



Our Minds — A Swinging Door or a Locked Door?

By Joanne Paulos



I can almost remember the day. I certainly remember my reaction.

Jimmy and I were new in the renewal. We had not officially joined the Community, but were attending every event, prayer meeting, and teaching the Community offered. We were going through the BCLS Series; Bill Beatty was teaching. He said something that was so new to me that I almost fell out of my seat.

OK.... Don't laugh when I tell you because in retrospect it seems like common sense. Bill said that we did not have to be ruled by our emotions. Emotions are neither good nor bad. It's what we do with them that counts. I know... it's common sense, but to me it was a revelation. It was good news because I grew up in a family where everyone knew how others felt on any given day. I just assumed

that all families operated this way. To be honest, I was kind of ticked off that no one had ever told me this before. I was 27 years old!

Over the past 38 years, I have listened to women share their stories, their battles, their victories and their striving for a better relationship with husbands, families and friends. One thing that often became apparent was a need to control their thoughts. Many times I would say, "Your mind does not have a swinging door on it. Close the door and lock it." In other words, you are the one and only person who can decide to take control over what you are thinking.

Our minds are often like toddlers — all over the place! Like a good mother who is always vigilant about the well-being of her child, we have to pay attention to what we are thinking.

Sounds impossible, doesn't it? Scripture tells us to take every thought captive and place it under the Lordship of Jesus. The Lord knows this is a difficult challenge. Take our thoughts captive... like a prisoner? If our minds are a battlefield, then yes, that is exactly what the Lord means.

Saloon doors are on hinges that make it possible for the doors to go back and forth in both directions. A lot of restaurants have swinging doors between the kitchen and the dining room so that waiters can bump the door with their hip to knock it open. Swinging doors are okay, but collisions are bound to happen.

No one would put a swinging door as the entry way into their home. How dangerous is that? Heck no... we put steel doors with dead-bolt locks on the front and back entry ways into our home. We say to our kids, "Shut the door... lock the door... don't open the door to strangers." If we took the same kind of concern we have for our homes and kids and applied it to ourselves when it comes to our thinking,



Triumphal Entry



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The Battlefield of the Mind

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Have you ever convinced yourself that something was going to go wrong? You just *knew* you weren't going to get that job? Even before the interview? Then you got that job? Or you were *certain* the kids were going to get into a car accident driving home? And then they arrived home safely? In hindsight we often look back on situations like

Capture Your Thoughts

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it would go a long way in improving the quality of our lives.

Years ago we had a teaching called, "First Thought, Second Thought." When a bad thought first comes to mind (impure thought, bad thought about someone, negative thought, etc.) that first thought is just something that comes without our intentionally agreeing to it. But aha! ...that second thought is something different.

When we intentionally allow ourselves to think things that are unworthy of Christ, we have collided with wrongdoing. This makes life difficult and unhappy. At the end of the day, we feel like we have been in a war, and we have. We lost.

So how do we control our thoughts? How do we win the stinking thinking battle? Here are some things that have helped me:

1. **I tell the Lord I am powerless to control my thoughts without His help.** Part of controlling my emotions is to be aware of what is going on in my mind. I need help in becoming more aware.

2. **I interrupt the thought pro-**

cess this and wonder why we were so worried. And sometimes have you arrived at the conclusion that your concern was "all in your head"?

Not surprisingly, the Bible addresses the "all in your head" syndrome. God understands that—if we're not deliberate—we are capable of imagining countless scenarios in which relationships fracture and bad things happen. So He built into His Word instructions for recognizing and overcoming the inclination to let our minds run away with us.

These battles in our minds are

cess the moment I realize that my thinking is negative or wrong. In other words, I shut that door and lock it. Not taking action at this point allows thoughts to flow in and out with ease. I do not spend anytime analyzing it, or judging it or myself. I just shut the door and lock it. Hand the key to the Lord.

3. **I intentionally choose to think something else.** It's like changing the channel on the radio. Do spiritual warfare, but changing the channel on our mental radio is a must. I leave the room, sing or do something that requires me to think about something else. Changing the mental thought requires a deliberate action. But we have to really decide that these thoughts are something we do not want to continue.

4. **I try to practice this every day.** The more we practice the better we get. I might have a problem with something or someone and find myself thinking negative things about it/them. The feelings rise up, and oops... I want to continue thinking about that situation or person. My thoughts are like a bully who tries to

actually a normal part of Christian experience. In 2 Corinthians 10, Paul speaks about this very vividly. In verse three he says:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.

Paul says we are living in physical bodies in a material world. At the same time we are in a war, but the war is not being fought out in the physical or material realm. It is in a different realm. He explains in verse four:

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds...

God has given us the appropriate weapons because this war in which we're engaged is not in the physical realm. Our weapons are not physical.

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push me around. I have to say, "NO!" If we have chronic problems controlling our thoughts, we need to ask for help.

5. **I find ministry and talking things out with someone (Headship or Older Woman) a great help.**

The battle of controlling our thoughts is a reality for men, women and children alike. Our thoughts do control how we feel about ourselves, our lives and other people.

I'm not sure what comes first, the thought or the emotional feeling. Perhaps it is the thought one day and feelings another. It really doesn't matter. One can control the other. The one thing that I do know is that we do not have to let either one rule our life. This is good news!

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Our Weapons are not Physical

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but spiritual. God has given us spiritual weapons that will destroy strongholds. In this war there are strongholds that oppose us and oppose God. And Paul goes on to describe these strongholds in verse five:

...casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ...

All of these words deal with the realm of the mind: arguments, the knowledge of God and taking every thought captive. Paul has made it clear that the battlefield is the mind. Having pressures in your mind, therefore, is not unnatural or abnormal. It is part of the Christian life. It is not necessarily a sign you are doing anything wrong, or are on the wrong path. It is just part of your total experience as a Christian.

The Enemy Within

At a certain point in my Christian experience, I made a startling discovery: I had an enemy of God in me. Even though I was a Christian, serving God, I discovered that my enemy was my own mind.

In Romans 8:7, Paul explains:

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

I grew up with a very highly educated mind. I had attended a prestigious university and had become a professor. But the trouble was that the mind that was being educated was an enemy of God. I had inside me a very highly educated enemy of God.

Many people trust in education. But education will not change your mind from being an enemy of God. It will just educate your mind the way it is. If you have a carnal mind and you go to seminary for five years, you

could likely emerge with a highly educated carnal mind inside of you.

There has to be a total and complete change.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul says that God has given us the appropriate weapons. There are many weapons for us to use in this war, but I believe the two most essential are time spent in God's Word and prayer.

Early in my Christian life, I had an experience in which I had to trust the Word of God for an entire year to bring my physical healing.

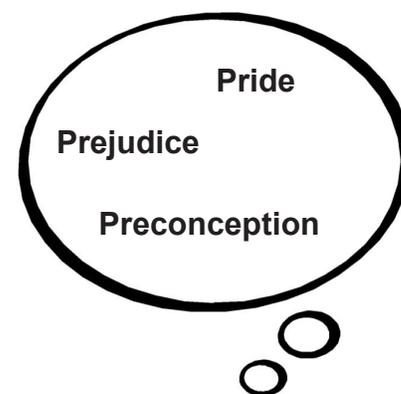
In Matthew 4:4, Jesus says man shall live *"by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."* I had to do that. At the end of that year, not merely was I physically healed, but I had a completely different mind. I had learned to think differently. I had learned to think in terms of God's Word. Make no mistake, though. In the course of that year, I had many prayer battles. I had to fight my way through to the truth. I had to reject lies from the devil—doubt, discouragement, fear—and I had to do that through prayer. By using those two great weapons—the Word of God and prayer—I eventually won that battle in my mind.

Three Strongholds

In 2 Corinthians, Paul speaks about *"strongholds."* Another translation says, *"strongholds in our minds."* What are those strongholds? I have given much thought to this, and I would suggest to you they fall under three main headings.

The first one is pride. The greatest stronghold of all in the unregenerate human mind is pride—self-serving, self-preserving, self-exalting pride.

Nearly all races and nations have a certain amount of national pride. I was born British—and, believe me,



Three Strongholds in the Mind

the British can be proud people. It can take a long while for a Britisher to acknowledge he has a problem with pride.

Germany is another country with a history of national pride. I believe nationalism is a key to how Hitler was able to gain domination over the German people—and even over multitudes of German Christians.

Denominational pride is another way this stronghold is seen. Some people say, "I know my denomination, so don't tell me anything that does not agree with my denominational doctrine—even if it is in the Bible." This could be said of Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals, Presbyterians—the list could be endless. If you are going to hold on to everything that is under a certain label—be it Protestant or Catholic or Presbyterian or Pentecostal or whatever—I believe you have a stronghold of pride in your mind.

Out of pride proceeds prejudice—having your mind made up before you've heard the facts. It's narrow. It's arrogant. And it's destructive.

The third stronghold is preconception—thinking you know something that you don't, presuming to have a clear picture of something that you haven't.

Let me offer you a way to check

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Put on the Garment of Praise

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yourself for a stronghold. If you find yourself agitated at the mention of one of these strongholds, you should be honest enough with yourself to consider it something to be dealt with. The most important reason to face this is that these strongholds block the entrance of God's Word to your life.

In Psalm 119:130, we learn:

The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.

Do you want light and understanding? Or do you want to continue in semi-darkness and ignorance and prejudice? The choice is yours to make. If you want light and understanding, you'll need to come against those fortresses in your own mind with the truth of the Word of God and with the power of prayer. Humble yourself and let the Word of God do its work in you—change you, adjust you, remake you, refashion you.

You may wonder how it is that I know so much about you. I don't. I know about all of us. We are all susceptible to these strongholds. We are all in a spiritual war in our minds, and God has given us the weapons for victory.

The Helmet of Hope

I learned firsthand how to use those weapons. From 1949 onwards (for about nine years), I was pastor of a congregation in London, England. I achieved a certain measure of success in my ministry. We regularly saw people saved and healed and baptized in the Holy Spirit at our church. Yet, I had personal problems for which I did not have any answer. In particular, I had a problem of recurrent fits of depression that would come over me like a dark, heavy cloud. The cloud seemed to press me down and cut me

off from normal communication with other people—even with my family.

I struggled against this by every means in my power that I knew of. I prayed. I fasted. I made resolutions. I did everything that I knew to do and it got no better. In fact, the more I prayed and fasted, the worse it got. I remember one of our daughters—who was about 14 years old at the time—saying to me one day, "Daddy, please don't fast. You're worse when you fast."

I had come to the end of my solutions, and one day a phrase in Isaiah 61:3 captured my attention:

The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness...

When I read that phrase I suddenly realized that I was dealing with a spirit—a personality that studied me, knew my weaknesses, knew how and when to attack me. I was not dealing with mental or psychological conditions merely in myself. I was not dealing merely with a habit pattern. But there was a person set against me—by Satan himself—studying me and plotting my downfall.

Then I saw why the pressure got worse the more I wanted to serve the Lord: because the mission of this spirit was to hinder me in my service for God. When I was somewhat slack and indifferent, the pressure was lifted. But the more dedicated and earnest I became, the more the pressure increased. I was dealing with a personality with understanding that knew just how and when to apply the pressure.

Recognizing the identity of my enemy was a tremendous step forward. I searched the Scriptures and found a verse that I believed would bring me the solution to my problem. Joel 2:32 says:

It shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the

LORD shall be delivered.

I believed this promise was just as all inclusive as John 3:16:

Whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

I saw Joel 2:32 as a promise specifically of deliverance. I put the two Scriptures together—Isaiah 61:3 and Joel 2:32—and I prayed a very specific prayer. I named the spirit (the spirit of heaviness) and I claimed God's own promise ("Whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered"). I prayed, "God, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ—according to Your Word—I'm asking You to deliver me from this spirit of heaviness." And when I prayed that specific, scriptural prayer, I was delivered. The pressure was lifted.

Then my learning experience continued. I learned that it's one thing to be delivered; it's another thing altogether to stay delivered.

God began to show me that He had done His part, and now I had to do my part. He had set my mind free from this demonic pressure. Now it was up to me to re-educate my mind—to cultivate a totally different outlook and way of thinking. Before I was delivered, I was not able to do it. After I was delivered, it was my *responsibility* to do it. God had done His part in delivering me, but I had to do my part in maintaining my deliverance.

I believe this is true in almost any realm in which God intervenes on your behalf—salvation, healing, deliverance. God does His part and then it's up to you to do your part.

Your part is to maintain—to hold on to what God has given you.

Adapted from Derek Prince's teachings: "Learning by Living" and "The Helmet of Hope," available at www.DPMUSA.org. Reprints are free.