

The Power of Negative Thinking

1. Warm up: On Sunday Jeff mentioned that negative thought patterns can get stuck in our brains like a bad song that just keeps running through our brain again and again. Jeff gave the example of the song “Jolene” by Dolly Parton. What’s a bad song that sometimes gets stuck in your head?

2. Our Scripture reading for this week is the basis for Joyce Meyer’s famous sermon (and book) called “Battlefield of the Mind.” In our passage, Paul addresses a conflict that had arisen in the Corinthian Church. After Paul planted the church, other missionaries came along after him who tried to persuade the Corinthians to reject Paul’s theology in favor of a more legalistic, fundamentalist approach. These missionaries said terrible things about Paul, creating factions within the church. In our reading Paul talks about his battle to destroy the false thoughts and arguments being made by these missionaries. Read II Corinthians 10:1-7, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Jeff noted how conflict is not just a common occurrence in churches, but in any place where people gather, including families, workplaces, and friendship circles. Jeff said, “Where there are people there will be conflict.” Basically, he was saying that we should anticipate that conflict will happen in church. Do you agree? How do you feel about that?

 - b. Paul was determined to battle against the false thoughts and arguments being shared by the missionaries that came to Corinth because he realized that bad things happen whenever a group of people – churches or cities or nations – embrace false ideas. Jeff reminded us of what Putin is trying to do to convince Russians that he must make war on Ukraine to root out Nazis. How do you feel about what’s happening in Ukraine? Have you ever been part of a group of people that got corrupted by bad ideas? What happened?

3. False group thinking can lead to terrible things. But what’s true of groups is equally true for each of us as individuals. Each of us can become the victim of false narratives in our brain that have the power to hold us back. In her famous sermon “Battlefield of the Mind,” Joyce Meyer challenges us to apply the principles found in today’s Scripture to our personal lives. That process begins with the realization of the power of our thoughts to shape our life.
 - a. In the old King James Version, Proverbs 23:7 says, “As one thinketh in his heart, so is he.” What do you think that means?

 - b. Mahatma Gandhi once famously said, “Your thoughts become your words. Your words become your actions. Your actions become your habits. Your habits become your values. Your values become your destiny.” In other words, thoughts = destiny. Do you buy that? Why or why not?

- c. James Allen put it this way, “Mind is the master-power that molds and makes. . . . The tool of thought . . . brings forth a thousand joys [or] a thousand ills. One thinks in secret and it comes to pass.” Jeff shared a story about a time in high school when the thoughts he overheard someone expressing about him transformed his fear of public speaking into a love for it. It’s a dramatic example of the power of thoughts and words to shape us. What are some of the most uplifting words anyone has ever spoken to you? How did that impact you?
 - d. What are some of the most destructive words anyone has ever spoken to you? How did that impact you?
4. “As one thinketh, so shall they become.” That why it’s so important for us to “take every thought captive to . . . Christ.” II Corinthians 10:5. As Joyce Meyer points out, there is a constant struggle for who’s going to control your brain – Jesus or Satan, positivity or negativity, love or hate, hope or despair. And here’s the thing: each of us ultimately gets to decide who’s going to win that battle. How so? Let’s go back to our Scripture passage and the concept of “strongholds of the mind.” A stronghold is a fortress. So “strongholds of the mind” refers to deeply ingrained ideas and patterns of thought that have become so powerful, they’re virtually impregnable.
 - a. Strongholds of the mind can be either positive or negative. Give an example of an idea or pattern of thought so deeply ingrained in your brain, it’s virtually impregnable. Your example can be of a simple silly idea deeply ingrained in your brain or a deadly serious one.
 - b. The image on p. 3 illustrates the brain biology behind strongholds of the mind. The image shows a powerful neural pathway created by someone who has repeatedly thought and acted on the same idea over and over again. What are your thoughts and feelings as you look at this medical image?
 5. Strongholds of the mind are like paths in the forest. They’re formed by regular repetition of a thought or idea, and they are destroyed when we begin to intentionally neglect them in favor of a better, more life-giving thought or idea. Jeff suggested a four-step process for destroying negative strongholds of the mind:
 - ✓ First, identify a negative thought pattern that is holding you back. Name it! Call it out!
 - ✓ Second, write down the opposite and opposing truth of God about the matter.
 - ✓ Third, every time you catch yourself thinking the negative thought, interrupt it, and repeat the opposing positive truth.
 - ✓ Fourth, act on that positive thought until it becomes your new normal.

To close out our discussion, go around the room and invite those who wish to do so to share: (1) a negative stronghold of the mind they want to destroy; and (b) the opposite opposing truth that needs to replace it.

*Let's leave here and practice what we've learned from II Corinthians 10!
Take charge of your mind!*

II Corinthians 10:1-7

I myself, Paul, appeal to you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold towards you when I am away!

²I ask that when I am present [with you again] I need not show boldness by daring to oppose those who think we are acting according to human standards. ³Indeed, we live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human standards; ⁴for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy **strongholds**. We destroy **arguments** ⁵and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every **thought** captive to obey Christ. ⁶We are ready to punish every disobedience when your obedience is complete.

⁷Look at what is before your eyes. If you are confident that you belong to Christ, remind yourself of this, that just as you belong to Christ, so also do we.

Image of a Strong Neural Pathway

