

New Life

Bible Study Lesson

THE DEVIL'S WORKSHOP #1 – AN UNCONTROLLED THOUGHT LIFE

DAILY READINGS:

- ❖ **Monday:** Examples of evil thoughts (Genesis 50:15-20; 1 Samuel 18:25; Nehemiah 6:1-2; Esther 3:6).
- ❖ **Tuesday:** God knows all your thoughts (1 Chronicles 28:9; Job 42:1-2; Psalm 139:2; Matthew 9:4).
- ❖ **Wednesday:** Thoughts become actions (Job 20:2; Psalm 10:4; Proverbs 23:7; Proverbs 4:23).
- ❖ **Thursday:** What should you think about? (Philippians 4:8-9; Psalm 119:113; Isaiah 26:3).
- ❖ **Friday:** What should you do with wrong thoughts? (2 Corinthians 10:5; Romans 12:2; Colossians 3:2).
- ❖ **Saturday:** Ask God to help you (Isaiah 55:6-9; Proverbs 16:1-3).

MEMORY VERSE: *"We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."* –2 Corinthians 10:5

What Are You Thinking About?

Many experts believe the average person thinks between 50,000 and 70,000 thoughts every day. That is at least one thought for every second that you are awake. What do these thoughts consist of? It is easy to simply let your thoughts wander. Other times you might find yourself daydreaming. Can either of these be harmful for a Christian? In the devil's workshop, there is a tool that he will do his best to use on every one—an uncontrolled thought life. If you are not in control of your thoughts, you can be sure that the devil will try to fill your mind with what *he* wants you to think about. An uncontrolled thought life is the perfect place for the wrong things to grow: discouragement, depression, anger, anxiety, revenge, and temptation.

Research has shown that as much as 85 percent of all illnesses come about because people have "toxic thoughts" (very negative thoughts), which they habitually think on. Some examples of "toxic thoughts" might be: "I'm so stupid," or "I knew I'd mess that up," or "I'll never be beautiful or popular." Failing to control your thought life can make you physically sick. What are some other things the devil wants you to be thinking about? Has someone treated you badly or made fun of you? You might be tempted to remember that hurt. Or you might begin to think of ways to get revenge.

Do you imagine yourself looking better, having more money, or being more successful in life? These can be good goals; however, the devil will endeavor to use pride through these thoughts so that they all center around wanting people to notice you. Haman was deceived by pride when he thought, *"Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?"* (Esther 6:6). Prideful thoughts led to Haman's eventual downfall. The devil also knows the effectiveness of working through daydreams, especially when those thoughts are wishful thinking of things that God is not pleased with.

Sin Begins With Just a Thought

Does it matter what you think about? Whom does it hurt? No one else will know— isn't that true? If so, why is this such a well-used tool of the devil? It is because he knows that one does not just fall into sin: sin begins with a thought. *"For as he thinks in his heart, so is he"* (Proverbs 23:7). The Bible gives many examples of people who thought evil, sinful thoughts first and then committed sin: Joseph's brothers (Genesis

50:20), King Saul (1 Samuel 18:25), Nehemiah's enemies (Nehemiah 6:2), and Haman (Esther 3:6). Just one thought placed in your mind by the devil can grow and grow if you allow it. Permitting that thought to remain in your mind gives life to wrong desires, and soon it will become sin (James 1:15). If you let wrong thoughts occupy your mind, Psalm 66:18 warns that *"the Lord will not hear"* you. Although you might believe that no one knows what you are thinking, *"no thought can be withheld from"* God (Job 42:2).

Influences on Your Thought Life

Have you ever heard a song and could not get it out of your mind? Perhaps you heard or read something, and you just could not stop thinking about it. Everything you read, listen to, and see has the ability to influence your thought life. That includes books, music, movies, video games, texting, and social media. You are being affected by everything that you allow into your mind through your eyes and your ears. A famous writer once said, "The food that enters the mind must be watched as closely as the food that enters the body" (Patrick Buchanan). Can Christians watch or read or listen to all the influences of the world continually without their thought life being affected? Can you watch a movie or read a book that is filled with profanity and not be affected? Can you play video games that promote violence and crime without being affected? Can you read inappropriate messages online and not be affected? An old Indian Christian was explaining to a missionary that the battle inside of him was like a black dog fighting a white dog. "Which dog wins?" asked the missionary. "The one I feed the most," replied the Indian. You cannot continue to be a Christian if you do not control what you allow to come into your mind. Take charge of the influences on your thought life: *"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."* (Proverbs 4:23).

Developing a Healthy Spiritual Thought Life

First, you must realize the importance of having a thought life that God is pleased with. Negative thoughts (revenge, pride, lustfulness, or discouragement), prideful thoughts (feeling superior, conceited, or thinking you know it all), or unthankful thoughts will come into your mind. What are God's thoughts concerning this? Hebrews 4:12 tells us that *"the word of God . . . is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."* Let the Bible be a measuring rod concerning your thought life. How do your thoughts measure up when considered in the light of Scriptures? Philippians 4:8 is a good indicator of what kind of thoughts the Christian should be thinking: things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, of virtue, and of praise.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "A man is what he thinks about all day long." What are the majority of your thoughts about? How many "toxic thoughts" (negative, prideful, unthankful thoughts) do you allow to come into your mind and stay? Now that you realize the importance of a controlled thought life, what can you do about it? How can you develop a healthy thought life?

PROTECT YOUR MIND: what are you reading, watching, talking about, and listening to? Use Philippians 4:8 to evaluate the content of the music you listen to, the books you read, the movies you watch, the video games you play, the text messages you send, and your online conversations. Any imaginations that go against biblical principles or morals need to be brought *"into captivity"* (2 Corinthians 10:5). The best way to do this is to not allow it into your mind by changing your media consumption.

DAILY BIBLE READING: it is not enough to remove things from your life that promote wrong thoughts. You must replace these with something that will develop a healthy thought life. Colossians 3:2 says to "Set your affection [thoughts] on things above." Psalm 119:11 says to hide God's Word in your heart. To do this, you must spend time reading the Bible. Then, think about what you read. "What does verse mean for me?" In other words, meditate.

PRAYER: you cannot have a healthy thought life without help. God knows your weaknesses and strengths; He understands your thoughts (Psalm 139:2). Ask Him to remove wrong thoughts when they come, and also ask Him to show you what influences might be in your life that are planting wrong thoughts in your mind.

1. What does it mean to let your mind wander?
2. How does the devil use the tool of an uncontrolled thought life?
3. What are some examples of “toxic thoughts” not found in the lesson?
4. What are some things that could be influencing your thought life?
5. What are the dangers of not controlling the things that could influence your thought life?
6. Write out the quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson (found in the lesson).
7. What are some of the ways you can improve the quality of your thought life?
8. What does Philippians 4:8 say you should be thinking about?
9. What things can you do to protect your mind from having the wrong thoughts?
10. What should you replace wrong thoughts with?