

What do you think?

By Sandi Michon, March 2007

If I ask: "What do you think?" – what would you say? If your family listened to what you said today, and watched what you did today, what would they guess your thoughts to be? Hmm...

Proverbs 23:7 says, **"As a man thinks in his heart, so he is."**

As this verse has played over and over in my mind, I am first struck by how much the context of Proverbs 23 sounds like our present age. The "thinking" context addresses our appetite for luxury, becoming rich, desiring dainties – and a preoccupation with our own wisdom. Sound familiar? Proverbs 23 highlights a problem but also gives lots of guidance on what to think and what not to think.



In our information age, we are bombarded with stimuli like never before. We have instant, 24/7 news, movies at the theater, at home, on the Internet. We have TV, DVD, CD, MP3, PDA, Apple Ipods, and Blackberries. When is the last time you watched the news – and heard good news?

Medical technology is finding more links between our mental health and our physical health. Our thought life affects our glandular system – and can actually change our brain chemistry. Clinical depression is a result of sustained chemical imbalance.

In Tim LeHaye's book, *How to Win Over Depression*, he suggests that traumatic events are not the cause of depression – but how we respond to those events – how we choose to think about the event. In an age that encourages a victim mentality, it is a radical concept that we might have the ability to control our reactions – and even our thoughts – because thoughts precede actions.

"As a man thinks in his heart, so he is."

Even though I am not struggling with depression, I believe the Lord led me to this book. After reading and outlining the book, I found myself deeply convicted about my familiarity with certain Scriptures. Biblical mandates I have often dismissed as impossible, I now saw as Scriptural truths vital to my health.

Can I share them with you and see if you've done the same thing? Be honest.

The first verse is **I Thessalonians 5:18**, **"In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."**

What is your reaction to that verse? Like me, it might be, "Yeah, right! Like anyone can do that." But, wait. It is clearly the will of God. "In everything give thanks..." Everything? Yes, everything. In fact, **verse 19 says to not quench the Holy Spirit**. Is my unthankful thinking quenching the Holy Spirit? God knows how important it is to be thankful. Do I really believe **Romans 8:28**? It says that **all things work together for good to them**

that love God and are called according to His purpose. As my disobedience became crystal clear, I repented. I could only cry, “Lord, help me in my unbelief.”

Philippians 4:6 adds prayer to our thanks with a wonderful result. Especially when hard things happen, verse 6 says, “**Do not be anxious for anything, but in prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.**” Why does God tell us to do that in everything? For peace. Verse 7 says, “**And the peace that passes understanding shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.**”

Do I think thankfully? If I don't, what do I default to?

“As a man thinks in his heart, so he is.”

That leads us to the **Philippians 2:14: “Do all things without murmuring and disputing.”** Really? Is that possible? This is another command, so it must be possible or God would not ask it of us. Mary Engelbreit is not exactly biblical, but I love her saying “Happiness is not getting to do what you love, but loving what you do.” Another adage says, “Most people are about as happy as they made up their minds to be.” What frame of mind do we encourage when we grumble and argue? It ignites negativity, saps energy and limits our productiveness. If I have to do it anyways, why make it worse?

We all know the power of encouraging words. Discouragement can be crippling and that is what we do when we grumble – we discourage ourselves.

To not murmur and argue, does not mean that we don't problem solve or resolve conflict. It means that we control our response to our circumstances. We have the freedom to choose how we think. **Philippians 2:14** tells us to stop complaining, and verse 15 shows how it hurts our testimony and ability to shine as lights in this crooked and perverse nation.

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Speaking of complaining, the next verse addresses our speech. **Luke 6:45b** says, “**For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.**” What I think lodges in my heart – it becomes who I am – and I speak it.

Guarding my thinking is not just good for my mental health, but it drives my conversation which affects all those around me. **Ephesians 4:29-32** tells us to build each other up with our speech, and not to let bitterness and wrath govern us.



Let's get practical. How do I choose to think about my husband? Do I grumble about the hairs in the sink, or do I choose to thank God for the evidence that I have a husband? Do I focus on his faults, or do I discipline my mind to think of the ways he is a blessing? Control of the tongue starts with a mind fed with right thoughts.

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Okay, last one. **Philippians 4:8** says, “**Finally, my brothers, whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are right, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report; if there be any virtue and if there is any praise, think on these things.**”

How can I possibly do this in a world of images, listening to a cacophony of voices? Ravi Zacharias has a wonderful lecture (on rzim.org) called “Mind Games in a World of Images.” In it, he reveals that the human mind cannot assimilate such a bombardment of images. **Ravi calls it a devastating seduction because powerful images lead us to conclusions based on emotion rather than logical, inductive reasoning.** LeHaye talks about the power of the arts and how music has the capacity to influence our soul by bypassing the mind.

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Interestingly, the Hebrew word for “thinks” in this passage is *sha ar*, which means to split or to open – to act as a gatekeeper.” As we go through life, we make choices what to open our minds to – we are to be the gatekeeper of our thoughts.

We need to think through our media choices. What do we shut off? What do we limit? Are we ever quiet? I Thessalonians 4:11 says to “study to be quiet...” Do we cultivate silence to hear the still, small voice of God?

Recent studies show that when kids study with TV, music, etc. they have less depth of understanding and less recall of materials studies. It’s the same with us. Our study of Scripture is shallow and often our relationship with God is superficial because of “noise.” It is “interference” to our reception of truth.

Daniel 7:25 says that Satan “wearies” the saints. It means to “wear out” and one expository added, “with continual drippings of negativity.” Are you anxious, fearful, discouraged, depressed? If you purpose to think on what is true, honest, right, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praiseworthy, **Philippians 4:9** says, “If you act on these things... *the God of peace shall be with you.*” **I Thessalonians 5:21** is good advice: **“Prove all things, hold fast to the good.”**

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This is NOT a positive thinking devotional – even though all of the criteria is positive. The ultimate answer to my mental health is found in Jesus Christ. “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 2:5) Romans 12:2 tells us to renew our minds by the washing of the Word. The Word of God is called “good news” for a reason. In fact, it may be the only thing that satisfies the criteria in Philippians 4:8. Romans 8:6 says the mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.

So, what do you think? As parents, it’s not enough to develop critical thinking skills in our children. I did that. But, I may have neglected to address the deeper issues presented in our four main verses. I agree with Theodore Roosevelt’s quote:

“If we educate a man’s mind, but not his heart, we have an educated barbarian.”

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What do YOU think?...