

Good Thinking



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 7:21–23, Luke 6:45, Acts 14:2, 15:24, Gal. 3:1, Ps. 19:14, Col. 3:1–17.*

Memory Text: “Finally, 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” (*Philippians 4:8, NIV*).

As one of the most utilized forms of mental health intervention today, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is based on the assumption that most psychological problems are improved by identifying and changing inaccurate and dysfunctional perceptions, thoughts, and behaviors. People with depression tend to interpret facts negatively; people with anxiety tend to look at the future with apprehension; and those with low self-esteem maximize others' success and minimize their own. CBT, therefore, trains people to identify and change their unhealthy thinking habits into better alternatives that promote desirable behavior and eliminate unwanted ones.

The Bible teaches us about the connection between thoughts and actions (*Luke 6:45*). Good thought patterns not only are healthy but also provide a way toward integrity: “Do not those who plot evil go astray? But those who plan what is good find love and faithfulness” (*Prov. 14:22, NIV*).

This week we'll look at some biblical truths that can help us gain control over our mental activity by allowing Christ to take charge of our mind.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 5.*

Thoughts: The Root of Behavior

Read Mark 7:21–23 and Luke 6:45. What do these texts tell us about the importance of controlling, not just our actions, not just our deeds, not just our words but our thoughts, as well?

People who suffer from impulse-control disorders fail to resist the impulse to steal, to attack someone, or to gamble. Mental health clinicians know that these impulses often are preceded by a certain thought (or chain of thoughts), which leads to the undesirable behavior. Consequently, patients are trained to identify those thought triggers, dispel them immediately, and occupy their minds with something else. In this way, they gain control of their thoughts and avoid the actions that these wrong thoughts so often lead to.

Indeed, sinful acts often are preceded by definite thoughts. (Isn't this what temptation is all about?) It is the duty of every Christian to learn to identify, with God's help, the first steps in this process, because dwelling on wrong thoughts leads almost inevitably to sin.

What alternative is proposed by Paul to deal with immoral behavior?
Rom. 8:5–8.

Mind and behavior are shown by Paul as intimately linked. The Spirit-filled mind will seek good deeds, and the sin-dominated mind will bring about sinful deeds. It is not enough to change the behavior for the sake of convenience or to present a righteous face to the world. The heart (mind) needs to be transformed or else the eventual fruits will show the true nature of that heart.

“We need a constant sense of the ennobling power of pure thoughts and the damaging influence of evil thoughts. Let us place our thoughts upon holy things. Let them be pure and true; for the only security for any soul is right-thinking.”—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, August 23, 1905.

Suppose you had to express, verbally, to 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?

Thoughts as a Source of Distress

What are the things that really frighten you? What are ways that you can learn to trust the Lord, despite that fear? After all, isn't the Lord's power greater than whatever threats you face?

Much suffering can occur through thinking. Psychologist Philip Zimbardo, in his book *Psychology and Life*, reports the case of a young woman taken to a hospital because she was terrified of dying. Apparently there was nothing wrong with her, but she was admitted overnight for observation. Hours later she died. Further investigation showed that years before, a psychic had predicted her death on her twenty-third birthday. This woman died, a victim of her own panic, the day before she would have become 23. No question, people can suffer seriously from their negative thoughts; hence the need of wholesome thinking (tomorrow's lesson).

Also, just as important to remember: we also adversely can affect others' thinking by expressing our negativity to others. 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. How careful we need to be with the thoughts and sentiments that come out of our mouths.

Read Acts 14:2, 15:24, and Galatians 3:1. What do they tell us about the power to impact people negatively?

“If you do not feel lighthearted and joyous, do not talk of your feelings. Cast no shadow upon the lives of others. A cold, sunless religion never draws souls to Christ. It drives them away from Him into the nets that Satan has spread for the feet of the straying.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 488.

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

Wholesome Thinking

“Finally, 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” (*Phil. 4:8, NIV*).

What is the essence of Paul’s words to us here? What is the key to doing what he says? See also *2 Pet. 3:1, 2*.

Remembering, repeating, thinking about, and meditating on the words in the Bible is one of the greatest spiritual blessings available to us, and it is a sure way to cultivate what Peter called “wholesome thinking” (*2 Pet. 3:1, NIV*). Many people have obtained invaluable blessings by committing to memory treasured Bible texts. When confronted with moments of worry, doubt, fear, frustration, or temptation, they have repeated such thoughts in their minds and have obtained relief and peace through the power of the Holy Spirit.

With so many alluring competitors (TV, computer, etc.), this generation of believers is being tempted to put the Bible aside. It is necessary therefore to make a committed decision to read and reflect upon the Word every day. The Word of God is the only true fortification we have against the mental onslaught of unspiritual distractions that come from the world.

Look again at the text above. Make a list of what things you encounter that are true, pure, lovely, and so forth. What does that list consist of? What do 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 other forms of selfish thoughts. Acquiring prayerful habits is a sure protection from sinful thoughts and, consequently, from sinful actions. The Bible is clear: God cares about our thoughts, because our thoughts impact our words, our actions, and our overall well-being. God wants us to have good thoughts because good thoughts (wholesome thinking) are good for us, both physically and mentally. The good news is that through meditating on the Bible, through prayer, and through Spirit-inspired choices on our part, we can keep our minds and hearts on things that will uplift ourselves and others, as well.

The Thoughts of Our Hearts

Read 1 Kings 8:39, Psalm 19:14, 1 Chronicles 28:9, and 1 Samuel 16:7. What crucial point are these texts making? More important, how should this truth impact us and how we think? Does this truth make you nervous and fearful, or does it give you hope? Or both? Analyze 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 of thoughts and emotions (*see Matt. 9:4*). Only God has access to the intimacy of our mental activity, to our true intentions, and to our secret yearnings. Nothing, even in the form of a fleeting thought, can be hidden from the Creator.

God’s knowledge of our soul is to our advantage. When people are too discouraged to utter a sensible word of prayer, God knows their need. Humans can look only at the outer appearance and behaviors, and then try to imagine what someone else is thinking; God knows the thoughts in ways others never can.

Likewise, Satan and his angels only can observe, listen, and estimate what goes on inside. “Satan cannot read our thoughts, but he can see our actions, hear our words; and from his long knowledge of the human family, he can shape his temptations to take advantage of our weak points of character.”—Ellen G. White, *The Review and Herald*, May 19, 1891.

As you make everyday decisions (personal or work-related) or think of other people, pause for a moment and send a quiet prayer to God. Enjoy the understanding of an intimate dialogue that is for you and God alone. Nobody else in the universe is privy to this communication. Allowing Christ into your thinking process will safeguard you from temptation and bring spiritual blessings. This process will, beyond doubt, help you build a closer walk with the Lord.

How does the day’s lesson help you better understand the biblical admonition not to judge others? How many times have your motives been misjudged by those who don’t know your heart? Why, then, is it important not to judge others in return?

The Peace of Christ in Our Hearts

Read Colossians 3:1–17. What are the specific actions that we are called upon to do in order to live the kind of life in Christ we are promised?

This passage takes us to the root of moral and immoral behaviors, the heart and mind. It also points at the only One who can work goodness in us by governing our thoughts, Jesus Christ: “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts” (*Col. 3:15, NIV*). Note expressions such as “set your hearts,” “set your minds,” “put on love,” “let the peace of Christ,” “let the word of Christ.” They indicate that avoiding sin and acquiring virtue are matters of choice and preparation, not improvisation. Sin can be overcome only by setting hearts and minds on things from above. Christ is the source of virtue and goodness. Christ, when allowed by us, is the only One capable of bringing true peace to our minds.

Our minds, then, being the core of our existence, need to be put under the care of Jesus. It is central to the development of character, and it cannot be left to the mercy of circumstances. Sinful tendencies and corrupt environments both work against purity in thought. Yet, the Lord does not leave us abandoned; He extends His help and protection to all who want it. “Our thoughts, if stayed upon God, will be guided by divine love and power.” Thus, we must “live on the words that proceed from the lips of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 669.

In the middle of spiritual warfare, a person may be tempted and find it very difficult to dispel certain adverse thoughts. In those moments, it may be easier to distract oneself by changing place or activity or seeking good company. This may permit a change that facilitates prayer and assurance.

Thought is a very mysterious human process. We really don't know for sure even what it is or exactly how it works. In most cases, though, in the inner recesses of our consciousness, we alone make the choice regarding what we are going to think about. A thought can be changed in an instant. We simply have to make the choice to change it. (In some cases, though, mental illness can affect a person's ability to change their thoughts easily, and so professional treatment [if available] can be extremely beneficial.) What about your thoughts? Next time the wrong ones come, what are you going to do?

Further Study: “More precious than the golden wedge of Ophir is the power of right thought. We need to place a high value upon the right control of our thoughts. . . . Every impure thought defiles the soul, impairs the moral sense, and tends to obliterate the impressions of the Holy Spirit. It dims the spiritual vision, so that men cannot behold God. The Lord may and does forgive the repenting sinner; but though forgiven, the soul is marred. All impurity of speech and thought must be shunned by him who would have clear discernment of spiritual truth. . . . We are to use every means that God has placed within our reach for the government and cultivation of our thoughts. We are to bring our minds into harmony with Christ’s mind. His truth will sanctify us, body, soul, and spirit, and we shall be enabled to rise above temptation.”—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 one another’s picks?
- 2** What is the meaning of “bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”? *2 Cor. 10:5*. How can we learn to do that?
- 3** How do the Internet, TV programs, recreational reading, advertisements, et cetera, work in your mind? How much of your thinking and doing may be affected by these sources? Why do we fool ourselves if we believe that what we read or watch doesn’t impact our thinking?
- 4** What are ways in which our actions, even subconsciously, reveal the thoughts in our minds? How does body language show what’s going on inside?
- 5** What advice would you give to someone who is struggling with impulsive behavior? What promises can you present to them from the Bible? Why is it also important to keep before them all the promises of forgiveness and acceptance through Jesus? How can you keep them from giving up in complete despair, believing that, because they have not achieved the victory that they want, their relationship with God is somehow deficient? How can you help them learn never to give up on the promises of forgiveness, no matter how unworthy they feel?
- 6** How careful are you with your words, which simply reflect your thoughts? How can you be sure your words always are working for good and not for evil?

The Power of Faith

by BENJAMIN SCHOUN

Ragasa lives in Madagascar, an island off the eastern coast of Africa. She grew up in a family that worshiped demons. When she reached adulthood the demons told her that if she did as they asked, they would give her great powers.

Ragasa agreed. The demons gave her powers to control lightning, withstand bullets, and much more. Through her powers, Ragasa became an influential woman. Then she did something that angered the demons, and they caused her to become seriously ill. No one could help her; and the demons to whom she had turned in the past refused to make her well.

One day she heard a knock at the door. She answered the door and found two young women standing there. As they talked with Ragasa, she felt comfortable with these strangers. She related her struggles with the demons and her resulting sickness.

The young women told Ragasa that they were Seventh-day Adventist Christians, and they asked if they could pray for her. Ragasa agreed, for she had no other options.

In a short time Ragasa was well. She began studying the Bible with her new friends. The women encouraged Ragasa to listen to Adventist World Radio, for it would bring her comfort and help her in her struggles against the demons. Ragasa listened to the station, and soon she fell deeply in love with Jesus Christ.

Adventists in the region learned of Ragasa's conversion and fasted and prayed for her before her baptism. The demons were powerless in the face of God's praying children, and Ragasa was baptized without trouble from her former masters.

Because of the love of the two young visitors and the ministry of Adventist World Radio, God transformed this once-powerful, demon-possessed woman into a humble Christian servant. In gratitude to God for His salvation, Ragasa invites others to listen to Adventist World Radio with her. Now a congregation of more than 100 worship together around Ragasa's radio every week.

Congregations such as Ragasa's have no pastor; they have no teacher except the radio programs. They have no church building, for they cannot afford one. Yet they believe and worship as we do.

Your mission offerings help support the work of Adventist World Radio and other outreach programs around the world. Thank you for sharing so that others, like Ragasa, can know that God loves them.

BENJAMIN SCHOUN is president of Adventist World Radio.

Students at James Memorial Higher Secondary School in Tamil Nadu outline where their new classroom block will stand thanks to our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering.



For 100 years Adventist schools in India have been a powerful tool to introduce people to Jesus. Our schools provide a solid foundation for leadership both in the church and in the secular world. Education continues to be a strong pillar for outreach to the more than one billion people on this sub-continent. Thousands, perhaps millions, can trace their faith to an Adventist school.

The demand for quality education continues to grow in India. And our schools must grow too. This quarter our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will enable three secondary schools in India to add classroom blocks that will accommodate more students and better curriculum choices. When a method of evangelism works, we need to work with it. And Adventist education in India is evangelism. I'm glad I can help build leaders for tomorrow and God's Kingdom today. For me it's personal.

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