

Defeating Sin with Scripture

As an introduction to this study, read the 1-minute devotion *A Practical Method for Overcoming Sin*.

Reciting, memorizing, and reading Scripture can renew our minds and help us overcome bad habits. That's because God's Word is not like human words.

God's Word has transforming power.

1. In the verses below, list (or underline) the different ways the Psalmist connects with God's Word. How does he show respect, commitment, and pleasure in God's Word?

Psalm 119:9-16: "How can a young person stay pure? By obeying your word. 10 I have tried hard to find you— don't let me wander from your commands. 11 I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. 12 I praise you, O Lord; teach me your decrees. 13 I have recited aloud all the regulations you have given us. 14 I have rejoiced in your laws as much as in riches. 15 I will study your commandments and reflect on your ways. 16 I will delight in your decrees and not forget your word."

2. Where does transformation start? Do you ever wonder why some Christians grow quickly and behave in godly ways while others live pretty much like the rest of the world? Many people experience an initial burst of renewal when they give their lives to Christ but eventually lose it. Others maintain that sense of renewal throughout their lives. What do you think accounts for this difference? Why is renewal a lifelong process?

Romans 12:1-2: Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform 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.

3. Do you see the process of renewal as active or passive? Why is it important for our beliefs to be aggressively protected in our thoughts?

2 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.

4. Note the two aspects of renewal in the verses below.

Philippians 4:8-9: Finally, brothers and sisters, 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. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Optional homework:

Using an online Topical Bible, find several verses dealing with specific sins you're struggling with.

Besides the examples above, you might look up bitterness, forgiveness, worry, fear, jealousy, envy, patience, joy, thoughts, etc.

Write the verses on 3x5 cards and meditate on them daily.

A Practical Method for Overcoming Sin

"I can't change!"

Ever felt that way?

Years ago, I discovered a way that helps me deal with specific sins in my life. I believe it will work for anyone who does it wholeheartedly out of love for the Lord (Colossians 3:23).

Here's what I do: I look for Scriptures dealing with a sin I'm struggling to overcome, write pertinent verses on 3x5 cards, and go over the verses daily, meditating on their truth. Sometimes I go over them two to three times throughout the day.

This might sound simplistic, but it works because the Bible is alive and active and able to penetrate our hearts and minds (Hebrews 4:12).

God's Word will always accomplish its purposes in our lives. It judges us when we refuse to repent, and it changes us when we submit to its truth (Isaiah 55:10-11).

I can't change myself. But God's Spirit and His Word can change me. When I actively seek that change, I show my love for the Lord (John 14:21).

Here are a few examples:

If you have a problem with anger, meditate on these verses:
Psalm 37:8; Ephesians 4:26-27; Proverbs 16:32.

Fear & worry: 1 Peter 5:7; Matthew 6:30-34; Philippians 4:6-7; Matthew 11:28-30.

Lack of self-control: Proverbs 25:28; 2 Peter 1:5-10.

Dirty Thoughts

When you let your mind wander, where does it go?

I don't want to tell you how often mine heads straight to dirty thoughts—not porno, but bitter memories or worries or self-pity. This is especially true when I'm going through a difficulty.

Did you know that we speak at a rate of 120 words a minute and think at a rate of 1300 words a minute?

That means negative thoughts can bury us in a pit of self-despair 10 times faster than spoken words.

No wonder Scripture says, "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).

If you're struggling in some area of your life, it's likely your thoughts are involved. Take time today to ask God to help you take your thoughts captive.

God's 2 Step Program for Overcoming Negative Thoughts

So many of my problems begin in my thoughts...I think the worst about a situation or dwell on the negatives. I decide something is hopeless or meaningless and conclude I can't be happy unless it changes.

There's a two-step answer to my dilemma:

"... we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." 2 Corinthians 10:5

1. Take my thoughts captive—make a conscious decision to quit thinking negatively.
2. Make my thoughts obedient to Christ—dwell on God's Truth. For example:

God can bring good out of every situation. (Romans 8:28)

God will never, ever, ever leave me. (Hebrews 13:5)

Peace comes by dwelling on good things. (Philippians 4:8)

And no matter what else happens, I can rejoice in my salvation! (Philippians 3:7-9)

If you are struggling with negative thoughts, ask the Lord to help you implement His two-step solution.

2 Ways to Maintain Healthy Thinking

Everyone has different strengths and weaknesses, and some of us find it especially challenging to "take our thoughts captive" (2 Corinthians 10:3-6).

I can over-think things and make myself miserable. Others can under-think and become irresponsible. These two steps can keep over and under thinkers on track.

1. Dwell on what's good in your life (Philippians 4:8-9).

What if we can't think of anything good? Usually we need to re-focus. But even when our life is at its worst, we can always dwell on these:

Our salvation (Romans 6:23).

Our knowledge that one day all suffering will end (Rev. 21:4).

Scripture passages and songs that give us hope and strength (Colossians 3:16).

2. Guard your heart (Proverbs 4:23).

Make sure that the influences in your life are uplifting. That includes:

Entertainment (TV, movies, etc.) (Psalm 101:3).

Music (Ephesians 5:18-20).

Relationships - as much as it depends on you to choose the right companions (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Sleep and proper nutrition are also necessary for right thinking. (Eat, Rest, Cry.)

I'm thankful we serve a supernatural God who gives us practical ways to deal with life!

The Power of Negative Self-Talk

Studies show our normal rate of talking is 120 words a minute, but we can think at a rate of 1300 words a minute.*

No wonder I sometimes get depressed when I dwell on my problems. Imagine ten minutes of negative self-talk. That's 13,000 negative, sad, angry, and discouraging words pumped into my soul.

2 Corinthians 10:5 says, "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."

When we begin to think negative thoughts, we must spring into action...demolishing and taking thoughts captive.

What a great picture of warfare—a reminder that most battles are won or lost in our minds.

What are some practical ways to fight these enemy thoughts?

- Memorize Bible verses related to our struggles

- Interrupt negative thoughts by counting our blessings

- Praise God instead when negative thoughts come

So next time the battle begins, let's fight!

*Tim Hansel, *Holy Sweat* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 102-3 as quoted in *Having a Mary Spirit* by Joanna Weaver, page 116.

3 Ways to Take Our Thoughts Captive

We often think of spiritual "strongholds" as something non-Christians have.

But we should also examine our own lives for strongholds. They typically begin in our thoughts. That's why Scripture warns us to take our thoughts captive (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

It might be a relationship problem we bitterly "debate" in our thoughts.

It might be an injustice or offense we've obsessively relived in our thoughts, memorizing each detail.

It might be an unrealistic fear that haunts us.

It might be an ungodly desire we enjoy pondering.

We need to take those thoughts captive:

1. Replacing thoughts with prayers - not prayers that rehash problems, but prayers that lift the situation to the Lord (Philippians 4:6).
2. Replacing thoughts with encouraging Scripture passages (Colossians 3:16).
3. Replacing negative thoughts with positive thoughts, praise and thanksgiving (Philippians 4:8).

Our thoughts create our mood and affect our actions (Luke 6:45).

Taking thoughts captive is a primary step in dealing with strongholds.

Think about it!

Praise Music Therapy

Some babies calm down when their moms play music. The babies begin listening to the music instead of their own cries.

I'm discovering I sometimes need the same kind of "music therapy."

My form of "crying" is allowing negative thoughts to roll over and over in my mind causing discouragement.

Playing praise music can replace my negative thoughts with positive, encouraging words about the Lord.

The psalmists were often troubled with negative thoughts, fears, and worries. Perhaps that's why we often read things like this:

"Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD.... Sing praise to the name of the Lord...Make a joyful noise." Psalm 95:1; 7:17; 66:1

When our minds are spinning with negative, useless, repetitive thoughts, it's time to turn on the praise music.

"He lifted me out of the pit of despair, out of the mud and the mire...He has given me a new song to sing, a hymn of praise to our God." Psalm 40:2-3

Set Your Mind or Set Your Alarm

I was struggling.

I had good reasons to be concerned. But I was letting my thoughts rule.

I read Psalm 31:15:

"My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies..."

I realized that my real enemies were not people or circumstances. My real enemies were negative thoughts, worries and self-pity. I wasn't trusting that God could work all things for my good (Romans 8:28).

I wasn't letting Him comfort me (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

My struggle was so strong, that I set an alarm for every hour during the daytime. The alarms reminded me to take a few minutes each hour to pray, read Scripture, or sing a praise song, taking my thoughts captive (2 Corinthians 10:5).

The more I set my mind on Jesus, the healthier my thoughts.

Are you struggling with a situation? Perhaps you too should set an alarm and focus regularly on God's promises.