

## The One Thought That Could Change Your Life Forever!

1. Warm-up: Our life experiences condition us to think in certain ways. And once we've learned a certain way of thinking, it can be really hard to change, even if that way of thinking serves little or purpose – or even hurts us. What's a deeply ingrained pattern of thought (serious or silly) that was drilled into you during your upbringing? Does that pattern of thought still have a hold on you?
2. Our thoughts have amazing power. Consider the following:
  - a. The average person thinks about 30,000 thoughts per day, and about 80% of those thoughts are negative. Does that seem accurate to you? Why or why not?
  - b. Why do our thoughts tend to skew so heavily toward the negative?
  - c. The AMA Journal on Internal Medicine says that 60 – 80% of all visits to primary care physicians have a stress-related component. Does that seem accurate to you? Why or why not?
  - d. Tell us about a negative thought (large or small) that you've experienced today. How did that thought affect you and your day?
3. Given the power of our thoughts and their tendency to skew toward the negative, it's imperative that find a way to exert more control. Our adversary the devil uses lies and distorted thinking as his chief weapon against us. He knows that if he can capture our thoughts, he can destroy our destiny. The only thing that can save us is the truth. But that raises an important process question: how do we defang the lies and embrace the truth? Jennie Allen says, "What if I told you that one beautiful, powerful thought could shift [the] chaotic spiral of your life for the better . . . every time you thought it? What if you could grab hold of one truth that would quiet the flurry of untruths that has left you feeling powerless over your brain? One thought to think. Could you do that? Such a thought exists." According to Allen, that thought is: **"I HAVE A CHOICE."**
  - a. The Bible teaches that each of us has a dual nature. As flesh and blood creatures, we have a "fleshly" way of thinking. That way of thinking is intuitive, instinctive, reactive, guttural, and often succumbs to lies and veers toward the negative. But within our fleshly bodies we also carry a spirit. As spiritual creatures, we have the ability to think and live in the Spirit. That way of thinking is noble, inspired, forward leaning, resonates with the truth, and embraces positivity. These two natures within us are often at tension with each other. Give us an example of how that tension has manifested itself in your life recently.
  - b. Given our dual nature, **WE HAVE A CHOICE**. We can choose to "think in the flesh" or "think in the Spirit." The Apostle Paul says, "Though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our

warfare are not of the flesh, but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God . . . and take every thought captive to obey Christ.” II Corinthians 1:-3-5. The “strongholds” mentioned here are ideas, opinion, and arguments that are contrary to God’s truth, i.e., toxic thoughts. In your view, what does it mean to “take every thought captive to obey Christ?” How would you explain it to someone else?

- c. Ephesians 2:5 says, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” What does that mean?
4. Our principle scripture this week is printed on p. 3. Let’s re-read, then discuss.
    - a. Romans 8:5 says, “Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.” What does it mean to “set your mind” on something?
    - b. Roman 8:6 says, “To set [your] mind on the flesh is death, but to set [your] mind on the Spirit is life and peace.” What does that mean?
    - c. Jeff shared a story about newlyweds who got trapped in traffic on the way to their reception. Instead of stressing and fuming, they got out of their vehicle and shared their first dance with cheering strangers. In your own life experience, when have you seen someone make a dramatic decision to reject negative thinking and embrace positive thinking?
    - d. What’s the difference between living in denial (i.e., pretending you’re not facing a dire situation when you are) versus responding to a dire situation in a positive manner with the mind of Christ?
  5. Jennie Allen suggests three practical steps we can take to retrain our brains to “think in the Spirit.” Take a look at those three steps on p. 3.
    - a. Go back to Question 2.b. where we asked you to think of a negative thought (large or small) that you’ve experienced today. What was the negative thought? What replacement thought would have been more consistent with “the mind of Christ?” What would be the benefit of embracing the replacement thought?
    - b. To what extent are Allen’s ideas relevant (or not) to someone with mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, or OCD?
    - c. Think of the area of your life where you are facing the greatest challenge now. What’s the challenge? What’s the negative thought that needs to be interrupted? What’s a replacement thought that better reflects the mind of Christ? Are you willing to experiment with Allen’s formula to confront your challenge?

## Romans 8:1-14, selected verses

<sup>1</sup> There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, <sup>4</sup> who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. <sup>5</sup> For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup> For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law – indeed it cannot, <sup>8</sup> and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

<sup>9</sup> But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. <sup>10</sup> But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

<sup>12</sup> So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – <sup>13</sup> for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

## Retraining My Brain To Think In The Spirit

In her book *Get Out of Your Head*, Jennie Allen suggests three practical steps for re-training our brain to think as Jesus did. When you catch yourself having a negative thought about something that's happening to you, this is what you do:

- **Step 1 – Interrupt!** Interrupt the negative thought by saying aloud, “I have a choice. I get to choose how I think about this situation.”
- **Step 2 – Choose the Mind of Christ.** Choose to replace the negative thought with your best understanding of how Jesus would think if he were in your situation.
- **Step 3 – Rinse & Repeat.** Repeat that as many times as you have to until your brain learns that new pattern of thought. Because neurologists tell us that each time we interrupt a deeply ingrained pattern of negative thought, the neural pathway that supports that negative thought grows weaker. And each time we replace a negative thought with a more positive thought the neural pathway that supports that positive thought grows stronger.