The Key To Changing Your Life

Change the Way You Think

Intro:

How do we change the way we think so we can change the way we live?

I. Embrace The Truth That Right Thinking Precedes Right Behavior

A. Quit trying to change your behavior
   - The reason I say this is because we have the cart before the horse!
     1. Obsessing over trying to change your behavior only sets us up for failure. What happens when you are constantly thinking about NOT doing something? You make yourself miserable and you end up doing it anyway!
     2. Let’s use food as an example of how this works. Let’s imagine that you want to improve your health by improving your eating habits. Change your eating behavior! One of the foods you want to stop eating are Cheetos. (Have Bag) Role play!
     3. You can pick any behavioral issue and the same scenario plays out. (Exercise / watch less TV / work on your marriage / reading the bible daily / having a daily prayer time
   - All positive new behaviors require us to say not to something. We first must stop doing the thing that hinders us in order to start doing the new behavior.
   4. The more you think about not doing something, the more attractive and enticing the behavior becomes. The more mental energy it takes from you to constantly tell yourself “NO”. It becomes the “forbidden fruit” syndrome.
   - The bible describes this conflict that rages within us.
     Rom. 7:18-19 “…I want to do what is right, but I can’t. I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway.” (NLT) Ever felt like this? Who hasn’t!
     5. We have this internal desire to change, to do the right thing…but we just can’t seem to pull it off. Then when we fail once again, we beat ourselves up. We engage in this negative self talk / thinking. “Dale…I can’t believe you did that again! What’s wrong with you?”
   - What’s wrong is that the focus is misplaced.

B. Focus on changing how you think first
   1. When it comes to life change, correct thinking precedes correct behavior. In order to live differently, we first must think differently. How we think determines how we live. “Can’t live beyond what you believe!”
   2. Thinking is like the rudder of a ship. How we think steers our lives…determines our behavior…and impacts our actions more than any other factor. For example…
• Thinking effects our church attendance ("I’m really tired… I don’t think I’ll go today.” I don’t like Pastor Dale’s series…the chairs are too hard…”
• Thinking effects whether or not we serve ("I’m just too busy to serve somewhere… I don’t have anything to offer…”
• Thinking effects how we treat our spouses ("My husband is such a jerk – My wife is such a nag… they are so selfish…”
• Thinking effects our general state of happiness ("I hate my life / job / marriage / house / life is so unfair / everyone treats me bad /
• How we think will determine the direction and destiny of our lives. This is why God tells us that our thinking must be changed.

Rom. 12:2 “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.” (NLT)

3. Notice the only way we do not look like the rest of the world in our behavior is to be transformed by allowing God to change the way we think. When our thinking is changed our behavior is transformed. Transformed thinking is the path to transformed behavior.
4. This is often the number ONE reason our lives do not change. We have never first changed how we think. We have the cart before the horse. We focus on behavior instead of thinking. This is why we fail so often.
5. This is one of THE key issues why the church looks and acts much like the world. It thinks like the world! If believers in Christ think like the world they are going to act like the world.

How do we let God change the way we think?

II. Let God’s Word Be Your Standard For How You Think

A. Be willing to reject old thinking

1. Much of this world’s thinking is a lie and is promoted by the father of all lies.

John 8:44 “…He (the Devil) was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies.” (NLT)

2. We live like the world because we think like the world. This world operates from the lies of the Devil. Our spiritual enemy has lied to the world regarding life / purpose / fulfillment / relationships / meaning / values / the church / money and possessions.

3. If our lives are going to change, we must be willing to recognize these lies and reject them. Just because someone gives their life to Jesus, doesn’t mean they automatically stop being controlled by the lies of the enemy.

4. Recognizing and rejecting wrong thinking is a life-long process. Since the transformation of our lives is a progressive process, God continually revealing to us our wrong thinking is progressive as well.

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5. I never cease being amazed at how often the Lord corrects my thinking.

- Two weeks ago I was Elk hunting over in Central Or. (Share about Ken blowing my hunt) Now, I have a choice how I’m going to think about the situation and my friend.
- The world would say I have a good reason to be resentful. God’s thinking says relationships are more important than any elk. My thinking will determine behavior!

6. What old thinking are you hanging on to that is keeping you a prisoner to old behavior? How do I identify wrong thinking?

B. Embrace God’s word as your standard for correct thinking

1. How do we know what the correct thinking is? We must have a standard that we evaluate every thought by. It has to be objective and it must come from God. We have one…It’s called the Bible!

   *Heb. 4:12 “For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.” (NLT)*

2. God’s word can expose to us whether or not our thinking is correct. We can use God’s word as the standard NOT just for our behavior, but for our thinking as well. I believe too often we just look at God’s word as a ruler for our behavior, instead of a standard for our thinking as well.

   *II Tim. 3:16-17 “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.” (NLT)*

3. God’s word is to be used in our lives to expose what’s wrong and then correct and keep us on the right path. God’s word prepares and equips us for everything God has in store for us.

- Notice the terms that refer to thinking; “teach” / “realize” / “prepare” – In order for us to be ready to DO every work we must be mentally equipped first.

4. This is not a book to beat us up and make us feel guilty. It is a book that exposes wrong in order to show us what real life is supposed to be like. God’s word must become a lens that we interpret and evaluate life through.

5. The most important place to begin to hold up that lens and evaluate is in our thinking. Am I thinking in a way that is consistent to what God has said in His word?

6. Do I think about life itself in the way God’s word describes it?
   - Do I think about relationships…
   - Do I think about my marriage…
   - Do I think about money and possessions
   - Do I think about contentment / fulfillment / happiness
   - Do I think about serving

7. Let’s just use the issue of forgiveness. How many of you are hanging on to grudges

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/ bitterness / resentment because you believe you have a right to hang on to these emotions. You may even know God asks us to forgive but you’ve never mentally agreed with the word of God.

8. We first must KNOW God’s word…then we must mentally AGREE with God’s word…then we must actively SUBMIT to God’s word. We make a mental choice! All this must happen before the behavior can change.

KNOW – AGREE – SUBMIT. Three mental choices.
• If we desire to see our lives change, we first must align our thinking with God’s word.

III. Grow In Your Ability To Choose Your Thoughts
A. Reject the lie that you have no control over your thoughts
1. God will never ask us to do something that is impossible for us to do with His help. If God tells us that we can have control over how we think, then it must be possible. Satan is the one who wants you to believe you have no choice. If you believe this, then your behavior will back that up.

Col. 3:2 “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.” (NLT)
2. The word of God tells us that we have a choice what we think about. We can have the mindset of the world or we can have the mindset of people who belong to a different Kingdom.
3. What are the “things above”? Does God expect me to have my head in the clouds all the time? Of course not! The things above can refer to God’s Kingdom. We are people of another Kingdom. His Kingdom has different values / behaviors / standards / perspectives / thinking. These are the things we SET our minds on.
4. We are constantly bombarded with the values / behaviors / standards / thinking of this earthly fallen world. God tells us we have a choice what we SET our minds on. Which Kingdom is your mind set on?
5. So many people don’t believe they have control over their thought life because they believe it’s an issue of will power. They have failed so many times they are convinced they can’t do it.
6. Part of controlling what we think on is being willing to reject the lies we are holding on to regardless of our successes and failures. If God’s word says that we can set our minds on the things above, it must be true. KNOW – AGREE – SUBMIT
• Now it’s time to begin practicing biblical thinking. HOW

B. Practice biblical thinking
1. Practicing biblical thinking is simply allowing the word of God to evaluate our thoughts to see if they are consistent with Jesus and His Kingdom.

II Cor. 10:5 “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.” (NIV)
2. Thoughts are taken captive only as we hold them up to the light of scripture and discard those that are lies and hang on to those that are true.

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3. If we are going to practice biblical thinking, then we must first be growing in our knowledge of God’s word and then growing in our willingness to submit our lives and thoughts under its authority. (Let’s look at these 2 choices)

4. We can’t use God’s word to evaluate our thinking if we don’t know it. One of the greatest commitments you can make this year is to a consistent / daily bible reading plan. Let God’s word change your thinking. As you read, look for ways God’s word is asking you to think differently not just behave differently.

- Along with this decision, I would encourage you to also make a decision to increase your Bible knowledge by taking a TNT nigh class (explain)

5. The other commitment is a willingness to submit your thinking under the bible’s authority. For many believers, this is where it breaks down. I know many followers of Christ who know the Bible very well, yet don’t submit their thinking and their lives under it’s authority.

6. Why do I say this? Because they act like the world. Behavior reveals how we think! I see believers who are bitter / unforgiving / unloving / divisive / gossip / selfish / materialistic / immoral / Their behavior reveals how they think.

7. Being a follower of Christ means that we submit our lives under the authority of His word. Therefore I choose to take my ungodly thoughts captive and choose to realign them to be consistent with who Jesus is. I choose to not let them run wild.

8. When I have thoughts that are not according to Christ (and we all do), the Holy Spirit will point that out. Thoughts that are inconsistent with His Kingdom…Now I have a choice to take them captive or allow them to run wild.

- For example: When someone wounds me, my mind automatically begins to have negative thoughts about that person…resentment is already beginning to grow. Now we have a choice! Run wild or take captive!

- KNOW what God’s word says. (It tells me to love and forgive)

  AGREE with God’s word. (I agree I need to be loving and forgiving)

  Choose to SUBMIT your thoughts to God’s word (I choose to respond in a loving manner and forgive the wrong. I will not let the resentment grow by dwelling on the wrong.

- Several final thoughts about taking your thoughts captive. The more you do this, the easier it will become. It does take practice. Ask God to help you!

- The quicker you do this the easier it becomes. If you allow your negative, fleshly thoughts to run wild for an extended period of time, it requires more effort to take them captive. Take your thoughts captive in the early frames. (Explain)

- If we will practice these things, I believe we will experience what Jesus said.

  John 8:32 “And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (NLT)

It is the truth of God’s word that will change our lives. Let’s be willing to change how we think so we can live the freedom that is ours in Christ.
How is God asking you to allow Him to change your thinking so He can change your life? What are some key areas where your thinking needs to change? Are you willing to not just KNOW, but AGREE and SUBMIT?