

Teacher's Guide for Living Holy

Theme: Holiness in Our Thoughts

Life Application:

Asking the Lord to purify our minds and to help us protect them from influences that would defile us or make us less Christ-like.

Key Verse for Meditation:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 2:5

Focus Scriptures:

Psalms 1:1-2; 139:23-24; Isaiah 26:3; Romans 8:6-7; 12:2-3; 2 Corinthians 10:5; Philippians 4:8; Titus 1:15; 1 Peter 1:13

Lesson Key:

The key endeavor of a holy Christian is to love God with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength. As individuals who have been set apart and devoted to God, we want the mind of Christ to be in us (see Philippians 2:5), so we carefully guard against anything that would contaminate our thoughts or distract us from our primary purpose of glorifying and serving God.

Introduction:

When we declare Jesus Christ the Lord of our lives, and consecrate ourselves to Him in a quest to live holy, His lordship extends to every sector of our lives. We relinquish our rights to determine what we will believe, or to develop our own philosophies of life. Because He is Lord, Christ has the right to exclusive claims upon our minds. And according to Philippians 2:5, His desire for us is that we cultivate the mind of Christ.

Having the mind of Christ will have a direct influence upon our behavior. Actions spring from thoughts, and thoughts are born in attitudes. "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). While in our human bodies we will never possess perfect wisdom nor have all knowledge, our motives will be to continually align our minds to the principles of God's Word, to conform our thinking to the thinking of Christ, to love what He loves and hate what He hates, and to uphold what He upholds and reject what He rejects. We will strive to see the world as He sees it, and will purpose to guard against the world's way of thinking.

Maintaining a godly mind in a secular world will require both vigilance and action. The writer of Romans speaks of the necessity of "renewing" our minds, and this is largely accomplished by maintaining constant exposure to the Word of God.

Opener Ideas/Activities:

The video clip "Anything but Jesus" could be a good opener. Search for "Anything but Jesus" at <http://sermoncentral.sermonspice.com>. You may wish to consider stopping the clip just before the final caption.

Tell your students that, prior to class time, you went out into your yard to see what you could find to bring to class. Explain that you collected a few things in a margarine tub. Hold up items such as a leaf, a rusty nail, a few pieces of litter, a stone with some dirt on it, a weed with some soil clinging to the roots, a worm, etc. Occasionally shuffle things around in the tub as if searching for something. Then pull out a half-eaten chocolate or dried, half-eaten sandwich. Comment that it looks like somebody

might have had a bite and then thrown it away because he didn't like it. Or perhaps the worm has been nibbling at it! Say, "Well, there is no use letting it go to waste. Who would like to eat it?" When there is no response, blow off some of the dirt, and then offer it again. Then ask why no one would take it. Make the point that we are very careful about what goes into our mouths. But are we as careful about what we put into our minds? Contaminating our minds with impurities is far more dangerous than eating contaminated food.

Perform a skit to illustrate how we can miss God's leadings if our minds are preoccupied with too many other activities. Show a man going through a typical day, and have someone hidden speak over a microphone the thoughts that are passing through the man's mind: "I need to stop by the bank on the way to work, and during lunch I should book my tickets for next week's game. After work I need to hit the gym; I haven't been there in way too long. Wow, that's a really good deal on Nike tennis shoes; I wonder if I should buy them? I think I still have some cash in my account, but I should save it in case of an emergency . . . I wonder if I turned off the heat before I left the house . . ." While these types of thoughts pass continually through his mind, have another voice portray God's call. That voice tries to get the man's attention, but he does not hear it because he is too preoccupied with his own thoughts. The point is that we must have our minds clear of distractions so we can hear God when He speaks to us.

Bring to class a clear glass or plastic wide-mouth jar of clean water, and several dirty rocks from the yard. Explain that the jar of clean water represents our minds. Begin by putting one rock in. This could represent seeing one inappropriate movie or TV show. Point out the dirt on the rock as it drifts to the bottom. Add another rock, representing one pornographic image. More dirt appears in the water. Another rock: an off-color joke. Another rock: an act of graphic violence. Another rock: inappropriate music. By now the water isn't so clear anymore and the jar is heavy. Likewise, our minds become contaminated when we take in things that are defiling.

Questions from Student Handout:

1. What principles regarding the Christian mind are outlined in the following verses? Mark 12:30; John 8:31-32; 1 Timothy 4:15; Titus 1:15

Mark 12:30—Love the Lord with all your mind. Our minds need to be focused on God and on striving to know Him better if we are to implement this.

John 8:31-32—If we continue in the Word, we will know the truth. We should be dedicated to searching the Scriptures, for that is where God's truth is written. His truth is what makes us free.

1 Timothy 4:15—We are to meditate on the Bible and godly precepts, making them the focus of our thoughts.

Titus 1:15—Purity comes from God. We cannot think holy thoughts if we have an unholy mind, and a holy mind is the result of a holy heart.

2. Why is it so important to discipline our thoughts? Proverbs 4:23-27

The mind is the route to the heart, which needs to be kept "with all diligence." By disciplining our thoughts, we can help prevent temptation from enticing us and sin from entering our lives. The enemy of our souls wants to get a wedge into our minds, but careful attention to our thoughts can help us keep a strong defense against him.

Pure thoughts enable us to hear God's voice and directions, reduce our susceptibility to doubts and other snares of the devil, and help us see and take advantage of the opportunities the Lord sends us.

3. What should you do if Satan runs a negative thought through your mind?

There are definite steps to victory in this area: plead the Blood of Jesus, submit to God, resist the devil, refuse to contemplate the thought, think of a Bible verse or song.

You could take a bird's nest (or maybe build a fake one) to class to illustrate the old saying, "You cannot keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair." The enemy of our souls will surely tempt us with thoughts, but we do not have to dwell on them. We cannot always choose what we see or hear, but we can choose what we ponder. It could be helpful to review the "Steps to Guarding Your Mind" from the lesson sheet.

Additional verses for reference are:

Psalm 19:14—a good prayer

Psalm 139:23-24—another good prayer

Matthew 4:1-11—use Scripture as Jesus did

Ephesians 5:15—walk circumspectly

James 4:7—submit to God, resist the devil

Revelation 12:11—testify

4. We are admonished, "Whatsoever things are pure . . . think on these things" (Philippians 4:8). Name some things that fit into that category.

Your class should be able to generate a list in answer to this question. Some of their thoughts might include: an uplifting testimony, a spiritual song, past spiritual victories, God's Word, and answers to prayer.

It is unreasonable to suppose that a Christian can indulge in all manner of thoughts which are contrary to the Spirit of God and still retain any degree of purity and the proper relationship to God in his heart. What our minds entertain, ponder, meditate upon, and study will have a lasting impact on our behavior. This is why thinking on pure things is so important.

5. On several occasions, the Bible instructs the saints to be of "one mind" (see Romans 15:5; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 1:27). Why is being of one mind necessary, and how can it be achieved?

Being of one mind is necessary because the Bible directs it. This brings unity and makes the Gospel "work" smoothly.

Being of one mind is achieved first by the experience of sanctification (holiness), and then by the practice of holy living, which includes being willing to lay aside our own ways, thoughts, ideas, etc.

6. While God is the One who purifies our hearts, we have a responsibility to guard it. What did Paul say in 2 Corinthians 10:5 regarding this? Why do you think Paul phrased this responsibility in terms of a warfare?

In 2 Corinthians 10:5 Paul speaks of "casting down imaginations" and "bringing into captivity every thought." In Paul's day, as in ours, there was a great deal of false thinking about the things of God. Thus, Paul described the Christian's mental responsibility in terms of warfare—it will take effort to maintain a pure mind. Other points of comparison could be made as follows.

The Christian mind is alert to danger and watchful.

The Christian mind is prepared for battle.

The Christian mind puts all things under the lordship and leadership of its Commander, Jesus Christ.

Additional Questions:

The Bible instructs the saints to be of "one mind" (see Romans 15:5; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 1:27). What causes us to be of different minds?

Negative thoughts, complaining, criticism, and contending for our own ways can cause us to be of different minds. The reference here does not mean simply a different way of looking at things, for there is room for a variety of opinions and perspectives in the Gospel. Rather, in this context the word implies a mindset that is based upon different goals or motives.

The ungodly mind is described in terms that are sobering. Read Romans 1:18-28. What are some of the ways this passage describes unbelievers' minds?

Class discussion could bring up the following descriptions of the minds of unbelievers:

- *Suppressing the truth*
- *Rejecting God*
- *Foolish speculations*
- *Foolish hearts*
- *Professing wisdom*
- *Exchanging God for a counterfeit*
- *Lusting hearts*
- *Exchanging truth for a lie*
- *Full of degrading passions*
- *Exchanging the natural for the unnatural*
- *Depraved*

No doubt most of us commonly think such thoughts as, Wow, how am I ever going to get the laundry done? When am I going to get the oil changed in the car? etc. Those thoughts might be true and honest, but are they lovely? Does that mean we should not think about daily chores? What types of thoughts would the verse in Philippians 4:8 refer to? How can we help ourselves remember to think along these lines?

We must think the thoughts that make our daily lives run smoothly, but having the proper goals and focus is vital. The point is for class discussion to bring out again that what we choose to meditate upon and study is critical.

How can we decide whether our thoughts are good or bad?

It can be helpful to ask ourselves some questions about our thoughts: Is there any virtue, excellence, admirable quality, or moral good in the thought? Is there any praise, approval, honor in the thought? Does the thought build up or tear down spiritually? Is the thought in agreement with God's Word? Does the thought extol or honor God?

In what ways do you think that daily, private Bible study and prayer help us think proper thoughts?

Reading the Bible continually reminds us of the character and actions of God, and of reasons for thanksgiving and hope. God's instructions are reinforced, and we learn from the examples given. Prayer keeps the channels open between us and God, allowing Him to check us if necessary, and inspire us to deeper meditation on the things of God.

What part does repetition play in keeping our thoughts and attitudes right?

God's Word is clear that repetition is vital to staying on track spiritually.

1 Corinthians 15:2—we need to remember what has been preached to us.

Philippians 3:1—Paul indicated there is safety in repeating the truth.

2 Peter 1:12-13 and 2 Peter 3:1—remembering can stir us up spiritually.

Word Search:

Romans 12:2 declares, “And be not conformed [pressed into the mold of] to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.” The Greek word translated *transformed* is *metamorphosis*, and is used today to describe the amazing change that takes place when a caterpillar becomes a butterfly.

In the original language, the verb tenses of the words *conformed*, *transformed*, and *prove* indicate continuous action. Thus, the Christian mind should be characterized by continuous development toward maturity.

Supplemental Resources:

“Return to Sender” by Rosaline Shears, *Higher Way* Vol.90-1

“What Are You Thinking” by Bill McKibben, *Light of Hope* Vol.83-3

“An Attitude of Gratitude” by Dwight Baltzell, *Light of Hope* Vol.84-5

“Imagine That” by Darrel Lee, *Light of Hope*, 87-3