

# *Introduction*

*“Remember what Christ taught and let his words enrich your lives and make you wise, teach them to each other and sing them out in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing to the Lord with thankful hearts.”*  
*Colossians 3:16*

The power of thought. That beautiful, wonderful, awesome, unfathomable power that each of us is given. *Thought* can change the existence of every living creature on our planet. *Thought* can change the life a single sometimes seemingly insignificant creature like you and me or it can change the direction of entire nation.

No house was ever built, no novel ever written, no bomb ever detonated, no marriage proposal ever made, no war ever begun, no pie ever baked, and no picture ever colored with crayons that did not begin as a thought.

The assassinations of Presidents Lincoln and Kennedy changed the world, and they were begun with thoughts. The virtual elimination of certain diseases (smallpox and polio for example) began with thought.

What is a thought? Is it an electrical impulse that travels about your brain—something akin to what happens in a computer? It sounds funny to say, but we all know that thoughts originate somewhere in our head. Ask yourself this—Did you ever get a feeling that a thought came from your knee or the pit of your stomach? Ask a child where his or her thoughts happen. They know immediately. It’s one of those innate things. We don’t know everything about the process of thinking, but we know exactly where that process happens.

We don’t feel thoughts. They don’t give us a fuzzy feeling between our ears when another one is coming. They just appear out of nowhere.

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Sometimes we get thoughts when we are trying to get them. Sometimes they are a dime a dozen. Other times we couldn't buy a thought if we had all the money in the world. They just seem to happen without much influence from us.

While composing my thoughts for this text, I kept being reminded of the World Trade Center incident on 9/11/01. And I kept thinking about the words of Jesus from Matthew 17:20—*“For if you had faith even as small as a tiny mustard seed you could say to this mountain, ‘Move!’ and it would go far away. Nothing would be impossible.*

Jesus did not tell us that our faith (our thoughts) could only be used for ‘good’. The terrorists who brought down that mountain had faith that they could pull off something so enormous and catastrophic. And it all started with someone’s thought. This is only one horrific example of the potential power of thought.

As a counter example, let’s think about the response our nation and the world gave after the events of 9/11. There was, and continues to be, a tremendous outpouring of love and support for those who were injured and toward those who lost loved ones. After the crisis-event came the period of healing. Periods of healing, even though they are only necessary when destructive actions have occurred, are the antithesis of the destructive event. They are life affirming. They are productive. They move us and our world toward fulfillment and completion. It is as if our nature and the nature of the world are comprised of a balance on a cosmic scale. I can think of no events, crises, or disasters that have not been met with a response of such healing. Again, as before, healing responses only occur after they have begun with the thought process. The thought becomes “realized”.

My family knows that I don’t like turnips. I don’t like the way the taste. I don’t like the way they smell. I will sometimes make the statement ‘If  
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you plant turnips you get turnips' anytime I encounter a situation where someone gets a bad consequence for something they set up. It's a variation of, "Well they got what they deserved". If you plant turnips, you can only expect to get turnips. So if you don't want turnips, you need to plant something else.

If you think of thoughts as the seeds of behavior we plant, this analogy of planting seeds makes a lot of sense. We generally do get what we deserve. We generally do get the type of fruit we plant. We generally do get the results we can expect from the behaviors we display. And those behaviors originate with and are perpetuated by what we're thinking.

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, gives us some assistance on which seeds to plant. ". . . fill your minds with those things that are good and deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honorable. Put into practice what you learned and received from me, both from my words and from my deeds." Phil. 4 4:9

There is not complete agreement on where Paul was when he wrote his letter to the church at Philippi, but most agree that he wrote it from prison. Some church historians even think that the epistle we call Philippians is comprised of several letters that Paul wrote over time that were pieced together.

The first section of the letter starts with the usual greetings and continues with thanksgiving. He fills the believers in on the progress of the church, and on the workings of two other missionaries, Timothy and Epaphroditus. He warns them about evangelistic Jews and others who were trying to teach beliefs and practices that threatened to revert the young Christian church back to Judaism. And Before his closing he makes a final appeal for unity among the believers at Philippi. He does this by offering suggestions on how Christians should think, and from those thoughts, to

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act. Again, “. . . fill your minds with those things that are good and deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honorable. Put into practice what you learned and received from me, both from my words and from my deeds.” Phil. 4 4:9

Paul realized the power of thought. He realized that the works he talked so much about could not become real; could not exist, if they did not first begin in the minds of the believers. So by managing those thoughts, with purpose, we can lead more productive lives. We can live more fully the way God intends.

I used the word managing very purposefully because we can and do manage our thoughts. You ‘manage’ a business, or your finances. Use a different word if you like. You “cultivate’ a garden by deciding the way you want your plants organized. You decide which plants stay and which go. Whichever word or phrase you come up with it all comes down to one thing—making choices. And we can make choices when it comes to our thoughts.

“Well, that’s hard to do”, you might say. And it is. It’s common to have thoughts come into our consciousness that aren’t very Christ-like. In fact, you might as well expect it. It’s going to happen.

Consider the level of frustration you can feel behind the wheel of an automobile. You don’t have to be on the road for very long to see or be involved in examples of frustration or anger. It’s real easy to get wrapped up into that sort of mentality or to do it yourself.

That’s only one example. We are all tempted all the time with every temptation you can imagine. This is a normal part of human existence. It’s just the way we’re made and it’s just the world we live in. The devil knows this. That’s why there are so many temptations out there. He creates

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these little diversions to keep us away from God. Even if we don't give in to them, he has occupied our mind for awhile and prevented us from doing something good. Doesn't 'not doing something good' almost equate to 'doing something not good'?

Often the next step is to give in to the temptation of guilt (which is still another thought) because we have permitted some of these thoughts, based on these temptations, to linger too long. You start feeling that you're a bad person or an inferior Christian because of what you thought. That's nothing more than the devil, the great deceiver, occupying your mind, separating you from the Creator who loves you.

Well you don't have to accept this. You will be better off if you do accept that the temptations are going to come, because they are. But that's not the end of the story. So, it's not the temptations that are the issue, it's what you do with those temptations that makes the difference. This is what Paul was referring to in our scripture. He was talking about choices. He was letting us know that we have a way out when we are confronted with thoughts that we don't like.

Martin Luther paraphrased Paul's message when he said, "I cannot prevent a bird from landing on my head, but I can prevent him from building a nest in my hair."

Another perspective to take regarding undesirable thoughts is to think of them as flies. Give them as much importance in your life as a fly. They come buzzing around and annoying you, but they don't have to control your life. You can take steps to get rid of them. Sure they'll come back, but what you do is up to you, not them.

In Philippians, Paul gave us a suggestion on how we should focus our  
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mental energies. People living during Paul's day had choices just like you and me. And Paul knew that choices begin with thoughts and that, with thought, comes the opportunity to do good or evil.

Now, I'm not going to tell you that problems aren't still going to occur in your life, but I am here to tell you that you can have an impact on your life. You don't have any control over the cards you are dealt, but you have 100% of the control over how you play those cards. There are even certain circumstances when you can stack the deck in your favor, at least to a point.

Even in the direst of circumstances we have the opportunity to choose those things that are true, noble, right, pure, and lovely. There are a number of writers who survived, or whose memories or writings survived, the Holocaust. Anne Frank, who was only a teenager when her life was taken, has inspired perhaps millions of readers with her writings. It is truly inspirational to see the perspective that she took, the life affirming positivity she expressed, while living in hiding—a captive.

The book you are now reading was written with the intent of sharing some things that have been helpful to me in the past when dealing with my thoughts. I believe very firmly in the power of affirmations—positive statements that you read or recite on a regular basis. I tell teachers to set themselves up for some success by moving months ahead in their lesson plan books and writing “This is the best lesson I've ever done” in there. “I'm great”. “I'm going to make a positive difference in some kid's life today.” Many times people will tell me they feel silly writing things like this to themselves. We are just not comfortable complementing ourselves. But try it—it works.

You don't even have to believe it for it to work. Words are that powerful. A number of self-help programs that exist use this kind of self-reinforcement technique—'fake it till you make it'.

I encourage you to do the same thing for yourself. You can start it today. One of the ways you can do this is to use a technique you've probably used when studying for a test in school—repeat something 10 times and it's yours. As you drive to work tell yourself, "Today I'm going to think about things that are true", "Today I am going to strive for truth in everything I do." It will take 45 seconds and you will have set yourself up with something good, something positive, something scripturally based, something that will move you closer to living God's will for you than if you hadn't done it.

Paul knew what he was talking about when he gave his advice to the church at Philippi. One of the great things about wisdom is that it stands the test of time. Good advice is good advice no matter how long ago it was given, especially as it pertains to matters of the heart. And what Paul gave the early church, what he has given to us, is just that—good advice. Paul shared with us 6 ideas; six seeds of thought; six seeds of behavior: truth, nobility, righteousness, purity, loveliness, and honor. Try selecting just one a day just to keep in mind. It's just like planting a seed.