

New Thinking – Destroying Mental Strongholds and Cultivating the mind of Christ



*“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.
Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is*

*—
his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

Romans 12:2

*“So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord,
that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do,
in the futility of their thinking.”*

Ephesians 4:17

“... But we have the mind of Christ.”

1 Corinthians 2:16b

Our Goal: *To become aware of our internal conversation,
learning to replace un-Godly thoughts with the truth of the Word of God.*

- **Part #1: The Mind as a Battlefield.** *We seek to show the connection between thoughts and actions.*
- **Part #2: Mental Strongholds - Lies we Believe and Embrace.** *We seek to show examples of how false thought patterns actually become spiritual “inroads” for demonic influence in our lives.*
- **Part #3: Deceitful Desires and Sinful Behaviors.** *Most sin is the result of desires (concupiscence), which promise what they cannot fulfill. We seek to show how these desires, based on incorrect beliefs, result in sinful actions and patterns of behavior.*
- **Part #4: We can say “no” to deceitful desires!** *Here we affirm the power we have in Christ to identify and renounce deceptive beliefs and desires.*
- **Part #5: How to demolish a stronghold by correcting false beliefs.** *We break down the internal process of replacing ungodly thoughts, using a specific personal struggle as a model.*



Part #1 – The Battlefield of the Mind

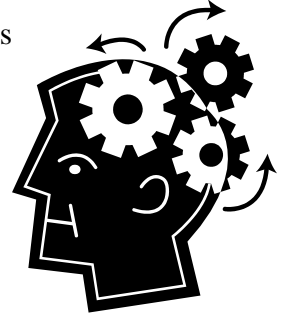


Our thoughts drive our feelings and behavior, much like the programming of a computer. Although computer “software” is not outwardly visible, it forms an internal design and system which directs every aspect of the functioning of the hardware. Our thoughts have a similar influence upon us. Our thinking and our behavior (our “walk”) go together like hand and glove. Therefore, the mind is the principal battlefield for personal change.

Our “internal conversation” – What are you saying to yourself?

We all host an ongoing mental conversation. This conversation with our selves provides a constant internal narrative of analysis, reactions, evaluations and observations.

Normally this conversation remains beneath the surface, often escaping our full awareness. Conscious or not, however, these messages affect us profoundly and inform our attitudes, words and actions. Certain beliefs, repeated often enough, can become the structure for attitudes that drive our behavior, and can even provide access for spiritual influences in our lives.



Thoughts provoke feelings



Imagine the following thought flashes through your mind during this very class:

“The teacher has a pistol under the table and is waiting for the opportunity to attack me!” What feelings are aroused? What physiological changes may take place?

What action might we take?

In contrast, imagine the following thought:

“The teacher has \$100 under the table and will give it to me at the end of the class.” What feelings and actions might be aroused?

Listen to yourself: What are you saying?

Generally we remain unaware of the underlying thoughts that provoke our feelings and actions.

- *Our muscles are tense, and we feel anxious and we do not know why?*
- *We feel sad or depressed, and we do not know why?*
- *We feel the urge to buy too much or eat too much, and again, we do not know why?*



As we become more aware of our internal conversation which provokes certain feelings, we are better able to evaluate these thoughts and set about to change them.



Viviendo la Vida Loca – Crazy thoughts – Crazy actions

You're nuts!! Along with everyone who reads, (and the one who *writes*), these words. Sin is insanity! In our distorted reasoning, clouded and twisted by the power of sin, we actually believe that rebelling against God and his words will produce happiness!! Otherwise, we would never sin! Enough of these crazy thoughts produce internal structures, or highways, through which Satan has access to us. We will call these inroads "Strongholds" and analyze them in the next section.

Part #2: Strongholds – Structures of lies we believe

These ungodly thoughts...

- *Provoke negative feelings*
- *Inspire sinful actions*
- *Form destructive patterns and habits of life*



A Stronghold = ***"Stinkin' Thinkin'"***

Spiritual Warfare of the Mind: Satan has access to us through our thoughts!



Consider the following text, observing all the references to the mind in the context of spiritual warfare.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-6.

In olden times, what was the function of a "stronghold" or castle?

What does it mean to "take every thought captive" and make it "obedient to Christ," in your opinion?

Steps to Demolish a Mental Stronghold

1. ***“I feel....” Recognize the attitude*** which does not conform to the truth of God
(be specific: Discouragement; resentment; pessimism...etc.)
2. ***“I said to myself...” I was thinking...” Identify the underlying thoughts***
that provoke this attitude or action
3. A new ***“camera angle”*** – ***“I could have thought....”***

Visualize an alternative way of viewing the situation
4. ***Confess and renounce*** this thought and sinful belief
5. ***Affirm the truth of the word of God*** in a verse and memorable phrase.



Example: Paco and the Pornography

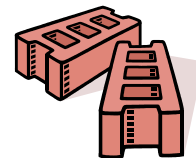
As we read this case study, try to identify the false beliefs that underlie Paco’s addiction to pornography.

Paco struggles with an addiction to internet pornography. He tends to internalize anxiety from the workplace and difficulties at home. When he feels pressure from his boss; has an argument with his wife, or worries about paying the bills, it seems that the stress is impossible to manage. Usually at those moments he steals away to indulge in his habit, and, at least temporarily, seems to forget his problems. “*I’m a man and I just can’t help it,*” he tells himself. Of course, after the initial rush of adrenaline, feelings of shame flood his heart. His wife feels hurt and rejected. Paco would like to serve God, but the shame of this secret addiction keeps him from stepping up to serve more actively in the church. This habit has become a stronghold in his life.

Can you identify some thoughts that underlie this habit in Paco’s life?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

These thoughts are “bricks” in his mental/spiritual stronghold.



Part #3: Deceitful Desires – the “bricks” of the Stronghold

A deceitful desire promises what it cannot deliver



*“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” **Ephesians 4:22***

Examples of “Deceitful Desires”

“If I have a new car – I’ll have more friends.”

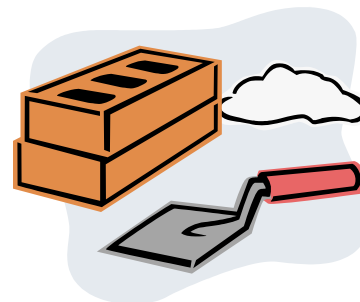
“If I eat this whole pizza – I won’t feel so depressed.”

“If I take this drug – I’ll forget my problems.”

“If I sleep with this man – I won’t feel alone any more.”

“If I had more money – my worries would be over.”

“If I look at pornography – I’ll feel relaxed.”



Note: Advertising specializes in planting such desires!!

Of course, what makes a lie believable is the grain of truth usually contained therein. Can you find the “truth” in each lie mentioned above?



Deceitful desires and the internal process of sin

“... but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like the shifting shadows...

James 1:14-17



Can you identify the steps in the process of seduction and sin?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Part #4: Good news – We don't have to buy the lie!

Temptation is a process which can be interrupted!

Consider these following “steps” in the progression of sin in our lives.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 1. <i>Attraction to the sin</i> | - Deceitful desire |
| 2. <i>Seduction</i> | - The process of persuasion |
| 3. <i>Conception of sin</i> | - A plan for the sin is visualized |
| 4. <i>The sin</i> | - The action is committed |
| 5. <i>Consummation</i> | - The individual sin becomes a pattern of bondage |
| 6. <i>Death</i> | - This stronghold destroys the person spiritually |

Our goal is to recognize this internal process in ourselves, and drawing on the Spirit's power and the truth of the word of God, to interrupt the process.

We can say “NO” - Interrupt the process!

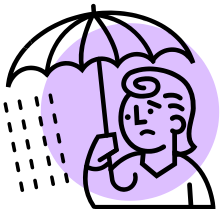
In Christ we no longer need be slaves.



*“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. **It teaches us to say “No”** to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age...” **Titus 2:11-12***



By the power of the Spirit we can choose to believe the truth of God rather than be driven by deceitful feelings.



Circumstances no longer need control us!

We no longer need be enslaved by our circumstances! By the power of the Spirit, we can live by faith, and not by the feelings of the moment. Many times we cannot control our situation, but we can control our reaction and our attitude.

We all face unpleasant circumstances....

- Illnesses
- Financial problems
- Unpleasant people
- The cold of Winter and heat of Summer
- Mistakes from the past
- Our family background

The key question: How will you respond?



Paul chooses joy: Philippians 1:12-18



Happiness is a feeling. Joy is a decision by faith!

Paul writes from a dingy jail cell, suffering terribly on account of his faithfulness to the Lord. To make matters worse, his enemies seize the opportunity and begin to preach in the streets – insincerely - out of sheer malice, hoping to aggravate the anger of the jailers against Paul.

How would you respond in such circumstances?

Observe the difficulties Paul faces in this text. In each case, how does he respond?
How does Paul handle the fact of his imprisonment? (Philippians 1:12-14)

How does Paul choose to respond to the fact that some enemies preach in the streets, intentionally to cause him more pain in jail? (Philippians 1:15-18)

Personal Exercise: Think about a particular circumstance or feeling that provokes a negative behavior in your life. Later we will consider alternative reactions to the same circumstance to interrupt the process.

Example: *Circumstance:* Stress

Undesireable reaction: Smoke

Example: *Circumstance:* Exhaustion

Undesireable reaction Impatient with wife and kids

Your circumstance: _____.

Your undesireable reaction: _____.

Part #5: A format for destroying a mental stronghold



“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” John 8:32

New thoughts – aligned with the perfectly true Word of God – produce freedom in Christ. In Him, we have power to recognize and reject the lies we believe!



The Word of God has power to destroy the lies of a Mental Stronghold – Memorization is powerful.



“How can a Young man keep his way pure; by living according to your Word... I have hidden your word in my heart so that I might not sin against you.” (Psalm 119:9 & 11)

Jesus overcame lies by using the power of the Word of God memorized. (See ***Matt 4:3-4***)

Steps in the destruction of a mental stronghold

1. “I feel...”

Recognize the attitude which does not conform to the truth of God. (be specific)

2. “I say to myself....”

Identify the underlying thoughts that provoke this attitude or action

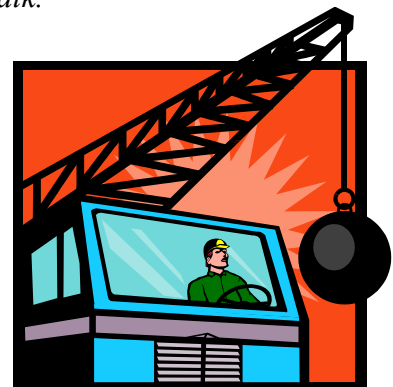
3. “Let’s try another camera angle!” “I could have thought...”

Just like in the filming of a movie, move the “camera” to a different place to have a new perspective on the same situation. Try to visualize an alternative way of viewing and interpreting the situation

4. I confess and renounce this thought and sinful belief.

5. I affirm the truth of the word of God, using a specific verse from the Bible.

Pick a verse to memorize and an easy phrase to repeat, which serves as a corrective to your previous thoughts and “self-talk.”



Example: The Grumpy Hubby!

Billy Joe comes home at the end of long day, snapping at his wife and kid for every little thing.

He goes through the following process to try to break this pattern.

1. **I feel** so annoyed with my wife and kids at the end of a long day. When my wife asks me to do something, like take out the garbage, I often respond by snapping or even yelling.
2. **I say to myself**... “I am a man and she doesn’t have the right to ask me to do something when I’m tired. I guess I think I need to shout to assert my authority.”
3. **Another camera angle...** **I could think...** about how she must feel after her long day at work and with the kids. Also, shouting does not establish my leadership. A true Biblical leader serves and can control his own anger. I suppose I come across to them as being self centered and bossy – not Christ like! Maybe they have a point.
4. **I confess and renounce** this self-centeredness and chauvinism.
5. **I affirm that** “I am a man of God, called to serve,” and “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Phil 4:13) With God’s help, I can adopt the attitude of a servant leader rather than be driven by my tiredness and insecurity.

Your turn – Demolish a Stronghold!

1. “I feel....” Identify a problem in your attitudes or actions

Single out an area of struggle in your life, that could be an emotional problem or a sinful habit. Try to identify a very specific situation in which this problem manifests itself

Example

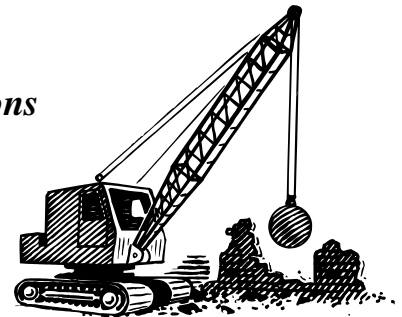
Problem (in general) - I feel annoyed! I get angry easily.

Specific situation - I snap at my wife when she asks me to pick up my underwear off the bathroom floor.

Your problem in general - I feel.... _____.

Specific Case - _____.

_____.



2. Identify feelings and thoughts: “I think...” “I say to myself...”

Remember the last time you gave in to this problem. What happened inside you? Try to get in touch with your “internal conversation” around the moment when you fell into this negative pattern. What were the thoughts, feelings and beliefs you can remember that accompanied this slip.



Example:

I was thinking...

1. She doesn't have the right to talk to me that way.
2. I work so hard that she should not demand that I do that kind of thing at home.
3. I'm the man of the house and I can leave my underwear wherever I want.

Thoughts and feelings I had... I was thinking... I said to myself...

1. _____

_____.

2. _____

_____.

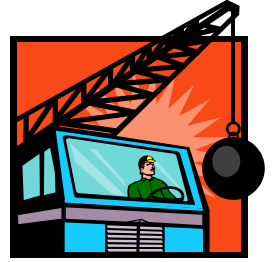
3. _____

_____.

3.. “Change the camera angle.” “I could think....”

Consider a different way of seeing the situation

Now try visualizing the same situation from a different perspective. Describe how you could have thought differently about the same situation.



Example: “I could think....”

1. She’s tired also and frustrated after a long day at work and then taking care of the kids. I can be patient and cut her some slack.
2. I’m annoyed, but I don’t need to shout or snap. I can let her know I don’t like her speaking to me in that manner without raising my voice or being disrespectful.
3. I’m called to love and serve my wife. To take care of such a little detail doesn’t “lower” me in any way. On the contrary, it’s a way of expressing my spiritual leadership in the home.”
4. I suppose if I wasn’t such a pig, then maybe she wouldn’t get so upset!

Different thoughts you can adopt – “I could think that....”

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. Confession and Renunciation

Example: *Lord, I confess the sin of self-centeredness and male chauvinism. I renounce this bad attitude, in the name of Jesus.*

Write your prayer of confession and renunciation: _____

5. Affirm the truth

Example:

Verse: Philippians 4:13 – *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”*

Phrase: *“I am a man of God – called to serve!”* In spite of being tired, I can be a man who is the servant leader in his home, without anger or explosions. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!!!”

Affirm the truth (and a verse) – _____

“You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”
Juan 8:32

