

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

39. What in the World Are We Thinking?

You are listening to episode 39 of the Encouragement for Real Life podcast, titled, "What in the World Are We Thinking?" So, what are we thinking? How often do we pause and ask ourselves this question? Because I believe it would benefit us to pause and ponder this question a whole lot more than we do. In this episode we are discussing our minds and our thoughts and just how important these are to us and to our lives. So, I invite you to hang with me here for this next short while as we dig a little deeper into this subject and find out what God has to say about our thoughts, too. Let's get to it!

Four and a half years ago I began hosting a local evening of encouragement for women every other month. For over two years we women gathered together, sharing food, fellowship, and a whole lot of fun. These events were life-giving and life-impacting, and I would be in awe as I witnessed God's powerful presence at each one. But when the pandemic arrived on the scene in March of 2020, sadly these evenings of encouragement came to a halt.

Well, last evening we held our first one in two years (our 15th one total), and let me tell you, my heart needed it. Gathering with other women was good for my soul, and it gave me a lift in my step that has been missing for quite a while. Check out my social media posts if you'd like to see more. But last night's subject centered around something I believe is critical and significant for each of us and for the lives we are given to live out daily. We discussed our thoughts and if they are helpful or hurtful? Because they are one or the other

And it all begins with this question:

What in the world are we thinking?

Do you ever stand back and ask yourself such a question? "What in the world am I thinking?" When was the last time you and I thought about our thoughts? Do we ever pause enough to ponder our thoughts? Because sometimes our thoughts shock us, don't they? Or am I the only one? The question, "What in the world are we thinking?" is one I think we could ask more often. Because if we did, we might be surprised. We might be either startled or pleased at the thoughts we think. And we might become aware that our thoughts aren't what we thought they were. (I know that sounds funny, doesn't it?) Because all too often, we just think what we think. But we don't necessarily think about what we think

I believe it's time to change that.

Why? Well because I believe the quality of our thoughts determine the quality of our lives. And I believe our thoughts are important to our Creator. And two proverbs explain why:

Proverbs 23:7 NIV says, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he."

Proverbs 4:23 NIV says, "Be careful what you think, because your thoughts run your life."

What our minds focus on shapes who we are.

We see often how our thoughts impact and influence what happens in our lives.

Our thoughts can control how we feel about certain situations in life. They can control how we perceive ourselves and others. They can determine our words, our actions, our beliefs. Our thoughts can impact how we view the world, our lives, our day-to-day experiences. They can determine our stress levels, our moods, our attitudes. And they can even impact our immune systems, our skeletal, muscular, nervous, endocrine, cardiovascular, lymphatic, respiratory, digestive, urinary, and reproductive systems!

Our thoughts matter! Now, this isn't to say our thoughts are magical because they aren't. There's no magic involved. When God formed us, He created our minds amazingly intricate. As wonderful tools for us to use and tap into. Not to waste or to use negatively, but to use positively and constructively. For our growth, for the good of others, and for His glory.

So, it's no wonder God has much to say about our minds and our thoughts! Do a word search for Bible verses about thoughts or the mind, and you'll be amazed at the numerous verses in the results.

It's no wonder God cares about the thoughts we are thinking!

So, I invite you to think about your thoughts just for a moment. The thoughts you entertained today about yourself, your circumstances, your life. Those thoughts you allowed yourself to think about your future, your present, and your past. The thoughts you believed about others, about God, about what others have said. What thoughts keep you awake at night and what was the first thought of your first waking moment today?

We can be honest with ourselves when it comes to our thoughts. Because only when we're honest with ourselves can we see truth. And when we pause to ponder our thoughts, we can make any adaptations needed. If we realize our thoughts aren't the best, it's a good time to transform our minds. This points us to a great verse, Romans 12:2.

Do not allow this world to mold you in its own image. Instead, be transformed from the inside out by renewing your mind. As a result, you will be able to discern what God wills and whatever God finds good, pleasing, and complete. Romans 12:2 VOICE

To be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Renew means: to restore or replenish, to revive or reestablish, to recover, to make new or as if new again

Our minds can be renewed through Jesus! They can be restored, revived, to be made new again!

And I believe a daily renewing is a must. Because we live in a world that's against God. We live in environments where our faith gets squashed, tested, beat up, and challenged. We are bombarded with news and headlines and lies and false testimony all day long. It's no wonder if we struggle with our thoughts some days. Our minds need renewing daily.

But how? How do we renew our minds?

God renews our minds as we spend time reading His Word, as we spend time in prayer, as we spend time with Jesus, even for just a few minutes. When we invite Him to control our minds and our hearts,

we will think more like Him and will be able to impact our corners of the world in ways we can't do on our own.

Because God cares about the thought we think, thankfully He enables the renewing of our minds

We also don't have to believe every thought we think.

Because some of the thoughts we think aren't from God. Some of our thoughts aren't healthy. Some of our thoughts don't honor God or ourselves. And to be quite honest, the enemy of our souls likes to plant thoughts in our minds ever so subtly throughout our days. He loves to take control of minds. He loves to make us miserable through our thoughts. The thing is, we don't have to let him. Friend, we have a say in the matter.

Think about those thoughts that pop into our minds that are negative about ourselves. Such as, "You're messing up your kids," or "You're a mess and a mistake." Do those thoughts come from God? No. God does not consider you a mess or a mistake.

Or the negative thoughts about our pasts such as, "What you did back then is unforgivable," or "You should be ashamed for what you did." Do those thoughts come from God? No. God will never shame you.

Or what about the thoughts we have about our futures such as, "There's no hope for me," or "I will never be happy." Do those thoughts come from God? No. With God you and I will always have hope.

If a thought is negative, it's not from God.

If it's a discouraging or destructive thought, if it brings fear, worry, doubt or unbelief, if it makes me feel weak or inadequate or insecure, that thought is not from God. It's likely originating from the enemy of my soul in attempts to discourage me and ultimately destroy me.

Remember what John 10:10 says, "The thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy..."

So, what thought or thoughts have we been thinking lately that are ones we don't need to believe one minute longer? I pray we can release those thoughts today.

You and I can choose to believe the thoughts God wants us to think. We don't have to believe all the other ones.

2 Corinthians 10:5 NIV helps us do this: 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.

This verse in this translation tells us that we can take our thoughts captive. Other translations read differently saying Paul was referring to taking the thoughts of others captive that prevent them from believing the truth of Jesus. Either way, thoughts can be captured and controlled.

And that's good news for us, because again, we don't have to believe every thought we think.

Each morning in my prayer time I ask the Holy Spirit to help me take every thought captive in my day and make it obedient to Christ. I think a lot of thoughts throughout my day, and you do too, right? It's impossible for me to take every thought captive in my day. But those thoughts that stop me, that

trouble me, that make me feel discouraged or depleted, that are hurtful and not helpful, those are the thoughts I focus on taking captive.

So, throughout the day, I pay attention to those thoughts, and when they arise, because they do more than I'd like, I go through this 4-step thought process.

Step 1: Examine the thought. What is this thought I'm thinking?

Step 2: Capture the thought. Give it to Jesus (according to 2 Corinthians 10:5). Does this glorify You, Jesus?

Step 3: Test the thought. Does it fit with Philippians 4:8? Is it true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy?

Step 4: Respond to the thought. If it's true, keep the thought. If it's not, get rid of it.

I needed a tangible way to think about my thoughts and to take them captive. These steps help me. I didn't do it very well at first, but the more I've walked through the steps, the easier they've become. It's becoming just something I do throughout my day. Feel free to use it if you feel it would be helpful to you.

Filling our minds with God's Word is the best way to impact our thinking.

A great way to internalize God's Word and impact our thinking is to do that search I mentioned a few minutes ago of the many Bible verses that have to do with our minds or our thoughts, then write them out as affirmations in which we can read to ourselves often.

For example, take 2 Corinthians 10:5. We can take that very scripture, and write it out as a statement for our daily lives. Something like this, "I take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ." Or 2 Corinthians 10:4, "I am freed from unhealthy thoughts as God's power destroys the enemy's strongholds."

It only takes a few minutes to write them out, but what an impact they can have on our thoughts and our minds!

We're continuing this conversation over in the Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook. I invite you over there to join in the fellowship and fun. The link to this positive, encouraging community is in the show notes.

And if you are encouraged because of this episode, I invite you to subscribe, rate, and review it so others can find this encouragement too.

In closing, what in the world are we thinking? We are thinking truth. We are thinking the thoughts God desires us to think. You and I don't have to believe every thought we think, and we can allow God to renew our minds through His powerful Word. Our thoughts make a difference, so let's make sure the difference they are making is an encouraging one. Thank you for being here and for the blessing you are. God bless you!

Julie Lefebvre