

Thought Life

Thoughts produce actions, actions produce habits, habits produce character, and character produces destiny.
By Jennifer Soltys

The brain is a beautiful creation of our Creator God, and it is a highly complex neurological, electromagnetic field that is constantly firing signals that allow us to react to and interact with our surroundings. The connective points between our brain and body cause us to react to situations by acting in certain ways. This is all based upon how we allow and train our brain to function.

I have dealt a lot with the feeling of fear in my life, having nightmares even as a small child. Often I speak over my life the scripture, there is no fear in Christ Jesus (1 John 4:18). I shared with my mother-in-law, who has her Masters in counseling, about my struggle with fear. She told me that when unprecedented fear would plague my mind, I had the ability to tell my brain to stop by just saying the word “stop” out loud. So I tried it. When I had the feeling of fear I said “stop”, and this caused the neurological pathways in my brain to redirect themselves. You see, unlike animals who react or act based upon their instincts, humans have a conscience (or as we would say, a soul) through which we are able to allow our minds to process thoughts or feelings based on our knowledge. Yes, some thoughts or feelings are harder to control than others, but this is something that we have been given the right to do by our Creator God.

We have a significant amount of control over how our brain responds to certain stimuli. We have the ability to condition our brains to react the way we train them to react. A scientific example of this is through the “placebo effect”. This is when someone is given false information, then reacts to a situation based on that false information. Their thoughts produce actions, even if the thoughts are not based on truth. Therefore, how we perceive or process certain information affects the reality around us. Even secular thinkers believe strongly in the power of the brain, and how “positive thinking” can change physiological circumstances, mental issues, etc. I don’t believe in the full spectrum of “positive thinking”, however it does go to show how our thoughts can affect our reality.

Because the mind is the center of perception and action, the enemy has developed strategic tactics which attack our thought life. Therefore, in 2 Corinthians 10:4-6 Paul writes,

“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.”

When Paul was writing this letter to the Corinthian church, he was combating the false teaching that had infiltrated the thinking of the people. Paul had revealed the gospel of Christ and the people were set free from being slaves to their sin. However, a report had come to Paul that false teachers were preaching against the freedom of the gospel message. The Corinthian people were believing these false teachers because of the charm and deception of their message. Paul realized that he was not fighting against the false teachers, but a spiritual enemy whose only purpose is to steal, kill, and destroy. That enemy will use whatever means necessary (whether false teachers or tribulations) to wage his war. What is Paul’s admonishment to the church? Take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ and you will be ready to discern truth from lies, and with truth walk in the grace of your Lord Jesus Christ.

What have false teachers shared with you that is contrary to God's Word? The romantic comedies, reality television shows, social media false realities are some of the false teachings of today. When you have a real devotional life you will not be like the Corinthian church who were so easily swayed by the false teaching that the enemy was using to kill the church. What false teachers have you allowed into your life?

So why are we talking about our thoughts? Because our thoughts produce actions, actions produce habits, habits produce character, and character produces destiny. Where our thoughts first produce actions is based upon our knowledge. If from a young age you were told that you were capable of anything you put your mind to do and worked hard at, when you were faced with a difficult situation you were most likely not intimidated and handled the situation well. However, if you were always told that you were not able to do anything, then when a difficult situation came your way, your reaction was to cower in fear.

Thoughts Produce Actions

That is why Paul says to make every thought obedient to Christ; which is seeing ourselves through humble sense of reality of who we are in Christ. Ephesians 2:10 speaks how we are Christ workmanship created by God to do good things, 2 Corinthians 5:17 says you are a new creation in Christ the old gone, and there are several more scriptures that speak to the reality of who we are as believers in Jesus Christ. With that knowledge comes a responsibility to act according to the truth of Scripture.

What knowledge do you have that has produced your thoughts about who you are? Your thoughts will influence how you act. If you have ever meet someone who cannot see well, whether they wear glasses or contacts, they will tell you that if they are given the wrong prescription it blurs their vision and that misconstrues what they are really seeing. When you have thoughts that are not grounded in a true sense of who you are in Christ, they will impact how you perceive your reality. That is why we have to keep every thought obedient to Christ who gives us the absolute true perception of who we are (Colossians 3:9-10).

In Ephesians 4:17-24, Paul tells us how to live a godly, Christian life first by telling us to not think like the Gentiles:

“So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

At that time the Gentiles were those who lived in opposition to God's truth revealed in Christ Jesus. Their hearts were hard because “they were darkened in their understanding,” and they acted according to their thinking. Their thought life produced the way they lived. However, Paul tells the believers to live with the truth that they know and it will produce a life of righteousness and holiness.

Actions Produce Habits

When you act in such a way that gets the results you want or makes you feel good, you will do that action again. If you consistently continue to do that action again, whether it is good or bad, then it will become a habit because of the condition of your mind. (It only takes 21 days to

create a habit, so be careful of the actions that you repeat.) As I mentioned earlier, you have trained your brain to respond and react. David Gable at a Chi Alpha staff conference this past summer said that when you have a thought, it is like plowing a field. You take the plow over the ground once, but the more you continue to do it, the deeper the groove becomes and the easier it becomes for the plow to move along the groove in the land. In the same way, your thoughts will follow the same deepening groove to your actions, and they will continue until you change the thought pattern. In response to the question of how we train our minds, he said you will only have the mind that you build today. What thoughts are producing actions that have now become habits in your life?

Habits Produce Character

A habit occurs when your brain and body react as they have been trained without even consciously thinking. Family and marriage therapist Robert C. Jameson writes, "Our day is full of small little 'habits' that we do unconsciously. Some of us are habitually tidy, or messy, or early, or late, or rude, or courteous, or happy, or angry. These are all habitual ways of being." The habits you develop will become your character. Character is the very thing that defines you. People understand you based on your character; a person of integrity, a person of peace, a person of compassion, a person of joy, a person of love, a person of...you can fill in the blank.

Character Produces Destiny

The saying goes character produces destiny, but how? Character is measured in how you choose to live your life. If you are a person of compassion, when you go to Haiti and you see a child maligned from the results of an earthquake and who is now an orphan, your heart will be moved. You will seek the will of God to see how He desires you to make a difference in the life of this sweet child. You may choose to become a missionary or adopt a child from a third world country. That is how your destiny is affected. Another example: you are a person of faith and you are graduating from college. Instead of moving back home to become a teacher in your rural hometown, you hear the voice of God tell you to move to the inner city of Chicago and teach there. However, you know that you don't have the finances to make such a move, but because you have the knowledge that God is your provider you step out in faith to listen to His voice. Your destiny is fully based upon the knowledge you have received and what you have chosen to do with that knowledge. Thoughts produce actions, actions produce habits, habits produce character, and character produces destiny.

Your destiny may seem like a far off reality, but the way you get to your destiny is not. Your destiny is being formed in your daily thoughts, actions, habits, and character. Right now, you may be living a part your destiny rather good or bad **What does this mean?** based upon what you have allowed your mind to think for the past year. Today, will you choose to put off your old self and conform your thoughts in obedience of Christ so you may have an abundant life and a purposeful destiny?

Questions:

1. What have you allowed yourself to think that has changed your destiny?
2. What are thoughts that you need to change?
3. Who are some false teachers in your life that you need to stop listening to?
4. If you could change one thought right now, what would it be? By changing that one thought how might that change your destiny?
5. What is one Scripture that you need to start memorizing to combat the lies of the enemy?