

Concerning Negative Thinking

2 Corinthians 10:5 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

*We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are **taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,***

Introduction

What is negative thinking? Negative thinking is “*a **thought process** where people tend to find the worst in everything or reduce their expectations by considering the worst possible scenarios*” (yourdictionary.com). That ‘thought process’ takes place in our brain, commonly called the heart.

Effects of a Negative Attitude

- *It changes your perspective on life and keeps you from enjoying the things that used to bring joy.*
- *It stops you from trying new things.*
- *It keeps you from maturing and learning how to cope with the challenges of life.*
- *It can lead to loneliness, depression, and stress.*
- *From a physical standpoint, negativity weakens the immune system. When this happens, you can become susceptible to many diseases, from the common cold to chronic pain.*

(<https://grammar.yourdictionary.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fgrammar.yourdictionary.com%2Fword-lists%2Fwords-that-describe-negative-attitudes.html>)

- *For many, negative thinking is a habit which, over time, becomes an addiction.*
(www.azquotes.com/quotes/topics/negative-thinking.html)

By the way, we cannot talk about negative thoughts without understanding what’s really happening in our hearts, because they start in our minds and hearts.

This morning, we will incline our ears to God’s Word in three ways. First, we will look into the nature of the heart. Second, we will identify three major parties who are involved in our thought process. Thirdly, we will consider things we can do to stay away from negative thinking.

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What's Happening in the Heart?

Heart is the innermost seat of emotion, thoughts, will, and appetites. Please note here that I am making no distinction between heart/emotion and mind/intellect, because the Scriptures don't make a clear-cut distinction between emotions and intellect. In fact, the Ancient Hebrews believed heart and mind are interconnected not separate entities. So, when I say, "the heart," it covers emotions, *thoughts, will, and appetites.* 2 characteristics of the heart. First,

- **Heart is a battle ground** where God and the enemy of God (that is the devil) vie for your love, attention, and worship. Next,
- **Heart is an open bowl.** It doesn't come with a lid to cover. It is open. All the time. 24/7. That means anything can come in and anyone can throw in or take out any thoughts from your heart.

Now, let's consider

Three Parties that have access to your heart: yourself, the devil, and God. All of them can throw in or take out any thoughts from your heart.

Let's take a closer look at each entity.

1. Yourself: You can initiate **any** thoughts, wishes, and plans (good and bad) and keep them in your heart. E.g. "I would like to go to church this morning." "I am going to call so and so."

2. The devil: Too many believers have a very naïve understanding of the devil. Some believe that he is not real but just a personification of evil. Others think of him as the guy with two horns on his head and a tail, holding a pitch-fork. Or, a cute little guy sitting on your shoulder whispering to you. No, he is a much more cunning and dangerous creature than those images. He is your enemy with only one goal in mind: to *make you his slave.* To make you worship him instead of God. To make your life miserable and to steal happiness and joy from you. Jesus says about him this way in John 10:10: *he wants to steal, kill, and destroy you.* To achieve such a goal, he relentlessly attacks you on all fronts: spirit, soul, and body. He carefully observes and studies your thought and life patterns and does everything to turn your heart away from God. So, out of all fronts, where do you think he assails you in the first place?

Your heart. His sneak attack takes place in your heart in two ways: *throw in and take away.* First, into your heart, he tosses the thoughts of deception, confusion, lusts and worries to enslave you under his control. Then, he fills up your heart with

unclean/negative/destructive thoughts that we often mistakenly believe ours. E.g. Judas Iscariot. Satan threw the thought of betrayal into Judas' heart (John 13:2). Then, he entered into him (John 13:27, Luke 22:3). Later, he deceived Judas into believing that the decision to hang himself was his own idea based on his remorse (Matthew 27:3,5).

Next, the devil also takes away anything good and godly thoughts from your heart, especially God's Word sown in your heart. E.g. God sows the Word of God (Luke 8:11) but the devil snatches away the Word sown in your heart (Luke 8:12).

3. God: He is the designer and creator of human heart. The Scripture tells us that God does 32 things with our hearts. To name a few, He *knows hearts, searches, weighs, examines, tests, strengthens, revives, renews, and changes our hearts*. Our heart is His business. He is the expert on the human heart.

Please get this: out of the three beings that have access to your heart, God is the one who loves you the most even more than yourself. He cares about your heart because that's where your joy and happiness begin.

God would do anything to strengthen your heart except one: *control*. Why? Because He loves you and love never controls or forces you to do something against your own will. God gives you the full control of your heart.

Ways to take care of the heart

Two things you can do: Store up and Screen out. Basically, keep good stuff in your heart and remove the bad stuff from your heart. Let's check it out.

Store Up Good Stuff. ⁹*How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word.* ¹¹**Your word I have treasured in my heart that I may not sin against You** (Psalm 119:9, 11). Remember the law of the harvest. You reap whatever you sow. There are many good things you can sow and store up in your heart such as good stories, good music, good images, good thoughts, and so forth. But, first and foremost, begin with God's Word the Good Book. Why? Because it gives life (1 John 1:1). It gives you peace. It restores your health (Proverbs 4:22). It is essential for your eternal life, too.

Here's a simple truth. Whoever loves God loves His Word and vice versa. Do you love God? Then, you will love and cherish His Word. It would be an oxymoron if you say, "I love God, yet I never open the Bible." It would be equally contradictory if you say, "I care for my soul, yet I never read the Bible." Why? Because God's Word is the food for your soul, and if you don't feed your soul with God's Word, your soul will starve to death.

Never believe in the devil's lie that the Bible is too difficult to understand. He does everything to keep you from getting into God's Word for your salvation. You need God's Word for your eternal life. You need God's Word to protect your heart (Matthew 15:19).

Remember this: whatever comes into your heart, it stays right there, and it is extremely hard to remove it, especially bad ones. That's why you need to make every effort to put godly things in your heart in the first place as a daily positive reinforcement. Then, cultivate the habit of dwelling on good thoughts daily. Chew on them, sit on them, and meditate on them daily. You will have a blessed life. ⁸*Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, **dwell on these things*** (Philippians 4:8).

Screen Out Bad Stuff.

Never allow anything bad to enter your heart. Take captive every thought and bring it to Christ. Listen: "... we are taking every thought **captive** to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Some of us are in the habit of following whatever our heart says. *Follow your heart*, they say. However, beware: the same heart can deceive us. In Jeremiah 17:9, God says, "The heart is deceitful above all things..." I would rather let God's Word guide me not my own feelings. E.g. "I cannot forgive my brother."-- Remember the Lord's Prayer. Train yourself to screen the thought traffic in your heart. Stop the negative and destructive thoughts before they enter your mind and heart. E.g. Once, drying a knife with towel, a thought popped up in my heart saying, "I can hurt someone with this." It was from the devil. I cut it out immediately.

Action Points:

1. **Remember** who you are. You're the sole caretaker of your heart. If you don't take care of your heart, no one will. Even God cannot. Why? Because God won't override your free will. So, it's up to you and up to God if you ask Him for help. He loves to help you and offers a great heart care plan for you. However, He helps those only who ask Him to do so.
2. **Ask** for the password. Remember you are on guard duty on behalf of your heart: to prevent enemy infiltration. E.g. The Army uses the daily password. Whoever says the correct password may pass, whoever doesn't, the guard can shoot. Same goes with your guard duty for the heart. For any thought trying to enter the heart, ask the password which is always the same: **is this thought in line with God's will?** If so, enter. If not, stop.

3. **Practice** screening the TV and movies you watch. Practice it with the music you listen to. Pray before you watch. Pray while you listen. Place guards on your eye-gate and ear-gate. Bring every thought and feeling under the control of Christ. Filter it. Test it against God's Word. Reject the enemy's thoughts right away. Stay disciplined. The payoff will be huge.

Conclusion

There are many things on your watchlist, but your heart is the number one priority. Why? Because your happiness and joy depend on your heart. *Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life* (Proverbs 4:13). Watch over your heart. The literal translation of the original Hebrew is: Above all guarding, **guard** your heart. Do not spare any efforts. Be diligent in sowing God's Word and good stuff in your heart. Take captive every thought to the obedience of Christ. Your life depends on it. Amen.