

Intentional Thinking

Phil. 4:5-7

Introduction:

1. Some anxiety is normal and can be healthy—apprehension about a test; fight/flight response.
2. Continual anxiety is a serious problem:
 - Generalized Anxiety Disorder affects 6 million Americans each day. Anxiety has surpassed depression as the number one mental illness in America.
 - 90% of anxiety sufferers have a paired disorder: depression, suspicious mind, intolerable uncertainty
 - Causes: stress, medication, cell phone (“Fear of Missing Out”), poor mental processing of events or situations.

You **MUST** become the guardian of your mind by identifying and refusing emotionally troubling, unbiblical thoughts.

Let’s break it down Biblically...

- I. Understand the Importance of Self Control (5)
 - A. “Moderation” = “self-control”—In other words, Scripture commands you to be in control of yourself—including your thoughts.
 - B. Self-control begins with the mind. It is MY responsibility alone.
 - C. Anxious care reveals a lack of mental self-control.
 - D. Only YOU can exercise self-control. (That’s why its called “self” control).

- II. Notice the Instruction Against Anxious Care (6)
 - A. “Careful”—full of care, anxious, worried, focused on cares.
 - B. Normally “care” is good; we should care! [Blood Pressure Meds]
 - C. Sometimes “care” gets out of balance and takes over. Anxiety is the inability of the mind to shut down. It’s when the mind goes into an unending loop of thinking.
 1. Care that dominates thinking is unhealthy.
 2. Care that interferes with joy is unhealthy.
 3. Care that us ultimately unproductive is unhealthy.
 - D. Appropriate Care—**The Control Paradigm** (Determine thought patterns based upon your level of control.)

1. **Things over which you have NO control.** Learn to dismiss this from your thoughts completely. Note this can include anything from the weather to the reactions and behaviors of other people.
2. **Things over which you have COMPLETE control.** These things include our thoughts, eating habits, goals, opinions, responses, etc. Focus your thoughts on things over which you have complete control.
3. **Things over which you have SOME control.**
 - a. Focus thinking on YOUR part of the equation. Do your best at the part for which you are responsible.
 - b. Do not focus on outcomes that are beyond your control. Remember, you can control some things; you may not be able to control outcomes.
 - c. Be satisfied when you have done your personal best and leave the rest to God.

E. Appropriate Care: **The Time Paradigm** (Determine though patterns based on the time setting of the issue.)

1. **Do not think about the negative PAST**
 - a. You have no control over the past; it cannot be changed.
 - b. Knowing the “why” of something doesn’t change what happened, nor does it bring “closure.”
 - c. Keep the negative past in the past by refusing to think about it in the present. The past should not bleed through into the present and stain the beauty of this moment.
 - d. Note, refusing to think about something is different from forgetting. Some things will never be forgotten; but we do not have to ruminate over them.
 - e. Do not allow regret to dominate your thinking. Example: “If only I had...”
2. **Do not think about the uncertainties of the FUTURE**
 - a. Matthew 6:34—Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.
 - b. The future is NOT within the realm of your control. Do not obsess over it. Simply refuse to worry about the future and what it holds for you. If you do so, you spoil today over something that likely won’t happen anyway.
 - c. God alone knows the future, and He loves you. He is in control, and that is enough.
3. **Focus thoughts on the PRESENT moment**
 - a. Learn to embrace the present situation. Embrace the things you cannot change. Accept circumstances without wasting emotional energy pushing against them.

- b. Avoid “decoupled cognition”—filling the present with thoughts unrelated to the present (such as thoughts of the past or future). Be present in the MOMENT.

III. Practice the Imperative of Prayer (6)

- A. The Christian response to things over which we have partial or no control is prayer.
- B. The problem we face is an opportunity to pray!
- C. Learn to pray and dismiss!
 - 1. “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.” Psalm 55:22
 - 2. “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.” I Peter 5:7
 - 3. Casting = Committing completely to God that which is beyond my control.
- D. “...with thanksgiving” means to embrace your prayer circumstance from the heart.

IV. Experience the Intervention of Peace (7)

- A. Notice that God’s peace comes in response to your obedience! God is not a heavenly Xanax. You will never know peace of mind if you disobey the scriptures by maintaining undisciplined thinking.
- B. God’s peace plan is beyond human understanding! When we do what God says, we experience peace that others don’t comprehend.
- C. God’s peace keeps (literally “guards”) our heart (emotions) and mind (thoughts). In other words, obedience to what God says begins a cycle of mental peace that will be a guardian to our tranquility.