

Taking Your Thoughts Captive

by Beverly Littau

Melissa is a young woman who has been in church all her life. She accepted Christ at an early age, and is earnest about her relationship with Christ. She has a loving husband and two wonderful children, but she reports that she isn't happy. *"I worry all of the time, about almost everything. I can't ever seem to feel peace."*

Pam is a grandmother who also loves and serves the Lord faithfully. She has friends and family and a job she enjoys, but feels very depressed when things happen that are upsetting. Pam says that she can't pull herself out of depression very easily and worries that the periods of depression seem to intensify each time. *"I know that I am supposed to be satisfied with the life that God has given me, but I feel like I am always needing something I don't have."*

Both of these women suffer from emotions that sometimes make them feel overwhelmed and exhausted, even though both of them are Christians. They read their Bibles faithfully. They pray. They serve in their churches. They have loving people around them. They know the truth of God's word, but somehow it never trickles down and changes the depressed and anxious feelings they have in their daily lives.

Some people with good lives often seem to experience anxiety and depression while others who have major problems (illness, poverty, unemployment, etc.) often seem to experience joy and peace. Why is that?

If people with major issues can feel peaceful and contented and people with a fairly good life can feel anxious and depressed, then it must be true that our feelings are not dependent upon our life circumstances.

The Bible makes it clear that our thought life is important. It instructs us to take our thoughts captive (II Cor. 10:5) and to renew our minds (Rom. 12:2). There are many reasons for that, but one of them may lie in Proverbs 23:7 where it tells us "For as a man thinks in his heart, so is he."

Just as a steering wheel can turn a big semi-truck, our thoughts can "steer" our feelings. If we allow our thoughts to be negative, we will likely feel anxious and depressed. If we submit our thoughts to God and His truth, we will probably feel more satisfied.

You've heard the saying, "garbage in, garbage out." What that says to me is that if I dwell on thoughts that are anxious or depressing, I will produce those feelings in myself. Change your thoughts, and you will likely change the way you feel.

(Sometimes people have a chemical basis for anxiety or depression. Only a doctor can determine if that's the case. When it is, medical intervention may be necessary. The information here is not in any way intended to be a "one cure fits all" formula. See your doctor if the suggestions here do not seem to help or if you are in a crisis that calls for a medical intervention.)

So how do we take thoughts captive and submit them to God? It is a fairly simple process, but it will take time and focus to make the new way of thinking "the norm."

1. The first step is to agree with God that negative thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes are not of Him. Confess them as sin. Ask Him to help you overcome them through His power.
2. Ask God to make you aware of thoughts or underlying beliefs that are driving the negative

emotions.

3. When you notice or identify a negative thought—one that does not agree with God’s word—then take that immediately to the Lord. Say, *“Lord, the thought I am having is _____ and I confess that thought to you. I submit that thought to the power of Your shed blood and death on Calvary, and ask You to render that thought dead and powerless in me.”*
4. Then ask God to replace the negative thought with His truth. Ask Him what His thoughts are. For example, if your negative thought is “No one loves me,” then maybe the truth He will speak to you is that He loves you and He may remind you of others who do too.
5. Thank God for the truth, and meditate on it. Journal it, sing about it, talk about it. Let it work its way down into your heart.
6. Turn from negative thoughts in the same way each time they come up.
7. Remember that when you first start telling yourself the truth, it will feel like a lie. That is because you have believed a lie for so long that it has counterfeited itself as truth. Keep telling yourself the truth, and it will eventually *feel* like truth.

People who deal with these issues often find it helpful to talk with an encouraging, wise friend or counselor who can help them see truth. Find friends who will hold you accountable for living in God’s truth.

Lies keep us bound, but the truth sets us free. Jesus has already paid the price for our freedom, but we must apply the power of the cross to our everyday lives—in our thoughts, our attitudes, our beliefs and our behaviors.

Bible Verses to Consider

Proverbs 23:7 “For as a man thinks in his heart, so is he.”

Philippians 4:6-8 “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your heart and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable— if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.”

II Corinthians 10:5 “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.”

Romans 12:2 “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.”

Psalms 77:12 “I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds.”

Psalms 7:9 “The One who examines the thoughts and emotions is a righteous God.”