minds, our true plans, and our secret desires. Nothing, not even the smallest thought, can be hidden from the Creator.

God’s knowledge of our souls is helpful to us. When people are too discouraged to say a word of prayer, God knows their needs. We cannot judge the heart of a person by his or her actions. God alone knows the true thoughts of people in ways others never can.

Satan and his angels can only watch, study, listen, and guess what goes on inside. “Satan cannot read our thoughts. But he can see our actions and hear our words. Then, from his long knowledge of the human¹⁰ family, he can use his temptations to

test our weak points of character.”¹¹ —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Review and Herald*, May 19, 1891.

Each day, as you make choices (personal or work-related) or think of other people, stop for a minute and send a quiet prayer to God. Enjoy the closeness of prayer between you and God alone. Nobody else in the universe¹² knows what goes on in this communication. Letting Christ into your mind and thoughts will protect you from temptation and bring spiritual blessings. This method will help you have a closer walk with the Lord.



The heart is the throne or seat of our thoughts and emotions.

How does our study today help you better understand the Bible’s warning to not judge others? How many times have you been misjudged by those who do not know your heart? Why is it important not to judge others in return?

10. human—of, relating to, or affecting people.

11. character—the way someone thinks, feels, and behaves.

12. universe—all of space and everything in it, including stars, planets, galaxies, and so on.

THURSDAY—FEBRUARY 3**THE PEACE OF CHRIST IN OUR HEARTS (Colossians 3:1–17)**

What are some things God has asked us to do so that we may live our lives in Christ?

These verses take us to the root of moral¹³ and immoral¹⁴ behaviors: the heart and mind. They also point at the only One (Jesus) who can work goodness in us by controlling our thoughts. “Let the peace that Christ gives rule in your hearts” (Colossians 3:15, NIV). Remember phrases such as “set your hearts,” “set your minds,” “put on love,” “let the peace of Christ,” “let the word of Christ.” They show that avoiding sin and becoming good are matters of choice and preparation. Sin can be overcome only by setting our hearts and minds upon God. Christ is the center of virtue (goodness). When we let Him, Christ is the only One who can bring true peace to our minds.

Our minds are the center of our lives. They need to be put under the care of Jesus. It is central to the development (growth) of character. It cannot be left only to events and results. Sinful desires and sinful places work against pure thoughts. But the Lord does not leave us to fight alone. He gives His help and protection to all who want it. “If our thoughts remain with God, they will be guided by God’s love and power.” So, we must

“live on the words that come from the lips of Christ.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, volume 2, page 669.

In the middle of this spiritual war, a person may be tempted and find it very difficult to get rid of sinful thoughts. In those moments, it may be easier to get rid of them by going to a different place, doing something different, or spending time with good people. This may make it easier to pray and have hope.

How thought works is a mystery. We really do not know for sure what it is or how it works. But, in our inner minds, we alone choose what we are going to think about. A thought can be changed quickly. We simply have to make the choice to change it. (We must remember that, in some cases, mental illness can influence a person’s ability to change his or her thoughts. In this case, professional treatment [if available] can be very helpful.) What about your thoughts? Next time the wrong ones come, what are you going to do?

FRIDAY—FEBRUARY 4

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “The power of right thought is more valuable than gold or any expensive jewels. We need to put a high value upon the right control of our thoughts. . . . Every impure thought dirties the soul, blocks the moral sense, and may

13. moral—concerning or relating to what is right and good behavior.

14. immoral—not good or right; evil, wrong, or sinful.

remove the influence of the Holy Spirit upon the soul. It dims the spiritual vision, so that men cannot recognize God. The Lord may and does forgive the repenting¹⁵ sinner. The person may be forgiven, but his or her spirit is damaged. All impure speech and thoughts must be removed by the person who wants to understand spiritual truth clearly. . . . We are to use every possible way that God has given us to control and develop our thoughts. We are to bring our minds into perfect unity [oneness] with Christ's mind. His truth will make us holy—body, soul, and spirit. And He shall strengthen us to rise above temptation.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, August 23, 1905.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① In class, go over the list you made on Tuesday and compare yours with others in your class. What can you learn from all of these lists?
- ② What is the meaning of Paul's wording in 2 Corinthians 10:5, "I keep every thought under control in order to make it obey Christ" (NIRV)? How can we learn to do that?
- ③ How do the Internet, TV programs, the books we read, and the advertisements we see work in our minds? How

much of what we think and do may be influenced¹⁶ by these things? Why do we fool ourselves if we believe that what we read or watch does not influence our thinking?

- ④ What are some ways that our actions show the thoughts in our minds? How does body language show what is going on inside?
- ⑤ What advice would you give to someone who is having a hard time with impulsive (uncontrollable) behavior? (Read the Introduction in the Sabbath study for this week.) What promises can you present to this person from the Bible? Why is it also important to help him or her remember all the promises of forgiveness and acceptance through Jesus? How can you keep him or her from giving up completely? (Keep in mind that this person may feel that his or her relationship with God is weak because he or she is still fighting against this sin.) How can you help this person learn never to give up on the promises of forgiveness, no matter how unworthy he or she feels?
- ⑥ How careful are you with your words, which show your true thoughts? How can you be sure your words always are working for good and not for evil?

15. repenting—feeling or showing that you are sorry for something bad or wrong that you did and that you want to do what is right.

16. influenced—to be affected or changed by someone or something.