

# Change Your Life by Changing Your Mind

Our theme verse is: Romans 12:2.

- In the NIV, it says, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”
- But if you’re using the New Living Translation, as I am, you’ll notice that it reads just a little differently:
- It says this: **“Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.”**

In other words, according to Paul, one of the main keys to transformation has to do with changing the way we think,

- Which is interesting because, more often than not, when we think about experiencing greater transformation in our lives,
- What we often think we need is for God to change our circumstances.

But God is far more interested in changing the way we think than changing your circumstances.

- And why? Because we’ll never experience real transformation in our lives until our thoughts begin to change.
- And there are 3 reasons for that that I’d like to share with you.

## **1. Because my thoughts control my life**

You see, everything we do... every single action, always begins as a thought. If you don’t think it, you don’t do it.

- It’s why Solomon writes in Proverbs 4:23 to **“Be careful how you think; for your life is shaped by your thoughts.”**
- You might say, “Come on, it was just a thought! How’s my life going to be shaped by my thoughts?”

But all that we do, both good and bad, starts with those thoughts.

Have you found yourself thinking about someone at work?

- From those “simple thoughts,” perhaps you’re now flirting

with that person...

- And now those flirtations have turned to lust, which turned to fantasy. Bottom-line, it starts with a thought.

Now, a lot of the thoughts we have stirring inside us come from things people have said to us... things, which, at times, just weren't true.

- Maybe someone expressed to you, for example, that you're somehow worthless; That you're no good;
- That you don't matter... that you're dumb or unattractive.

Even if there isn't a shred of truth in what they said, if you accept it, then it will shape your life.

- Whether those words came from those in authority or from the kids in the playground,
- You've probably figured out that "Sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me"
- is as far from the truth as you can get because they shape your thoughts, which can shape your life.

In fact, even now, years later, you may still be living out of that false information.

- Proverbs 23:7 says "As a man thinks... so he is."
- While everyone else, for example, may see their mistakes as opportunities to grow,
- For you, even the smallest criticism adds weight to the lie that you're stupid... that you're useless.

And so, for you, perhaps that lie manifests as perfectionism... not because you need everything to be perfect...

- but because you're terrified of looking like you're anything other than competent & intelligent.
- All that, because of a thought... because of a lie that was planted deep inside of you.
- The second reason why it's so important to "renew our minds" or "change the way we think" is...

## 2. Because the mind is the battleground for sin

The mind & our thoughts are where we either win or lose the battle. And why? Because all temptation happens in the mind.

- You see, we think temptation starts “out there,” that it’s something external that intrudes into our space.
- But, those things wouldn’t tempt you if there wasn’t a corollary thought or desire inside your mind.

When we talk about the sins of pride or lust or bitterness or hatred or anger or fear or resentment or envy or worry,

- Where do all those things happen? They happen in your mind.
- And so, if you can learn how to manage your mind you’ve learned how to manage your life because this is where the battleground is.
- But managing our minds isn’t always an easy thing, is it?

Paul says this in Romans 7:22-23. He says, “I truly delight in God’s commands; but there’s something else deep within me that is at war with my mind and wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin within me. In my mind, I want to be God’s servant, but instead I find myself still enslaved to sin.”

- We can all identify with that. Just look at the language Paul uses here— words like war, fight, slave, and enslaved.
- What’s he talking about? He’s talking about that battle that’s waging in your thoughts.

Sometimes you’re conscious of that battle and sometimes you’re not... but either way, it’s happening... and it’s intense.

- And, the reason it’s so intense is because your mind & thoughts are your greatest asset,
- Which is why Satan wants to remain in control of your mind & thoughts rather than have you in control of them.

And so, to do that, Satan makes every effort to implant in our minds a lie that has the power to redefine us...

- Lies & strongholds that work their way into our relationship with God, with others, and with ourselves.
- And then, seeing these lies as breaches in our defenses, he begins tempting us in those areas.

In fact, when it comes to temptation, satan typically uses the same pattern... a pattern described for us in James 1:14-15:

- **“Temptation comes from the lure of our own evil desires. These evil desires then lead to evil actions. Then the evil actions lead to death.”**

- Do you see the process here? You see, temptation isn't an isolated event.
- A lot of people talk about like “It just caught me off guard. It just happened.”
- Well, it didn't “just happen.” There were a lot of things you gave into in your thinking before you actually surrendered to the behavior.
- Why? Because temptation is a process and it's this four-phase process that James is describing for us here.
- So, let's look at them real quick. Phase number one is that temptation starts with desire. [“How Temptation Works”](#)

### **Step Number One is Desire**

If you don't have any desire for something it's not a temptation. I have never ever in my life been tempted to smoke cigarettes.

- Why? Because, there's no desire in me. I'm not putting myself above you if that's something you struggle with.
- I've never been tempted because it just didn't smell good to me.
- I think about my first overseas flights in the 80s... being stuck on a flight with so many people smoking. I'd never want to smoke!

But, of course, there are other things that tempt me... and those things always start with an inner desire.

- Again, temptation doesn't start “out there.” It doesn't start with all the foods you like to binge on in your kitchen.
- It doesn't start after an attractive person catches your attention.

It starts inside your mind.

And, oftentimes, like with food, it starts with a natural desire. You have a natural desire for sleep.

- You have a natural desire for water. You have a natural desire to think about the future.
- You have a natural desire for sex. You have a natural desire to succeed in life. These are all God given drives.

But temptation turns a routine desire into a runaway desire. That's what makes it bad.

- You see, a runaway desire will always be destructive. Fire in a fireplace can warm you...
- Fire on a stove can cook great food. But a fire that's uncontrolled can burn your house down.

If misused & abused, even those God-given desires (like food, sleep, serving others, the desire to love and be loved);

- Has the potential to burn your house down, which, as James writes, can lead to death.
- So, temptation doesn't start "out there." It starts in here, in my mind, in my thoughts & desires.
- But then, after the desire, comes the doubt.

### **Step two is Doubt**

In fact, after "desire," there are 2 things you'll begin to doubt. First, you doubt that God loves you; And, secondly, you doubt that God knows best.

- We see this with the very first temptation with the first married couple, Adam & Eve.
- They're all alone in paradise... no kids to distract them and they have no clothes on!

I mean, come on... How can you mess that one up?! Well, what happened was that satan comes and says,

- “See the fruit on all these trees here? Did God really say you can’t eat the fruit of these trees?”
- What’s satan doing here? He’s getting you to doubt whether God has your best in mind; Whether God is really good or not.
- He’s getting you to question God’s love & character. He’s getting you to question what you know to be true.

Just think about what’s going on in the mind of someone who’s considering an affair.

- “He makes me feel alive... how can something that feels so right be so wrong?”
- “God wants me to be happy... and this makes me happy. How can it be wrong?”
- “My marriage wasn’t God’s best... this person is my true soul mate”
- “Those friends who told me to run away from this are just judgmental. Christians are always so judgmental.”

Every time you give into temptation you are believing a lie... a lie that causes you doubt God...

- That makes you think that you know better than God; That you can take care of yourself better than God can take care of you;
- That you think that you know what will make you happy more than he does.
- So, there’s always the desire and then there’s the doubt. But then, comes the deception:

### **Then Step Three is Deception**

The third thing that Satan does is he replaces God’s truths with his lie. You see, God told Adam & Eve that they can eat of any tree in the Garden except one.

- But if you eat of the one, God says, “Surely you will die.”
- But what does satan say to them? He deceives them... telling them that they “surely won’t die if you eat this!”

In fact, not only did satan lie by telling them that God’s prohibition

- against eating from the one tree applied to all the trees,
- But, satan tells them that the reason God doesn't want them to eat the fruit is because...
  - God was holding back on them... that he didn't want them to know what He knows.
  - It's one deception after another. And the aim of this deception is to lure you away from God.

James 1:14 puts it like this. He says that **“Temptation comes from the lure of our own evil desires.”** Notice this word “to lure.”

- Now, let me ask you... how many of you are fishermen? If you are then you know that the secret of good fishing is simple...
- You've got to use the right bait! Now, I'm no fisherman, so I don't know what kind of bait you need to use to catch trout as opposed to salmon,
- But I do know that you can't just use a bare hook... you've got to have a lure.

So, here's my question to you: What kind of bait does Satan use on you? What bait does he put on the hook that almost always causes you to bite?

- It may be something from a long time ago that a parent said to you that can still trigger you.
- It could be a particular person who you've been flirting with at work.
- It could be a lie about your appearance or the memory of a past hurt.

In the right context, that lure is gonna have you hooked. And once it does, you'll begin to act out.

- It'll happen, because **satan knows how to conceal the hook with just the right bait...**
- Because he knows your desire and has caused you to doubt what you know to be true.

But the crazy thing is that even after we've been hooked a few times by the same bait... even when we know there's a hook underneath, we

might still take the bait.

- It's like people who flirt in the office. How stupid is that? You know there's a hook there.
- You know how bad it can go... but you still keep nibbling.
- You say, "I'm an adult, it'll be fine. I won't get hurt. I'll be careful." Well, if you're buying into that, then know that you're being deceived!

### **Step Four is Disobedience and Defeat**

So, we move from desire— it's something I want; to doubt— where I question God's Word and God's love;

- to deception— I'm believing the lie that Satan's telling me... that it's going to be okay; that I can get away with it just this once; that it's not that bad.
- But then the process takes you to disobedience & defeat where the sin in your mind evolves to sin in your actions.

You might say, "What's the danger of a harmless fantasy?" Are you kidding me? It's not harmless.

- Guys, listen to this... "What I flirt with I'll fall for." Whatever I flirt with... it may be a cupcake – I'll fall for.
- Listen, you're ultimately free to make your own choices. But you're not free from the consequences of those choices.
- Because there are unintended consequences that come with every choice. What you sow you will reap.

And so, this battle over the way you think rages on... because whatever gets your attention, whatever gets in your head, gets you!

- So, I need to manage my mind because my thoughts control my life and because my mind is the battle ground for sin and temptation.
- And then the third reason I need to manage or control my mind is...

### **3. Because it's the key to peace and happiness**

The Bible says it like this in Romans 8:6 "If your sinful nature

controls your mind, there is death but if the Holy Spirit controls your mind, there is life and peace.”

- What Paul is saying is that we'll never really live the life God has for us as long as our thinking is controlled by our sinful nature.

- But, if in the power of the Holy Spirit, we choose to manage or control our thinking, then there is both life & peace!

Now, maybe you're wondering if it's even possible to manage or control your thoughts.

- “My thoughts just enter my mind, how can I control that?”

- Of course, you might have a thought pop into your mind, but what you do with that thought is entirely up to you.

If you're changing the channel on TV and something inappropriate is in front of you, you can change the channel.

- If you're online and something inappropriate is in front of you, you can get off that page.

- If a thought comes to your mind that is rooted in a lie... If an inappropriate thought just gets into your head...

- You absolutely can choose to do something about it! You don't have to be thinking about what you're thinking about right now.

So, where's the starting place to break free from all those bad patterns of thinking? Well, what I need to do is make some choices.

- The Bible says there are three choices for a healthy mind. I have to feed my mind, I have to focus my mind, and I have to free my mind.

- Let's look at these three things. They're all choices you'll need to make in your everyday life. So, first...

### **A. I Must Feed My Mind with the Truth**

We all know the importance of nutrition. Good, healthy food cause you to feel better, to be stronger, to be healthier, to have more energy.

- While unhealthy food, food made in Dupont Laboratories rather than the farm, will likely harm your body.
- Well, the same is true in your thought life. I need to feed my mind not with Twinkies and snicker bars, but with truth.

In Matthew 4:4, we're told this... "People need more than bread for their life; they must feed on every Word of God."

- You see, the Bible is our soul food. It's our owner's manual, which we're meant to feed from each and every day.
- In Psalm 119:147, David says, "I rise before dawn and cry for help; I put my hope in Your words. Lord, how I love Your Word. I think about it all day long."
- In Psalm 16:7 he says "Even in the darkest of night your teachings fill my mind."
- From before dawn and through the day into the darkness of night, David is taking in/interacting with God's Word.

Let me give you one example of how serious David was about filling his mind with the truth of God's Word.

- David spent much of his early years running for his life because the king, who felt threatened by him, wanted him dead.
- As a fugitive living in caves and moving from place to place, David never knew if that day would be his last.

And yet, in Psalm 119:95, he says "When wicked people hide to ambush and kill me, I choose to keep my mind on your decrees."

- Wow! You see, David's saying, "I don't care what's going on in my life, morning, noon, night.
- Even when people are trying to kill me, I keep my mind on God's truth. That's called managing your mind.
- I feed my mind daily on truth. Secondly...

## **2. I must Focus My Mind on the Right Things**

In order to break free from negative patterns of thinking, we also need to focus our minds on the right things.

- And, in Philippians 4:8, Paul gives us an idea of what those “right things” are.
- He says, “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.”

What Paul’s inviting us here in Philippians 4:8 is to not only feed our minds with the truth, but to reflect & think on those things that are true...

- Those things that are noble and right and pure and lovely and admirable...
- And there is nothing more admirable and pure than Jesus, which is why we need to focus on Him and make Him the center of our everyday lives.