

How to Take a Thought Captive

By Wendy Wood



A person's life is directed by the thoughts they think. Our thoughts drive our emotions. When we think we should get something and we don't, we get upset. When we think something should be easy and it's not, we get frustrated. When we think something will take an hour and we accomplish it sooner, we are happy. Our thoughts also lead to our actions. Out of our frustration or happiness, we act and the outward manifestation of our thoughts is seen. Martyn Lloyd Jones says that we need to stop listening to ourselves and start talking to ourselves. That is really the basis behind taking a thought captive.

Paul tells us in **2 Corinthians 10:3-5** ***"For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ"***. We are doing battle against arguments and lofty opinions raised against the knowledge of God. The arguments and lofty opinions are the thoughts that run through our heads. We are so used to thinking all day, every day, that we don't pay very much attention to where our thoughts go as we go about our day.

However, when we stop and take inventory of our thoughts, we will begin to understand our emotions, actions, and desires so much more!

Stop and think about your thoughts. What do you turn over and over in your mind throughout the day. Maybe it's something along the lines of "I just wish this day would be over!". Maybe the thought you return to is "Why are my children so difficult to deal with?". Or maybe the thoughts are more about you. "I can't do anything right" or "Of course that didn't work, I never get it right". Maybe your thoughts fall on the other end of the pride spectrum and you think "That idiot doesn't know how to drive! How did he get a driver's license?" or "Why can't she just agree with me?!" Stop and think about your thoughts throughout the day. That's the first step. Figure out what your "natural" inclination is to think about. We are sinners. Our minds and thoughts are tainted by sin. We drift toward sin in our thoughts because we are sinners. It takes deliberate action and the work of the Holy Spirit to change our thoughts, and thereby the direction of life.

You might be thinking, I think those types of thoughts every day. What's wrong with that? Well, those thoughts do not take into account a sovereign, wise, good, loving, just God. When we judge our circumstances and think they are wrong, we are putting ourselves in the place of God. Our evaluation of our circumstances will always be about what we want and, typically, what we want is a comfortable, easy life. As believers, we are called to have the mind of Christ! God's word tells us that suffering is a good gift! ***Philippians 1:29 says, "For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake"***. God has purpose in suffering and it is a gift to suffer as Christ did because it draws us closer to Him. ***Ephesians 1:11 says, "In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will"***. Every moment of every day is predestined by God to accomplish His purpose. There is nothing that will ever happen to you that is not part of God's grand purpose for His world. ***Romans 8:28-29 tells us "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."*** God is using all things, every circumstance, to conform us to the image of His Son! We are designed to live life God's way since He is our Creator. As we become more like Christ we experience more joy! When we think about life through the lens of God's character and word, our thoughts should be radically different than the ones mentioned above.

"You can't stop a bird from flying over your head, but you can stop a bird from making a nest in your hair!"

What does that quote have to do with thoughts? The temptation to think self-centered thoughts will come. We are sinners in a sinful world and the temptation to think selfishly will come. It's what we do with the temptation that matters. The bird can and will fly overhead, but you can stop it from making a nest! When you are tempted to dwell on a selfish thought, stop and think about the truth of God. This is "taking a thought captive".

Here are some examples:

Old thought: "Why can't my kids just listen!"

New thought: "Based on Deuteronomy 6:5-9 I know that God calls me to be a faithful parent and instruct my kids in His ways. I will use their disobedience to show them they need a Savior and how to repent. I will choose to trust God's wisdom and love in giving me this difficult day."

Old thought: "I am so tired of my boss not appreciating me! Maybe I'll just quit!"

New thought: "Colossians 2:23 tells me to work heartily for the Lord. I will work hard trusting that God sees my work. My aim is to please God (2 Corinthians 5:9) so if I do my best with an attitude of joy in serving God, I can still find joy in my work."

Taking thoughts captive requires you to know God and His word. This will involve meditation and memorization. To meditate on something means to ponder, to consider, to turn over and over in your mind, to fixate on, or dwell on. Too many of us meditate on sinful thoughts. God calls us to meditate on His word day and night (Joshua 1:8).

Steps:

1. Take inventory of your current thoughts. Write them down and evaluate them based on who God is and what His word says.
2. Write out scriptures that speak God's truth about these thoughts/circumstances.
3. Meditate and memorize a verse or two for each sinful thought.
4. Pray: Ask God to help you take your thoughts captive.
5. Resolve yourself to take action against arguments and lofty opinions raised against the Lord.
6. Think truth. When you are tempted to think selfishly, stop and read or recite your scripture. Ask God to help you trust Him in that moment that His plan is good and wise and loving.

As your thoughts change, you will experience a change in emotions and actions. As you dwell on God's word, the Holy Spirit is working in your heart to shape your desires more and more like God's desires. Your thoughts matter!