

Are Your Thoughts Making You Unhappy?

by Terri Testa

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I don't know about you but at times my thoughts can get off track. Recently I was sitting in my backyard on a spring day enjoying the sunshine. It was Goldilocks weather, not too hot, not too cold. The flowers were in full bloom and I was sipping a cup of coffee and then it happened. My mind wandered and I started thinking about negative things. In my mind I started reviewing my previous interaction with my work colleague. I asked myself why does she you can fill in the blank. Then I focused on the one area of my yard that needs to be weeded. So instead of enjoying the sunshine and thanking God for the gorgeous day I was thinking about negative things, and this put me in a bad mood.

I'm not quite sure why the human brain gravitates to the negative at times. It seems that as humans we are prone to be discontent. The Bible's account of creation tells us that God created a perfect garden for Adam and Eve to live in. However, Eve still wanted to eat the fruit that God commanded them not to eat out of a desire to have more. She was not content with what God had provided.

Our thoughts have the power to lead us to action. Frank Outlaw coined the phrase, "Watch your thoughts, they become words; watch your words, they become actions; watch your actions, they become habits; watch your habits, they become character; watch your character, for it becomes your destiny."

Behaviorists theorize that individuals first think something then they talk about it and then it becomes action. If you want to control your behavior you need to be able to control your thoughts. So how do we control our thoughts?

The below Bible verses outline five steps to control our thoughts and align them God's word.

1. The Philippians 4 Test

Philippians 4:8

Philippians 4:8 helps us identify when we are thinking untrue or negative thoughts. We are to think about whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy. So whatever we are thinking needs to pass the Philippians 4 test.

In order to do this we first ask ourselves is what we are thinking true. We might be thinking "I am the worst gardener" because I have so many weeds in my yard. This statement is extreme and not true because no one is the "worst" gardener.

We can then continue going through the list of qualities presented and check our thoughts against the qualities listed in Philippians 4. This helps us decide if the thoughts we are thinking are aligned with God's word. But how do we change our thoughts? Cognitive behavioral theory suggests that in order to improve our mental health our distorted thoughts and beliefs need to be changed.

2. Take Every Thought Captive and Make it Obedient

2 Corinthians 10:5

God is well aware of how the human brain functions. After all he created our brain. In Exodus (**Exodus 16**) when the Hebrews left Egypt and wandered in the desert on the way to the promised land, they focused on the lack of variety of their food that God provided

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instead of the fact that God had just freed them from slavery.

God knows that focusing on the negative keeps us from the peace he desires us to have and from seeing God's goodness. God commands us to take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ (**2 Corinthians 10:5**) so we can live the life He intends us to live.

But how do we do this?

3. Not Only Get Rid of Our Negative Thoughts But Replace Them

Luke 11:24-26

This scripture teaches us that it's not enough to get rid of negative thoughts, they also need to be replaced with positive ones or else the negative thoughts will return. Focusing on true thoughts changes our focus, leaving no room for negative thoughts to return.

4. Use Scripture to Replace Our Negative Thoughts

Matthew 4:1- 11

Jesus used scripture to combat Satan when he was tempted in Matthew 4. Memorizing scripture so that we can recall it when we are being tempted protects us from untrue thoughts. God's word is powerful, and being armed with truth helps us combat untrue messages. Jesus was tempted when he was hungry, and we are often tempted to think negative thoughts when our physical needs are not being met. We are more vulnerable to temptation when our physical and mental strength is low.

5. Being In God's Word Arms Us

Romans 12:2

"Do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

By renewing our mind in God's word we can remind ourselves of what is important. By reading and meditating on God's word we can arm ourselves with scriptures to combat negative thoughts when we are tempted.

6. Pray

John 14:13-14

We also need to rely on God's strength by praying throughout this entire process.

Following the above steps when you are feeling unhappy can help you experience a peace-filled life. Taking every thought captive and making it obedient to Christ can assist us in doing this.

For me taking every thought captive isn't something that comes naturally. I recognize that I am not doing this when I am not feeling at peace, and then I recognize that I am not taking every thought captive. Then I remind myself of the above steps to renew my mind with God's truth.