

### Part 3: Change Your Life By Changing Your Mind

Our theme verse for Transformed! is Romans 12:2. We've been using the NIV version of it. This week I want to read the New Living Translation. It says, *"Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think."*

"The renewing of your mind" is the way the NIV puts it. The New Living Translation says "by changing the way you think." The thing is, God is far more interested in changing your mind than your circumstances. We want God to change our circumstances - to take away all of the problems, pain, sorrow, suffering, sickness, and sadness. But what's really more important is what's happening in you. God's far more interested in changing your mind. If you get out of one problem, another's around the corner, so it's more important to take care of how you respond to problems than any particular problem. And no transformation, no change takes place in your life until your thoughts begin to change.

We looked at spiritual and physical health, today we're going to look at mental health. How do I have a healthy mind? And why is it important that I manage my thought life. Let me give you three specific reasons:

**Because my thoughts control my life.** Every action begins as thought. If you don't think it, you don't do it. That's good and bad. If it's a good thought you'll tend to do good. With bad thoughts you'll tend to do bad. Proverbs 4:5-6a says, *"Don't do as the wicked do, and don't follow the path of evildoers. Don't even think about it..."* People say "I was just thinking about it!" They don't realize how important thought is. Thoughts have enormous power to shape your life for good or for bad. Romans 13:14 says, *"...clothe yourself with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And don't let yourself think about ways to indulge your evil desires."*

We're going to look at feelings next week when we look at emotional health. But your feelings don't shape your life. Your thoughts, ideas and beliefs do. And they don't even have to be true. If you believe it, it will shape your life.

A lot of you were taught things as a kid or even later that just weren't true. People grow up acting on false information. Be transformed by changing the way you think. Because thoughts control your life for both good and bad.

I also need to manage my mind... **Because my mind is the battleground for sin.** It's where I win or lose the battle. In fact all temptation happens in the mind. We think of temptation as something out *there*, something external, something that happens to us, tempting us. It wouldn't tempt you if there wasn't a desire inside you. All temptation happens in your mind so sin is something that happens in your mind. If you can learn how to manage your mind you've learned how to manage life. It's where the battleground is.

Paul says in Romans 7:22-23 *"I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me."* We can all identify with that. In our hearts, we love what God has to say, but our minds are a battlefield. There's a major battle in your brain and it's going on twenty four hours a day. Sometimes you're conscious of it and sometimes you're not, but it's going on all the time in your life.

The reason why it's so intense is because your mind is your greatest asset, so people and organizations and businesses and even the evil one want to control your mind. There's a battle for the way you think.

**Because it's the key to my peace and happiness.** If you learn what we're talking about today and begin to apply it in your life, your peace of mind, happiness, understanding and enjoyment of life will all go up dramatically.

An unmanaged mind leads to tension. A managed mind to tranquility. The unmanaged mind leads to discord. A mind managed in God's Spirit leads to peace. Romans 8:6 says, *"...letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace."* If your mind isn't managed well - if you just let your thoughts go wherever they will - you'll have significant stress in your life. An unmanaged mind leads to dissonance. A mind managed in God's Spirit creates to harmony.

A lot of people don't understand that you can control your thoughts. They think thoughts are uncontrollable. They're wrong. Nobody else can control your thoughts, but you can. Satan can't control your thoughts. He can suggest; tempt; cajole, but only you can control your thoughts. So, I want to look at three choices you must make on a daily basis in order to have a healthy, well managed mind.

And God isn't going to control your thoughts. God has given you freedom. Unless you have a serious mental illness, you have a choice - you don't have to be thinking about what you're thinking about right now. Nobody's holding a gun to your head. Your thoughts are highly controllable.

So if I want to have a healthy mind, I want to break free from negative patterns of thought, what I need to do is make some choices. There are three Biblical choices for a healthy mind. I have to feed my mind, I have to free my mind and I have to focus my mind. They're all choices and you have to choose them, not just once in a lifetime but on a moment by moment basis. Let's look at these three things.

If I want to have a healthy mind... **1. I Must Feed My Mind With Truth.** We all know the importance of nutrition. Good food and good calories help you to be stronger, healthier, to have more energy. Bad calories like in junk food harm your body. The same is true in your thought life.

There is a group you've never heard of that has enormous influence in the world: Oxford Analytica. Every day at about 5:30 am leading scholars at Oxford University gather in a room to share reports from all around the world of what's happened in the last twenty four hours. They then discuss these things. Everything from crop prices in China, to unrest in the Middle East, to the weather on the Gulf coast and all kinds of things. Then they make decisions about what needs to be said about it by eleven o'clock that morning the *Oxford Analytica Report* is ready. That report is paid for by groups like the United States CIA, Russia, China, many world leaders, major corporations and organization. They all look to *Oxford Analytica* to get this report and pay big bucks for it.

Oxford Analytica is founded on the idea that the best leaders make the best decision when they have the best information. Even if you're a good leader if you don't have good information you're going to make bad decisions. That make sense? So to make the best decisions you've got to have the best information.

You're not a client of Oxford Analytica but you need the best information you can get to live the best life that God wants for you. That information is found in the Word of God.

In Matthew 4:4 GNT Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 and said, *"Human beings cannot live on bread alone, but need every word that God speaks."* The Bible is our soul food. It's our owner's manual for life.

When should I do this? The answer is all the time. Throughout the day. Morning, noon and night. When you eat for nutrition, you don't just eat once a week or even once a day - you do it regularly during the day. In fact, experts tell us that the more you space out your eating during the day, the better. It's similar with truth. If you're regularly thinking about truth during the day, it's healthier for your mind.

Psalms 119:147 says, *"I rise early, before the sun is up; I cry out for help and put my hope in your words."* So it starts every morning.

Psalms 119:97 says, *"Oh, how I love your instructions! I think about them all day long."* SO all during the day.

Then Psalms 119:55 says, *"I reflect at night on who you are, O Lord; therefore I obey your instructions."* So even late at night think about God's truth.

Psalms 119:95 says *"Though the wicked hide along the way to kill me, I will quietly keep my mind on your laws."* No matter what's going on in life, morning, noon, night, even if people trying to kill me, I have one thing I do: I keep my mind on the truth.

**2. I Must Free My Mind from Destructive Thoughts.** Your mind needs to be liberated, delivered, released. Because you are a prisoner of your own thoughts and of things that people have told you that simply weren't true. As I said earlier, it doesn't matter if it's true or not - it's affected your life. And if you see yourself some way you will tend to act in accordance with the way you see yourself.

This isn't easy. In particular, there are three things that keep you from fulfilling all your good intentions; three enemies in your mind that are battling in your brain to keep you from doing all the things you would like to do.

What are the enemies? The first is 1. My old nature. In Romans 7:23, Paul talks about how his old nature keeps him in mental bondage. He says this: *"But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me."* He's using the language of warfare here.

Do you ever find yourself wanting to do or even doing things you don't really want to do? That's the battle. Have you ever engaged in self defeating behavior? "I know this isn't good for me but..." That's the battle in your mind. You have the best intentions, but there's a battle. Our old nature is the source of bad habits. Romans 8:5 says, *"Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit."* It's about how you think.

The second enemy is 2. the evil one. He can't control your mind directly but he wants to, so he brings up ideas and thoughts in your mind. He can't force you to do anything. If you're a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit in you, so evil can't force you to do anything. Because *"Greater is he that is in me than he who is in the world."* But evil can make suggestions. And those suggestions can be very powerful. He's continually planting negative thoughts in your mind. He'll use people or the media or just throw a thought in your mind.

Have you ever been praying or in worship and suddenly the weirdest thought comes into your mind? Where did that one come from? I'll tell you where it very well may have come from! It could have been sent to you by the evil one.

Martin Luther said you can't keep the birds from flying over your head, but let me tell you - you can avoid letting them poop in your hair! When I'm down the shore and there's a bunch of seagulls dive bombing someone with food, I get out from under where they're flying!

One important thing to keep in mind is, you shouldn't believe everything you think. Just because you think it, doesn't make it true! You think a lot of stuff that's not true. In fact, maybe a majority of the stuff we think isn't true. If you get a thought in your mind, it may come from your old sin nature, it may come from the devil. You don't have to believe it.

Stuff you think about yourself, stuff you think about God, stuff you think about your husband or your wife or life or the community - you thinking it doesn't make it true. We are imperfect and we don't have all the facts about anything - including about ourselves!

We're going to cover this in detail in your small group. The moment you wake up, Satan starts dropping little seeds. "You're not going to have a good day today. Life is going to be bad! Nobody's going to like you. In fact if I were you I wouldn't even show my face." You start thinking, "Why in the world am I even trying? It's not going to be any different." He starts giving you all these reasons to give up - and you haven't even started the day yet. Sometimes he'll say, "Go ahead, get angry, get even. How dare they say that to you." Go ahead, you deserve it." You've got to resist him. If you get up in the morning and you don't meet the devil head on, it means you're going in the same direction.

In 2 Corinthians 2:10-11 Paul talks about a man in the church who caused a lot of problems. He says, *"...when I forgive whatever needs to be forgiven, I do so with Christ's authority for your benefit, so that Satan will not outsmart us. For we are familiar with his evil schemes."*

If you pay attention, you can discern what the evil choice would be - if it's not something Christ would inspire, it could be part of an evil scheme. When I am unforgiving I'm caught in Satan's trap because Christ is forgiving. Satan wants to keep you focused on bitterness and resentment. If there's someone you have not forgiven that's falling into Satan's trap, so be careful. Whatever you do or think concerning that person is suspect and could easily become part of evil. Paul says, I'm wise to this guy. Satan has schemes and you need to be aware of them.

The third enemy is 3. the world's value system - culture around you. The world isn't helping you be more disciplined, are they? Does anything in our society encourage self discipline? Not much. Every advertisement tells us to get what we want and then tells us what it is we want. A Mountain Dew commercial said "Obey your thirst." In other words obey your immediate desires by consuming their product.

1 John 2:16 says this *"...the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world."* This is what people are going for in our culture: Money, sex, possessions, status, and power. All the commercials, what you see in the media, aren't encouraging healthy thinking or wise thinking. They're encouraging you to crave other things.

So how do you fight this mental battle? Look at the next verse, 2 Corinthians 10 *"It is true that we live in the world, but we do not fight from worldly motives. The weapons we use in our fight are not the world's weapons but God's powerful weapons, which we use to destroy strongholds. We destroy false arguments; we pull down every proud obstacle that is raised against the knowledge of God; we take every thought captive and make it obey Christ."* Notice this is the language of warfare and he's talking about a battle going on in our reasoning, thoughts and understanding. He says *"we take every thought captive."* The words in Greek are *akmalō teedzo* which literally means to conquer, capture and bring under control. He says we take every thought captive and make it obey Christ. The words translated make it obey there are *hupa koay* which literally mean to bring into submission.

He's talking about making your mind *mind*. We take it captive. We make it obedient. We bring it into submission.

Our thoughts often disobey us and rebel. My mind often has a mind of its own. It wants to go in other directions. When you need to ponder your mind wants to wander. When you need to pray your mind drifts away. Paul says take it captive and make it obedient. Most people live ineffectively and don't enjoy life as much as they could because they've never learned how to fight the battle of the mind. They can't fight temptation because their thinking has no discipline.

James 1:14-15 tells us the pattern of how temptation works. *"Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death."* Notice temptation is a process. It's not an isolated event. A lot of people say things like, "It just caught me off guard. It just happened." No. There were a lot of things you gave into before you got to lowering that final barrier.

There are four phases: Phase one is that temptation starts with desire. If you don't have any desire for something it's not a temptation. There's a lot of stuff that you've been tempted in that I've never been tempted about. There's a lot of stuff that I've been tempted in that you haven't been tempted in. Temptation doesn't start *out there*. It doesn't start on TV. It doesn't start on the street corner. It starts inside your mind and it begins with desire - often not even an evil desire but with a natural desire.

You have a natural desire for sleep. You have a natural desire for food. You have a natural desire for sex. You have a natural desire to succeed in life. These are all God given drives. Those are normal drives. There's nothing wrong with them until temptation turns a routine desire into a runaway desire. It becomes more important than it's meant to be. It dominates your thoughts. Any desire out of control is destructive. Fire in a fireplace can warm. Fire on a cooking stove can cook great food. But fire uncontrolled can burn your house down. All of God's gifts misused or abused will burn you. Often temptation is an attempt to fulfill a legitimate desire in your life. Like, "I just want to be loved" (There's nothing wrong with that) in the wrong way.

Step two in temptation involves doubt. You doubt that God knows best or even that God loves you. We see this with the Adam and Eve's temptation. They're in a paradise. *Hello!* The tempter comes and says, "See that tree over there? Did God really say you can't eat of that tree?" Then he says, "God knows if you eat of that tree you'll be as smart as God is." What's he doing? He's getting them to doubt God; to doubt that rules are for our benefit.

When you give into temptation, you're accepting a lie. You're deciding you know better; that God doesn't know best.

Then step three is deception. The evil one tries to replace God's truth with his lie. He said to Adam and Eve, "You won't die if you eat this!" God had already said, "If you eat this fruit you're going to die." God said you can eat anything in the whole place except from this one tree. What did people do? Go straight for that tree.

The tempter alters what God said. It says, "One day he asked the woman, 'Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?'" well God didn't say that. The tempter is being deceptive. It's like a political candidate A saying "Have you read reports that the candidate B is always breaking promises?" When the reporting has been about candidate A saying that! It's not completely false, but it's not at all the truth.

This is particularly self-deceptive because we often know there's a trap but deceive ourselves that we can keep nibbling on the cheese and not get caught. It's like people who flirt. They know there's a trap there, but keep nibbling. It's different things for different people, but you say to yourself, "I'm an adult. I'll be careful. I won't get hurt." You're being deceived. And there's a trap. Temptation always looks better than it is.

Step four is disobedience and defeat. We've moved from desire – it's something I want; to doubt – doubting God; to deception – believing the lie that it's not so bad. Then you get to disobedience and defeat and now temptation has become sin. What began in the mind gets translated into action.

You're free to choose anything you want; free to make your choices. But you're not free from the consequences. Every choice comes with consequences - often unintended ones. What you sow, you reap. You can't choose the behavior and say you didn't choose the consequence.

The best time to win the battle with temptation is before the process begins. Psalm 119:112 says, *"I have made up my mind to obey your laws forever no matter what."* Until you come to that point you're likely to keep stumbling. It's a choice. I have made up my mind to obey your laws forever no matter what.

**3. I Must Focus My Mind on the Right Things.** For mental health I must focus my mind on the three things that will make the most difference in your mental state.

**1st: Think about Jesus.** Keep your mind on Jesus Christ. Hebrews 12:3 says, *“So keep your mind on Jesus, who put up with many insults from sinners. Then you won’t get discouraged and give up.”* When you start feeling like you’re ready to give up, think about what Jesus went through. Your experience can’t be as bad as what he went through for you. Think about Jesus.

**2nd: Think about others.** Philippians 2:4 says *“Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.”* That’s counter cultural for us. Everything in our world teaches you to think about yourself. How many times have you heard: I’ve got to do what’s best for me. Look out for number one. It’s all about me and mine. But it’s not about me. It’s not about you. It’s not about any of us or all of us. It’s not about our congregation. It’s all about God. It’s only in giving your life away, that you’ll understand what it means to live. It’s only in giving our church away that we’ll BE the church. So think about others.

**3rd: Think about eternity.** Think about how there’s much more to life than just here and now. Our problem is we indulge in short term thinking. We only think about what’s happening right now. Colossians 3:2 says *“Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth.”* The Good News Translation says, *“Keep your minds fixed on things there, not on things here on earth.”*

Have you heard that old canard “He’s so heavenly minded he’s no earthly good.” That’s a bunch of baloney! In reality, only the people who are heavenly minded actually do any good. And those who are most heavenly minded throughout history are those who have done the most good on earth. It’s not the earthly minded people who get the most good done on earth. It is the most heavenly minded people. The problem is the opposite: We’re often so earthly minded we’re no heavenly good. All we think about is finances and privileges and structure and stuff like that.

1 Corinthians 2:9 says *“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.”* Think about that. When you start thinking about that, all of the problems that seem so big are going to seem so minor compared to the glory, the joy, the enjoyment, the things we have to look forward to in eternity. Let's pray.