
THE WALL OF THE MIND

We've already seen that the Israelites, under the supervision of Nehemiah, had a mind to build the walls, but I feel it's important to note that they also had to mind their minds while they were working. Think about it for a moment. They were being ridiculed, threatened, laughed at, distracted and attacked. How easy would it have been for them to say, "You know what? We quit. It sounded like a good idea, but we've changed our minds. It's just too hard"? So, why didn't they? What kept them from throwing in the towel (or the trowel, in their case) and leaving Nehemiah to finish the work alone? It was the fact that their minds were focused on the task before them and nothing else. Or to put it another way, they were paying more attention to the battlefield of the mind than to the battlefield around them, and that's as it should be because the mind is indeed a battlefield, and it is here that many battles are lost. And let me tell you, no one is immune to these attacks.

THE POWER OF A SINGLE THOUGHT

In I Kings 19, we witness Elijah's flight from Jezebel and, consequently, his flight from the Lord's work. You see, God had placed him in Jezreel for a reason. God had a work for him to do, and He wasn't finished with Elijah. But in a moment of fear and desperation, Elijah listened to his feelings and the thoughts swimming around in his head that told him it just wasn't worth the fight, and he fled. At first, he went to Beersheba, about one hundred miles south of where he was supposed to be. Then, after the Lord's tender care of him there, he continued his journey south and ended up another two hundred miles away at Mount Horeb (also known as Mount Sinai). It was a holy place, perhaps the best place to get his act together. . .if God hadn't already told him to be somewhere else.

What truly amazes me is the encounter that takes place next. The Lord comes to Elijah and asks, "What are you doing here?" Listen to Elijah's reply: *And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. (I Kings 19:10)* There are many things wrong with Elijah's comments, but I don't have the time and space to go into that right now. Instead, I want to continue the story. Read on:

And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? (I Kings 19:11-13)

Again, there's so much that could be discussed here, but alas, I must press on to get to my point. After God had displayed His great power and manifest presence, he asked Elijah

again, "What are you doing here?" Surely, Elijah was humbled by this event. The Bible says he wrapped his face in his mantle which is a sign of humility and respect. From that verse alone, it appears that God had gotten through to the prophet. We expect Elijah's next words to be those of sorrow and repentance. Perhaps a plea for forgiveness or a second chance. But no, take a look at what he said: *And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. (I Kings 19:14)*

I assure you this is no typo, nor did I type in the wrong verse by mistake. Elijah's second answer was nearly identical to his first. He gave the Lord the same answer almost word for word. You know what that tells me? Elijah had been rehearsing. I believe that the forty-day trip from Beersheba to Mount Horeb gave Elijah a lot of time alone with his thoughts, and it wasn't at all productive. It seems to me that Elijah rehearsed in his mind that same sob story so many times that he had it memorized and could probably spout it in his sleep. And that, my friends, is what happens when we allow our minds to dwell on the wrong things.

In her book, ***The Best Yes***, Lysa Terkeurst put it this way: "We do what we do and feel how we feel because we think what we think." Oh, how true! Elijah was running from God because he felt like he was all alone in the battle and that God had let him down. From before the time he faced the 450 prophets of Baal, he was declaring that he was the only one left serving God. Evidently, that thought (false though it was) blossomed into fear, anxiety and eventually a rebellion so great that even the shaking of the mountain couldn't loosen Elijah's grip on his bitterness. He did what he did and felt what he felt because he allowed himself to think what he thought.

The mind is a battlefield, and every thought can be a dangerous enemy. Take care. Be "mindful" of what you allow yourself to dwell on. If you're not sure if the thought lurking about is friend or foe, run it through the filter of Philippians 4:8: *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.* That will quickly help you to identify the thoughts that should be allowed to remain and those that need to be brought into the captivity of Christ (II Corinthians 10:5).

Never underestimate the power of a single thought!

DOES THE BIBLE TEACH POSITIVE THINKING?

The wealth and prosperity coaches of this world teach a principle called The Law of Attraction, also known as Positive Thinking. This philosophy is the belief that a person's positive or negative thoughts will bring about respectively positive or negative things. In other words, according to this warped teaching, we can control the outcome of our lives by thinking only the right things at the right times. The sad thing is that, like most lies, there is a grain of truth to this philosophy, though not in the way these coaches would like you to think.

Proverbs 23:7a says, *For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.* Using that verse as their "proof text," these prosperity seekers claim that if you think you're rich, you'll become rich. If you think you're healthy, you'll become healthy. Like some magical field of dreams, if you think it, it will come. Sorry, but life doesn't work that way.

These teachings irritate me because they use the Bible as their proof, but what they're saying is distorting what the Lord is saying through His Word. If life were as simple as to think it and it will happen, then why do we need the Lord? Why is there heartache and disappointment? Why isn't everyone healthy and wealthy? Sadly, these prosperity seekers are leaving God completely out of the picture and saying that we are in control of our lives and futures, and it all boils down to merely thinking about what we want and believing it will come true. They have confused positive thinking with blind ambition, and they're leading people astray by the millions (and many of them are making millions of dollars in the process).

That being said, while we are not in control of our lives and futures, we are in control of our thoughts and emotions. We determine what we think about, and that's where the Biblical principle of positive thinking comes into play. Take, for example, Proverbs 23:7 again. *For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.* Our thoughts cannot dictate our circumstances, but they certainly affect our emotions and even our actions. If we think angry thoughts, it's not long before we're upset and acting out in that anger. If we think negative thoughts, pretty soon we're depressed and snapping at everyone we come in contact with. Our emotions and actions follow our thoughts, so it's not rocket science to see that if we think positively (as Philippians 4:8 commands), we'll have more positive emotions and actions.

Romans 12:2 says, *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.* We are not of the world; therefore, we shouldn't think as the world thinks. Instead, we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. To transform something means to make a drastic change. If your thoughts are anything like mine used to be, a transformation sounds like a good thing. I love the way the Merriam-Webster dictionary explains the word "renew." It means, "to make (something) new, fresh or strong again." New. Fresh. Strong. Talk about positive thinking! God is saying that if we want to change our lives drastically, we need to do some serious work on our thoughts. How? One step at a time. One thought at a time. Constantly on guard. Catching those treacherous trespassers and stopping them in their tracks.

Sounds pretty simple, but I assure you, it's hard work! Thoughts come and go by the hundreds, and to keep our emotions and actions in check, we need to closely monitor every idea that passes through our brain and run them through the filter of Philippians 4:8. If it's positive and uplifting, then it can remain. If not, give it over to God immediately. Keep in mind, I'm not talking about ignoring the thoughts and hoping they'll go away. That does NOT work. Trust me; I've tried. I thought I was doing good by pushing them away, but the trouble was that I wasn't giving them to God. I was trying (in my own strength, I might add) to ignore them, but let me tell you, they're determined and adamant. More so than I am. We cannot simply bury them. We must turn them over to God and allow Him to do away with them.

Now, you may be wondering what exactly that means. How do we give our thoughts to God? The process takes a few steps, but they happen rather quickly and are quite effective.

First off, accept responsibility for the thought. Remember, you have a choice about what you think. Second, stop that thought in its tracks and recognize it for what it is. If it's a realistic problem, identify it as such. If it's some fear-filled "what if," acknowledge that as well. You can't deal with an enemy until you've identified it.

Once you've acknowledged the thought and its value, give it to God verbally. If you have time, you can say a long prayer here, but if not, something short and sweet will do. For example, "Lord, this thought is weighing me down and causing me fear. I give it over to you and trust that You love me enough to work this situation out for my good and Your glory." From there, I've found it helpful to quote some Scripture or sing a gospel song. This keeps my mind occupied long enough for the anxious thoughts to slip away.

A good way to look at surrendering your thoughts to God is this example. The process of writing and publishing a book is complicated and involves many stages. Most of the elements I do myself, but to speed up the process with this book, I hired out some help. I turned the cover work over to one person, the description to another. Someone else was responsible for formatting, and another person did the logo. While each of them was doing his job, I was doing mine. Basically, I had turned over the responsibility of individual areas to them, and I trusted each of them to do their part. I didn't have to worry if it was getting done. I didn't keep checking in with each worker to make sure they weren't letting me down. Why? Because I knew each one and understood that I could count on them. By allowing them to do their part, I was able to focus on mine, and the entire process was smoother and much less stressful. The same holds true when we turn our problems over to God. We can trust Him to do His part because He's proven Himself faithful. And because He's dependable, we are free to do the work He has called us to do. We don't have to fret about whether or not God is capable of handling the task. He's got it! That is what it means to turn our thoughts and situations over to God. Give Him control and focus on the things He's given us to do that we can control.

Unfortunately, the battle doesn't end there because there are three other walls that need to be built to set up the perimeter around our heart, but I'll tell you the good news. Once you've built the first wall, the others go up much easier because they are each anchored to the previous one. For example, we've just covered the importance of filtering our thoughts, and that will help us with the next wall which is controlling what we say. Why? I'll let the Bible explain.

O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned. (Matthew 12:34-37)

What we think drastically affects what we say, and in the next chapter, we'll see that the words we speak hold the power of life and death.