

Thanks-living

Give 'em a Peace of Your Mind

November 13, 2022

For the next two weeks, we're gonna gear up to give *thanks* by looking at *how* to have an *escalation* of *appreciation*. But *before* we can get to that *gratitude* adjustment, we gotta answer *this*: **What's on your mind?** Y'know, what gets your *attention*; what do you spend your time *thinking* about?



Apparently, a lot! Because a study at Queen's University revealed that the average person typically has around 6,200 thoughts in a single day. However, according to the National Science Foundation, 80% of *those* thoughts are negative and 95% of them are *repetitive*. And I know what you're thinking; *"I knew it. I knew we were problem; I just knew it!"* Well *careful*, cuz neuroscientist Caroline Leaf says, *"Thoughts are real, physical things [and] moment by moment, every day, you are changing the structure of your brain through your thinking."* **So why do we choose to do damage with that negative, stinkin' thinkin'?!**



Well, we think our *negative* bias is based on building an *awareness* of danger; to protect our *physical* health; which makes sense. Like the way my wife *expects* a murderer around every corner so she'll never be taken by *surprise*. However, *Dr. Leaf* goes on to say *positive* thoughts like hope have a positive effect on our *mental* health. Like the way I *expect* each Seahawks *loss* is just part of the path to a Superbowl *win*; so I can stay *optimistic*. But altogether, that means *how* you *think* is where you choose: **Who's more important, the *outer* or the *inner* you?**



But *before* you answer, just remember, the *outer* you definitely *dies*, while the *inner* you *can* keep on living *forever*. And **wouldn't you rather focus on the you with more of a future?** That's why *God* is more interested in the *inner* you. Because where *He's* from, *eternal* friends and family are all there is! So it only makes sense that *He's* constantly trying to *steer* our thoughts and *cheer* us on. Just listen to *Paul's* plea for *positivity*:

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it *again*: Rejoice! [Aha! Repetitive but *positive*, this guy did his homework!] ... Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, *will* guard your *hearts* and your *minds* in Christ Jesus. [See, He's all about the *inner* you!] Finally, brothers and sisters, 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. — Philipians 4:4-8 NIV

And there you have it. The four-part plan for inner peace – just in time for the holidays: **Worry about nothing. Pray about everything. Thank God for all things. Focus on good things.** And what do we do after we make a list? *Check it twice!* So, let's take it from the top: **Worry about nothing**

Don't you just hate it when your life is spinning out of control and somebody offers some pithy little platitude that *they* think has some *secret* wisdom that'll just *solve* everything?! ... Well I'm sorry, sometimes it's the best I got! *Paul's* words, however, *aren't* powerless platitudes, but hints of his *powerful* attitude! Because *somehow*, *Paul* had the confidence to tell us "Do not be anxious about anything" while he was in prison, awaiting possible *execution*!



So you gotta *wonder*, how is *he* cool as a cucumber, while in *our* lives, worry continues to *rise* at unprecedented rates? I mean, we've even done the studies to *show* that over 90% of our worries never ever happen. So, **why do we worry? Is there something we like about it?**



Yup! Power and pride! Think about it, worry is based on a belief that in *some way*, we must solve all the problems in our lives by our *own* strength and whatever happens is ultimately in *our* hands. **Worry gives us a false sense of control over the uncontrollable in our lives.**

And we like the idea of being in control so much that *we're willing* to bear all of *life's* burdens rather than hand them over to *God*. Which is why Peter reminds us of our *need* to:

Humble yourselves, therefore, under *God's* mighty hand, that *He* may lift you up in due time. Cast all *your* anxiety on *Him* because *He* cares for *you*. – 1 Peter 5:6-7 NIV

We can't cast our cares away unless we humble ourselves, give Him control, trust His timing, and believe He cares for us. And whether it's about *imaginary*, *insignificant*, or *past* problems, worry reveals we're *missing* one of those *marks* – and assuming the *role* reserved for *God*.



And that's a *big* problem because the *heart* of the Gospel message is *knowing* that **we aren't saved by what we do, we're saved by what Jesus did.** I love what *Bruce* said about how Jesus turned *religion* on its head: Jesus declared deeds of the *law* could not make us more *righteous*, and then made it a *sin* to even *try* adding to what we've *already* been given. So, be prepared for a fight with your *own* power and pride because **to worry about nothing, we need to let go of everything.** And we'll only give up *that* throne for *good*, if we put *God* on it, for *real!* Which is why our next step is to: **Pray about everything.**

Listen, if you *ever* humble yourself enough to turn your worry over to *God*, you better *pray* for it to *stay* that way! Because **old habits die hard and we'll quickly revert without constant effort.** That's why it's *not* an exaggeration to direct us "in every situation, by prayer and petition..." present your requests to God.

Otherwise, *you're* just *picking* your battles and hiring *Him* to handle the *rest*. That's why it's gotta be *all* or *none*. **God's gotta be on the throne alone if you choose freedom over fighting.** And it takes prayer to *incubate*, *increase*, and *intensify* our *confidence* in His control, our *trust* in His timing, and our *comprehension* of His care.



Prayer paves the way for our mind to stay set on the otherwise offensive idea of obedience. It's a *discipline* and a *dialogue* that keeps our thoughts *deliberate* and *decisive* after we've made a *challenging* choice like giving up *control*. But *here's* a nightmare: **what if something that you worried about, and prayed about, actually happens?!**

Doesn't that just make you wanna *backslide* like a penguin on a playground? At *that* point, worry starts looking pretty *smart* and thoughts of taking *back* control start growing. Well, Paul's got it covered, cuz **our habit of humility is held together when we take step 3; thank God for all things.**



Ever heard of grammy-winner Patti Austin? Well, like all of us, *she* worried about her loved ones, but was blind-sided by a fear *fulfilled* the morning she was told her *mother* suffered a stroke. *Immediately*, she dropped everything and flew across the country to deal with this *new* tragedy that would likely change her *career* and *future* forever. However, that *next* day things were put into *perspective* as she watched with the whole country as terrorists highjacked the planes of 9/11. But, it wasn't until her *manager* called that Patti discovered the emergency flight she booked meant she had *anceled* her previous reservation; on flight United 93 that crashed in Pennsylvania.

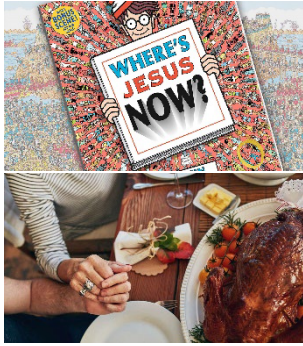
Thank the Lord. For the stroke! And as strange as that thanks *sounds*, it is totally reasonable if you've really turned control over to God, because we *must* remember:

"My thoughts are *not* your thoughts, neither are *your* ways My ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than *your* ways and My thoughts than *your* thoughts. – Isaiah 55:8-9 NIV

We're not equipped to judge things as *good* or *bad* because we can't see the big picture! And it takes *thankfulness* in *all* things to keep our mind right because that's *the crucial* key to remembering: **the foundation of our faith isn't a why, it's a who.** God's *reasoning* may be beyond our grasp but His *relationship* isn't. And *that* way, it *assures* our relationship is built on the *humility* of our *heart* instead of the *merit* of our *mind*. Because **children are supposed to love and trust dads before they learn and understand what dads do.** We've been given an *example* before the *explanation* to so that our *relationship* informs our *religion*, *not* the other way around. So, whether *pleasant* or *painful*, **thankfulness for all things shows we appreciate who we have, not what we have in our lives.** Thankfulness is the faith that *God* is *who's* always in control –

So we say with confidence, "The *Lord* is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?" – Hebrews 13:6 NIV

So while we're *down here* trying to calm the worries of this world, this needs to be the mantra of your mind: **Peace isn't the absence of conflict it's the presence of God.** And to *keep* that thought close to home, we have to *flip* the way we *think*; we have to take our 6200 thoughts *captive* and ground *each one* in gratitude toward God. Because **anxiety is killed by confidence in what we have not of concern for what we lack.**



The only problem is, we *forget* what we *have* because as we work to *root out* our worry with persistent *prayer* and thoughtful *thanksgiving*, we still have to live lives full of *financial fights*, *stubborn spouses*, *nosy neighbors*, *belligerent bosses*, *disasters*, *diseases*, and of course, *death*. And **even with our best efforts, God can get buried beneath this world's worries.** Which is why we need to take step 4; **Focus on good things.**

So here's a question, what's the main *activity* of Thanksgiving at your house? Some *excessive* combination of *food*, *football*, or *family*, right?

Okay, now picture *that* Thursday *without* any food, football, or family. Kinda feels more like a typical *Tuesday*, doesn't it? What *happened*? Well, we lost the *things* that *inspire* and *encourage* us to *break* from the everyday way of a world that's *full* of worries. *Those things* are *there* because we deliberately *designed* the day to *remind* ourselves to make our thoughts more *thankful*. **Things help us fix our focus.** And we *need* help, because as we discussed, our thoughts are either *built* on *thankfulness* for what we *have* or *worry* for what we *lack*. And down *here*, **it takes extra effort to fill our lives with enough stuff, so thankful thoughts can drown out the worrying ones.**

[So Paul urges us:] 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. – Philippians 4:4-8 NIV

[there should be no] obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. – Ephesians 5:4 NIV



If we want the full peace of the full power of the full presence of God, everything else has gotta get emptied out. And *our* whole job is just *focusing* on the good things! Because giving *things* our attention, is how we let them *in* to fill us *up*! And **filling up with good things is what empties out the rest!** Just like Noah and his ark; the best way to *drown out* the *world* is letting God flood your *life* with *His* will. Because *everything* that's any *good* comes from *Him*. So giving *Jesus* our full attention, is the *way* we get *Him* to fill us. And the *best* way to *make* way for *His* way is to live *the* way *He* wants:

My command is this: Love *each other* as I have loved you. – John 15:12 NIV

Shifting our focus from *outer* anxiety to *inner* peace means **actively filling our minds** with *reminders* of the *good* we've been given – **by saturating our lives** with the same *giving* that Jesus gave *us*. Because to *give* our thanks we need to *live* our thanks by *loving* on others.

So, in the end, good *thoughts* are a lot like good *food*. Whether it's your *mom's* mac and cheese or your *morning's* daily devotionals; **they fill us up with real reminders of the good we've been given.** And *each* time we *taste* them, our *gratitude* inspires and empowers us to *share* the goodness and *forget* everything else. So be sure to *heap* on another helping so *you* can fill everyone at *your* table with the *extra* peace of *your* mind.