One Small Step - Part 2

# Think on These Things

# (Romans 12:2)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. I’m so thankful to have all of you with us today as we continue with part two of a four-part message series called “One Small Step.” If you missed last week, we talked about how big goals, those big things that we want can often be so intimidating. As we’re beginning a New Year, some of us have a tradition of making New Year’s resolutions, and most of us enter a new year with a sense of anticipation. And yet, for so many of us by the second or third week of January our dream has faded away and our vision has blurred. But today I want to encourage you to focus, to take one small step, because it really is the little things that make a big difference in our lives.

Last week, we focused on one little thing and I asked you to seek God for just one word that would give you direction for this year. What I’d like to talk to you about this morning is your thoughts, because we need to understand that our thoughts matter to God. In fact, the Bible advises us time and time again that God knows our thoughts.

Once Jesus was teaching in this house and the people crowded in around him to hear and some religious guys called Pharisees and teachers of the law had also come to hear him speak. But Luke tells us in his gospel, that these other guys came bringing their friend on a mat because they believed that Jesus would heal him. Now, these guys couldn’t get their friend to Jesus through the crowd so in desperation they went up on the roof of the house and breaking through they lowered him into the middle of the crowd right in front of Jesus. When he saw their faith he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven” (Luke 5:20). But in verse 21, Luke tells us,

“The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" JESUS KNEW WHAT THEY WERE THINKING and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?” (Luke 5:21-22).

Again, and again the Bible tells us that Jesus knew people’s thoughts, that he knew in his spirit what people were “thinking in their hearts” (Mark 2:8). And the Bible has always made it very clear to us that “the Lord knows the thoughts of man” (Psalm 94:11), “He detests the thoughts of the wicked” (Proverbs 15:26), and that’s why David could say with such confidence,

“Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely…” (Psalm 139:1-4).

And that’s why this message is so important, because we need to watch our thoughts, because they become words, we need to watch our words, because they become actions, and we need to watch our actions, because they become habits, which form our character and become our destiny. And so, this morning, as we think on these things, we’re going to re-evaluate our thoughts, filter our old way of thinking, learning to think a new way, because our thoughts really do determine who we become. In fact, the Bible says it this way in Proverbs chapter 23,

“As he thinketh in his heart, so is he…” (Proverbs 23:7, KJV).

In other words, if you think you can’t, then you probably won’t. If you go through life believing that your best days are behind you, that your marriage won't get better, that you’ll never experience victory over that sin, then you probably won’t ever achieve your potential. On the other hand, if you think you can, then you probably will. And so, your thoughts really do matter, because as a person thinks in their heart so they become.

Craig Groeschel said it this way, he said, “Your life will always move in the direction of your strongest thoughts.” And yet, for many of us we find that our “loyalty is divided between God and the world” (James 4:8 NLT). And so, what we’re going to do, number one, is we’re going to reevaluate our thoughts, because we’ll only move in the direction, we’ll only attain the height of those things that we think on.

## 1. Re-evaluate Your Thoughts

Now, we know that God sees things differently than we do. We recognize that God’s perspective, that God’s ways are higher than our ways, his thoughts are higher than our thoughts, we know that. And so, when we try to interpret things, especially spiritual things, according to our narrow perspective and our limited understanding, sometimes we’re just way off the mark. And therefore, the process of growing in our Christian walk is learning how to see from God’s perspective. The apostle Paul described it this way in 1 Corinthians, chapter 13, he said,

“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me” (1 Corinthians 13:11).

Today, we need to stop thinking and reasoning like spiritual children and instead reevaluate our thoughts so that we look at life from God’s perspective. You see, we can’t successfully make our way through life when we see things from a child’s perspective. And so, as Paul said, we need to put away childish things and learn to think with the mind of Christ. I think it was Zig Ziglar who coined the phrase "no stinking thinking" and that’s exactly what we need to do, because we’ll never mature and move ahead until we get rid of that "stinking thinking" and begin to think and reason from God's perspective. That’s why Paul pleaded in Romans chapter 12,

“And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect” (Romans 12:1-2 NLT).

Today I want to challenge you to re-evaluate your thoughts, to do a thought audit, to think about what you think about. Asking yourself, “Am I thinking about worldly things or eternal things? Am I thinking about negative things or positive things? Am I anxious and worried or are am I at peace? You see, those questions are important because our lives move in the direction of our strongest thoughts, our greatest preoccupation, and so if you’re consumed with worldly, worried, or negative thoughts, then you’re moving in that direction. But if you’re consumed with peaceful, positive, godly, and eternal thoughts, that means you’re moving in that direction. And so, we need to reevaluate our thoughts regularly, because the attraction of our world and culture, not to mention our coworkers and neighbors, are all leading us in the wrong direction. The Bible says it this way in Philippians chapter 3,

“There are many whose conduct shows they are really enemies of the cross of Christ. They are headed for destruction. Their god is their appetite, they brag about shameful things, and they think only about this life here on earth. But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives” (Philippians 3:18-20 NLT).

And that’s why God inspired the apostle Paul to tell the church not to conform, copy or imitate the behaviors of this world, but to let God change us into a new person by changing the way we think. Then as you renew your mind, you’ll be transformed, and your life will begin moving in the direction of your good, positive, and godly thoughts. And so, number one, you want to reevaluate your thoughts, because your old way of thinking is holding you back.

## 2. Filter Your Old Way of Thinking

And then, number two, you want to filter your old way of thinking…so that you can begin experiencing God’s good, pleasing, and perfect will; because what we think is based upon what we’ve come to believe, what we’ve been told all of our lives, and in many cases it’s just not right, it’s just not true. But our old way of thinking is so ingrained in our mind that we hang on to these erroneous beliefs, thinking “I can’t make a difference, I’m no good, I’m a screwup, I’m never going to amount to anything,” without ever thinking about where that belief came from, what it’s doing to us, or where it’s taking us. And that’s why the Holy Spirit said,

“Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think” (Romans 12:2 NLT).

And so, we’ve been corrupted by our old way of thinking, the world’s way of thinking, the world’s way of believing, and the world’s way of doing things, because it doesn’t matter how sheltered you are, some “stinking thinking” will find its way into your thought process. For example, how many times have you found yourself trying to overcome bad thought habits that have caused you to struggle with temptation, lust, low self-esteem, a critical spirit, and just plain old negativity? And so, we need to evaluate, filter, and sort out those things that we believe and ask ourselves where those thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs come from. You know, “Did that belief come from the word of God, is that who I am in Christ, or did that thought come from the world?”

And so, if you find that you are consumed with pride or fear, maybe covetousness, anxiety or negativity, you can filter those destructive worldly thoughts. The Bible says you can seize them, capturing them, and controlling what you think, what you feel, and what you believe. This is what the apostle Paul taught us to do in second Corinthians, chapter 10, he said this to these believers that had been caught up in deceptive, worldly thinking in verse three,

“Even there we’re human… we don't wage war as humans do. We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5 NLT).

And so, we begin this process of experiencing the transformation that God desires, the renewing of our minds, by realizing that there are some things going on in our thought lives that are merely baggage from the world’s way of looking at things. Instead of being a radiant church, holy and blameless, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish (Ephesians 5:27), unknowingly we’ve become stained, even imprisoned, locked away by deception, chained up by lies, having these false thoughts that we’ve been force fed by Satan, our spiritual enemy, the father of lies. And his greatest desire is to deceive us and convince us of things that are not true, impressing them on our minds and in our thought processes, so that we build our lives on a lie rather than the truth. But Paul informs us that we’ve got God’s mighty weapons, supernatural weapons, with divine power that are available to us. And so, we can filter what we receive, demolishing, knocking down the strongholds of human reasoning, destroying every false argument, proud obstacle, and rebellious thought.

Now, I will be the first to admit that there is nothing easy about renewing your mind. In fact, tackling your thought life is the hardest work you'll ever do. That's why Paul said we must take every thought, every belief, every attitude captive to make it obedient to Christ. And so, this is an everyday battle that takes place on a thought-by-thought basis as we ask ourselves, “Is Jesus behind this or is this something I picked up from a bad influence along the way?” And so, we filter old way of thinking remaining faithful to Christ teachings and remembering his promise in John chapter 8,

"You will know the truth and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32 NLT).

But the truth is that most of us spend too much time engaged in the wrong kind of thinking, because the Lord tells us that “the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace” (Romans 8:6). And so, therefore, we need to be proactive, taking captive each thought, fitting our thinking, emotions, and impulses into the structure of a life shaped by Christ and refusing to be conformed to this world. And so, number one, we reevaluate our thoughts, number two we filter our old way of thinking, and number three, we learn to think a new way.

## 3. Learning to Think A New Way

Now, learning to think a new way is unlike any other discipline you may apply to your life. For example, you may go to the gym once a day and once you’ve completed your routine, you’re done, but taking charge of your thought life is an all day, every day process, beginning the moment you wake up and continuing until you’ve fallen sleep.

In fact, experts disagree on the exact number, but they suggest that you have between 20,000 to 70,000 thoughts every day. And so, even at the lower end of the spectrum, 20,000 is a massive number of thoughts to deal with every day and that’s why the Bible encourages us, “To be made new in the attitude of your minds” (Ephesians 4:23). Or the New Living Translation says it this way,

“Let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes” (Ephesians 4:23 NLT).

And so, learning to think a new way is important, because our natural inclination is to drift towards sinful and negative thinking. But God’s will, God’s desire is that we would renew our minds so that our lives can be transformed by a redeemed desire for a renewed way of thinking. A new way of thinking as Paul says in Colossians chapter 3 that is focused not on worldly wisdom or earthly ideas, but he says in verse two,

“On things above, not on earthly things” (Colossians 3:2).

And so, renewing your thoughts and attitudes not only applies to how you think of yourself, but it also applies to how you control your temper, outburst of anger, sexual temptation, even selfish ambition, because those things that you dwell on in your thoughts tend to grow and grow and grow. And that’s why the Bible warns us so strongly,

“I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:21).

And so, whatever it is that you nurture, that you feed, that you repeatedly put in your mind, will shape your thoughts, emotions, and will ultimately find its way into your actions. So how do you learn to think new thoughts?

The first thing that I would suggest is that you need to be ruthlessly SELECTIVE with what you allow to influence your thinking. The apostle Peter says it this way in first Peter chapter 1, he wrote,

“Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled …as obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance” (1 Peter 1:13-14).

Prepare your minds for action, be selective, be self-controlled, because the battle for holiness begins in the mind, it begins with how we think. And so, Peter tells us that we need to be ready, we need to be prepared to deal with those distractions that would seek to derail you, setting you off course, and focus instead on what is true. This is why the Bible tells us in the book of Hebrews,

“We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away” (Hebrews 2:1).

In other words, we need to make it a point to focus on the truth of God’s word, rather than to dwell on the wisdom of the world, because when we lose sight of God’s truth, we lose our perspective and are at risk of drifting away. Now, that doesn’t mean that you ignore what’s going on in the world, but you don’t give the same level of importance or authority to the voices you hear in the world.

The second thing you will want to do is to declare some thoughts to be OFF-LIMITS.

And so, when it comes to certain thoughts or ideas, you simply decide beforehand that you’re going to refuse to go there, because you know that when you dwell on certain thoughts… they become words, which become actions, which become habits, which become character, which becomes your destiny. That was the point that Jesus was making in Matthew chapter 5 when he said,

“I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28).

It’s that stinking thinking, thinking the wrong thing, the wrong way, that will wreak havoc in your spiritual life, because it becomes your destiny. And so, it would benefit us all to draw a line in the sand, deciding once and for all: not to entertain sexual thoughts about anyone other than your spouse. Period.

If you’re not married yet, you honor your future spouse, you keep yourself pure, and you just make that kind of thinking off-limits. Jesus took this seriously and you should too. He said to cut it off, amputate it, just cut it out. He said,

“If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell” (Matthew 18:8-9).

Of course, there are other kinds of thoughts and ideas that need to be cut off and kept off-limits as well. For example, Psalm 73 says,

“But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (Psalms 73:2-3).

In other words, don’t think envious thoughts, don’t allow any jealousy to rise up in your heart, but put that kind of thinking aside. Make it off-limits. This would include every kind of negative emotion, all worrisome, fearful, anxious thoughts need to be in the off-limits category. Now, I know that thoughts just pop into our heads, but you don’t have to dwell on every thought, and just like those annoying pop-ups on your computer, you click that little “X” in the corner, close the window and move on.

And then the third thing for learning to think a new way, when you’re tempted to think the wrong way, is that you train yourself to intentionally REDIRECT your mind to think the right way. In other words, you make a “to think” list, kind of like a “to do” list, where you itemize several thoughts and make it a point to reflect on them every single day. Just imagine if you were to create an itemized “to think” list and you were to check off these items one by one throughout the day just like you check off:

* go to the grocery store
* cut the grass
* drop off Johnny at ball practice

You know, what if we were to decide to become proactive in our thinking to ensure that every day our minds were engaged in the most empowering, uplifting thoughts and ideas? I believe it would revolutionize the way that you experience the world, because it would change your perspective, it will turn your emotions right side up, and you would be able to see the world through God’s perspective, through the filter of faith rather than the filter of fear.

As a matter of fact, the apostle Paul had a “to think” list. He recorded it in the Bible in Philippians chapter 4 and here’s what he said in verse eight and nine,

“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).

And so, we want to think on these things, focusing on the eternal, seeing the good in everything, no matter what our circumstances are, no matter what our situation, even if you’re in prison like Paul was when he made this list, no matter what we see, because we don’t live by sight, we live by faith. And so, by changing the way that we think we can literally transform our destiny, because as we think so we will become. Therefore, we take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ, we fix our thoughts on things that are pure and lovely and admirable. If anything is excellent or praiseworthy, we will think about such things, it’s just one small step that will make a big difference in our lives.

Now, last week I asked you to pray for one word that would guide you, and what we want to do this week is to seek God not for one word, but instead for one thought, because I believe one thought can result in bigger changes than you could ever imagine. One small step, one small thought that you will think again and again and again until your mind is renewed, that thought becomes truth in your heart, and it changes the words you speak and the way that you live.

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