

The challenge of Renewing Your Mind

By Dave Batty

Trevor became a Christian two months ago. He regularly attends church, making new friends—but he is still struggling with anger.

“I can’t stop my outbursts. I get really irritated at the way people treat me,” he states. “Every day I pray to God, but every day people still make me angry.” He also confided that he is constantly struggling with lustful thoughts.

Harry, 67 years old, has been a Christian all his adult life. He grew up with a father who verbally abused him. “I can still hear my father saying—you’ll never amount to anything! You’re good for nothing!” And the damage still hangs on even though Harry is now a grandfather and loves God.

The struggles may not be

- ❖ **How can a person renew their mind?**
- ❖ **What help can I expect from God in changing the way I think?**
- ❖ **What can I do to get rid of inappropriate thoughts in my mind?**
- ❖ **What role do your emotions have in determining what you think about?**

identical, but many Christians are caught up in major battles in their mind. The promise of 2 Corinthians 5:17 sounds great, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (NIV) But where reality hits the road—we fall short—especially in our thought life.

*If you renew your mind,
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benefits and promises
for you.*

The old way of thinking has not gone away. Many still struggle with temptations in their mind, bitterness, depression, fear, hopelessness, frustrations, problems, and putting it bluntly—evil thoughts.

To be a successful Christian means to follow Jesus, to obey His teachings, to love others, to grow spiritually. But this battle still rages in the mind.

God’s solution to this battle is not simply to pray more. Prayer is important—but we need to do more than pray. Romans 12:2 goes to the heart of the problem and offers God’s solution—“Do not conform any longer 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.” (NIV)

The promise is powerful—if I renew my mind, God has some awesome benefits and rewards.

1. I will be transformed—not just cleaned up on the outside—but completely transformed on the inside, too.

2. I will know and understand God’s will for my life.

How many times have you said, “I wish I knew what God wanted me to do in this situation.” Here is the path to knowing God’s will—His good, pleasing and perfect will. Renew your mind!

3. The God of peace will be with me when I renew my mind. See Philippians 4:8-9.

God’s part vs. our part

Three significant scriptures talk about renewing your mind—Romans 12:1-2, Philippians 4:8-9, and Hebrews 3:1. All three of these scriptures say YOU must renew your mind. None say, “pray that God will renew your mind.”

So when you pray, “Oh God, renew my mind,” you are acting much like a child that says, “Mom, do my homework for me.” Most responsible parents would say, “No!”

When it comes to renewing your

mind, God will do His part, but not your part.

God's Part

1. "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."

2 Timothy 1:7 (NIV)

Three gifts are promised by God for every true Christian—a spirit of power, a spirit of love, and a spirit of self-discipline. God extends these gifts to His children—but are we taking them, and applying them in our lives?

Self discipline in our thoughts is a critical element of renewing our minds. God has promised to help.

2. When Jesus was preparing to leave earth and return to heaven, He specifically promised that the Holy Spirit would guide us into all truth.

John 16:13 says, "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come." (NIV)

Separating God's truth from the deceitful lies of Satan can be a challenge. God promises to help—He will guide you into all truth—but you have to be willing to take His help. Jesus did not say the Holy Spirit would give you all the truth—He said He would guide you into all the truth. This clearly indicates you must be seeking the truth if you want Him to guide you.

It's the same as the child who says, "Mom, help me with my homework," versus "Mom, do my homework for me."

3. God promises to bring us from darkness into light.

"When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the

world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'" John 8:12 (NIV)

One of our students was in 5 secular drug rehab programs before coming to Teen Challenge. After each of these programs, she would immediately return to her lifestyle of drug addiction. Her mother asked, "What are you learning in these programs?" The daughter's reply—"It's like they have given me a broom to sweep the floor, but the room is totally dark."

We need to learn to think like God thinks. We need to get rid of our sinful attitudes, our negative, critical ways of thinking, our selfish thoughts.

Jesus brings light into the darkness in our world. God's truth is light for us. One of the most important gifts that God has given us for renewing our mind is the Bible—His written word—a wealth of truth that clearly shows His way of thinking, and how He wants us to think.

King David said in Psalm 119:105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." (NIV)

God has given us an incredible tool for renewing our minds—His written word. Now what are we going to do with this treasure?

4. God promises to give wisdom to those who ask.

"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." James 1:5 (NIV)

He will give generously to us—His wisdom! Another incredible tool for us to use!

Our part

When it comes to renewing your mind—God has already done His part. And it is clear that He will not do your part.

First, you must accept responsibility for renewing your mind. After all, it is your mind!

So what does it mean to renew your mind? We need to learn to think like God thinks. We need to get rid of our sinful attitudes, our negative, critical ways of thinking, our selfish thoughts.

Renewing your mind should not be confused with thoughts that come into your mind. Many times we cannot stop certain thoughts from entering our mind. But what we do with that thought the instant we recognize that thought—that's where our response clearly shows whether or not we are renewing our mind.

Much of what we think about is directly connected to what we are feeding into our mind. If you put pornography into your mind—that is what you will end up thinking about. And what goes into your mind affects your whole life.

God tells us in His word "I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil." Romans 16:19 (NIV)

We need to guard our mind and not fill it with garbage. This includes what we watch on TV, what we read, and the music we listen to.

Romans 12:2 tells us that we need to renew our minds and the benefits we will reap if we do so. But that scripture does not tell us how to renew our mind.

The positive approach

The first major strategy for renewing your mind is found in Philippians 4:8-9. It contains 8 specific steps we can take to renew our mind.

“Finally, brothers, 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. 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.”
Philippians 4:8-9 (NIV)

Each of these 8 steps can be a filter in my mind to take me closer to God’s way of thinking. With each of these 8 steps, I must constantly look for God’s standard, not my standard.

Eight steps you can take to renew your mind

Philippians 4:8-9 Strategy of Renewing Your Mind

1. Choose one character trait per day or per week. The first one—whatever is true.

2. Remind yourself throughout the day that you want to do a personal checkup on how well you are using this step to renew your mind.

Ask yourself—what have I been thinking about today? Is it true? Or have I been thinking about something that is a lie? Have I been living with a fantasy in my mind? Am I worrying about what might happen? That’s not the truth.

Am I speculating on the motives or thoughts of another person?

One way to help evaluate a thought is to ask yourself—If Jesus were in my shoes right now, what would He be thinking about this issue or person?

3. Consider the opposite of

the trait. The opposite of truth is lies, fantasies, speculations. Ask yourself, “Am I thinking about something that is not true.” If so—I need to stop going down that thought path.

4. What scriptures will help me apply this trait to my way of thinking?

What scriptures on truth speak to you? Proverbs and Psalms have lots of treasures to use for these 8 steps. Memorize the verse and meditate on it during your daily activities.

5. After you have gone through all 8

steps of Philippians 4:8, begin to apply more than one test to each thought.

A young man sees an attractive young lady and thinks, “She is beautiful. I wonder what it would be like to be married to her?”

His thought meets the “whatever is true” test. But if she is already married, then this thought clearly fails the “whatever is right” test.

This process of renewing the mind calls us to ever higher standards of filtering our thoughts and placing boundaries so we do not go down the path of sin in our mind. Jesus made it clear in Matthew 5:27-28, that sin is not simply measured by our actions—we also sin when we embrace that thought and go down that path in our mind.

6. When you are evaluating your thoughts, bring God into the mental conversation. Breathe a prayer to God, ask for His wisdom. Quote scripture as a prayer of what you want God to do.

David’s prayer in Psalm 51:10 can be your prayer: “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” (NIV)

7. Talk with other Christians about your challenge to apply these 8 steps to renewing your mind.

Tell them of your successes and your challenges. The act of telling others can become a way of reinforcing these new thought patterns. It also can give you something positive to talk about! It’s time to move beyond the weather and sports in our conversations.

“Finally, brothers, 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. 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.”

Philippians 4:8-9 NIV

For example, the first step—think about whatever is true. I need to discover God’s standard of truth, not my perception of truth.

What does God say in His word about truth? If I am going to renew my mind, I must fill my mind with His truth. I need to read the Bible daily—I need to memorize scriptures.

But it is not enough to have this information in my head—I must “put it into action!” That’s the conclusion Paul gives in Philippians 4:9. A renewed mind should lead to changed behavior.

The box on page 3 gives a more detailed description of how to apply the strategy of Philippians 4:8 to renewing your mind. I challenge you to take each one of these 8 steps and work in a very systematic way of evaluating your thought life.

If a thought fails the test of being true, or noble, or right, or pure, then stop going down that path in your mind. Turn your thoughts toward God and His word. We need to put off our old way of thinking and develop a new way of thinking.

“²²You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. ²⁵Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.” Ephesians 4:22-25 (NIV)

Renewing your mind is a process, not a one time achievement. If you realize you have fallen short of one of these 8 standards, don’t beat yourself down—instead focus your attention on renewing your mind right now. Get back on the right path.

With each of these 8 steps, God’s word can help you. Fill your mind with scriptures that relate to that step. If you have a real struggle with one area—then find scriptures that speak to that issue. Write them down, carry them with you, and read them throughout your day.

The more you fill your mind with His truth, the more it will help to cleanse your mind of the inappropriate thoughts.

A key issue here is—what do you want to think about? Learning to

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conquered by ignoring
them, we must attack
them with God’s truth.*

think like Jesus means that you must continually make decisions in your mind. Your decisions! Your mind! God won’t decide for you. You must want to change the way you think.

Joseph in the Old Testament was sold as a slave by his brothers. He ended up in Egypt, and eventually in prison—with no hope for the future. But God rescued him. Nowhere do you read of Joseph being bitter because of the injustice he suffered.

Many years later his brothers fear he still plans revenge for their evil actions. The response of Joseph shows a truly renewed mind in action—“ ‘You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.’ And he reassured

them and spoke kindly to them.” Genesis. 50:20-21 (NIV)

Battling evil thoughts

The 8 steps of Philippians 4:8-9 provide a powerful place to start in renewing our mind—focus on the positive! But many of us face evil thoughts in our minds. They invade our mind without our permission.

Perhaps you have been in church, singing songs of worship or listening to God’s message from the pastor, when in your mind a movie of sinful thoughts begins to play. “Where did this come from?” you wonder. Or maybe you face this battle as you try to go to sleep at night.

You try to focus your mind on God’s truth, but the evil movie continues to play in your mind.

God offers another strategy we can use for these kinds of battles in the mind. “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 (NIV)

God tells us to take on the mindset of a battle-seasoned soldier fighting the enemy. These evil thoughts are not conquered by ignoring them, any more than a soldier ignores his enemy. The soldier faces his enemy, and fights him.

We must do the same when we face evil thoughts. We must use the strategies of a soldier—fight with passion! Satan is our enemy, committed to destroying us.

This scripture points to the absolute need for us to know God’s word. How do we know if an argument or pretension is setting itself up against the knowledge of God? We must know God’s truth before we

Do your feelings control your thoughts?

Do you find it easy to think positive thoughts when you are feeling good and everything is going just great? But how do you respond when you feel depressed, discouraged, bored or unhappy? Do you allow these feelings to control your thoughts?

God has promised to give His children the “spirit of self discipline.” See 2 Timothy 1:7. If you are going to renew your mind, self discipline is absolutely essential.

The call to Christian maturity is to discipline your thoughts and your emotions—to find the balance Jesus had in 3 areas of His life—His thoughts, actions, and feelings.

“Right thinking” leads to “right actions,” which leads to “right feelings.” The priority is critical. If feelings are at the front, they will drive you wherever they feel like going. You’ve heard it said, “If it feels this good, it must be the right thing to do.” What a trap! Your emotions will take you into all kinds of confusion.

“Right thinking” guides us in responding with “right actions.” Right feelings may not come immediately, but they will come eventually.

Accept the challenge that feeling good must have third place in your priorities. Right thinking is based on seeing each situation from God’s point of view, and then right actions—what would Jesus do?

can spot an error. How do we make this thought obedient to Christ unless we know God’s truth?

You must speak God’s truth to the evil thoughts that come to you. “This is a temptation from Satan to get me to lie, or to lust, or whatever the thought focuses on. And here is what God says about that issue”—and then you need to remind yourself of the specific truth that relates to that evil thought.

This is how Jesus did combat with Satan in the time of temptation early in His ministry. See Matthew chapter 4. Jesus did not ignore the temptation—He faced it. And He quoted scripture to respond to each temptation.

When evil thoughts come into your mind, don’t try to run from them—attack them! Use the tools God has given you. Once you have exposed what you are battling, then begin to focus on the positive things God speaks of in Philippians 4:8. Bring God into the battle.

Another strategy that can help us battle these evil thoughts is to be accountable to another godly person. Give them permission to ask you how you are doing in the battles with evil thoughts. You don’t need to give them specific details of what you are battling, but you can give them a report on how successful you have been over the past few days.

One of the devil’s most powerful tools is secrecy. If he can get you to keep secret all your battles, then he has a much easier time defeating you.

Focus on Jesus

Sometimes we are faced with difficult problems and confusion. The pain and frustration can drive us to the point of despair. The problem simply does not go away. What can we do in

these situations that do not seem to have a solution?

A third major strategy for renewing your mind is found in Hebrews 3:1. “Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.” (NIV)

On one occasion I was faced with a difficult ministry decision. Actually several others were making a decision, and I was the one most affected by that decision. I felt it was the wrong decision, and appealed to these leaders. They agreed to a meeting, where I was given full opportunity to voice my concerns. But they did not change their decision.

I left the meeting with a great burden of frustration. Instead of going directly back to my office, I stopped at a park and sat there talking to God. I began to simply focus on Jesus. I set the problem aside in my mind. Only Jesus and His love, His faithfulness, His genuine concern, His kindness were the focus of my thoughts. His promise to never leave me or forsake me.

The more I thought about Him, the better I felt. When I returned to my office, the problem had not changed. But fixing my thoughts on Jesus had taken the burden of frustration off my back. I could face the day with the confidence that Jesus was with me.

Some of the situations we face simply do not have adequate answers. In times like these we can look to Jesus—fix our thoughts on Him. Everything else might be messed up—but Jesus is not messed up or confused. He is seated at the right hand of the Father making intercession for us! We have to keep our thoughts fixed on Him.

Thoughts vs. actions

It is not enough to think pure thoughts. Philippians 4:9 takes it one step farther—we must put these thoughts into action. It's not enough to *think* kind thoughts—we must *speak* kind words, and *live out* kindness in our actions.

The prophet Jonah in the Old Testament illustrates the need for a renewed mind to impact one's behavior. God told him to go to Nineveh and preach, but he ran from God. His actions reveal his need for a renewed mind.

Jonah ended up inside the belly of a large fish for three days. He described the lessons learned in a beautiful prayer—Jonah chapter 2. He then obeyed God and went to Nineveh and preached to the city. A great revival broke out and people by the thousands repented.

The next actions and words of Jonah point to the deep problems he still had in his mind. He was angry that God forgave these people—so angry that he told God he wanted to die!

Our thoughts are revealed by our actions. In one sense our actions speak louder than our thoughts. If we say we are a very generous person, what do our actions say? If our actions send the opposite message, then we may be living in denial or delusion—this clearly does not reflect God's way of thinking.

Renewing our minds is a challenge that may take a lifetime. God has provided some very special gifts to help us in this process. But the real key to remember—this is my mind, and I must take full responsibility for renewing it.

The blessings are incredible that God has promised if we renew our mind—we will be transformed, we will be able to test and approve God's will in our lives, and we will experience His peace.

The challenge of Renewing Your Mind Discussion Guide

The following questions can be used for your personal reflection on this topic, or it can be used as a guide for a group discussion. If this is used in a group setting, please understand that you are not required to disclose the specific details of past sins, failures, or personal experiences.

1. What are some examples where you have seen change in your thought life—where you are making progress in renewing your mind?
2. What is one area where you need to renew your mind?
3. Read Philippians 4:8-9. Which of these 8 steps are you doing the best in your thinking? Which of these 8 do you need to most improve?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 10:5. What are the biggest battlefields in your mind? How can you take thoughts captive? What strategies work best for you?
5. Every temptation to sin is connected to our thoughts. What false beliefs make temptations a big battle in your life?
6. Read Hebrews 3:1. How helpful is it for you to fix your thoughts on Jesus?
7. What scriptures have you found most helpful in renewing your mind?
8. Activity: Pick one step from the 8 listed in Philippians 4:8 and use it all day long to assess and guide your thought life. After you have done that, give a progress report on how it worked for you.



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