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“Harnessing Our Thought Life”

Ezekiel 8

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David said in Psalm 13:2: “How long must I wrestle with my thoughts?” Do you ever feel like David? Is your thought life something that is pleasing to God or is it displeasing to him? God wants us think on things that bring glory and honor to him. In Ezekiel 8, God gave Ezekiel a vision of what goes on in the dark recesses of the minds of the people of Judah, so that Ezekiel could see how justified God was in his judgment against them. Ezekiel saw vile things, and impure images in a dark room. In this message, Pastor Gary challenges us about our own thought life and what we need to do to guard our minds for God’s glory.

Historical Background

1. On September 7, 592BC, according to the Babylonian calendar, Ezekiel was at his home in Babylon, meeting with some of the elders of Judah, who were included among the exiles, when God gave him a vision of things that were taking place in Jerusalem.
2. Worshipping Tammuz
 - a. **Ezekiel 8:3** - *“He stretched out the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of my hair; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven, and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the north gate of the inner court, where the seat of the image of jealousy was, which provokes to jealousy.”*
 - b. **Ezekiel 8:14** - *“So he brought me to the door of the north gate of the LORD’s house; and to my dismay, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz.”*
 - i. Tammuz, the Babylonian idol, was the god of life and vegetation.
 - ii. The Babylonians believed Tammuz died every fall and departed to the underworld.

- iii. The evidence of Tammuz's death was dead vegetation.
 - iv. They also believed that every spring, his wife, Ishtar, would have to rescue him and bring him back to life.
- c. **Exodus 20:4-5** - *"You shall not make for yourself a carved image - any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God..."*

3. Worshiping The Sun

- a. **Ezekiel 8:15-16** - *"Then He said to me, 'Have you seen this, O son of man? Turn again, you will see greater abominations than these.' So He brought me into the inner court of the LORD's house; and there, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs toward the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east, and they were worshiping the sun toward the east."*
- i. They Jews probably got the worship of the sun from the Egyptians, who worshiped Ra, the sun god.
 - ii. The twenty-five men are most likely the priests.
 - 1. We read about the division of the priests in **1 Chronicles 24**, which helps us see that these men were the spiritual leaders.
 - iii. Worship of the sun was a capital offense.
 - 1. **Deuteronomy 17:3-5** - *"[anyone] who has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, either the sun or moon or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded, and it is told you, and you hear of it, then you shall inquire diligently. And if it is indeed true and certain that such an abomination has been committed in Israel, then you shall bring out to your gates that man or woman who has committed that wicked thing, and shall stone to death that man or woman with stones."*

4. Worship Of The Heart And The Mind

- a. **Ezekiel 8:7-12** - *"So He brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, there was a hole in the wall. Then He said to me, 'Son of man, dig into the wall'; and when I dug into the wall, there was a door. And He said to me, 'Go in, and see the wicked abominations which they are doing there - every sort of creeping thing, abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed all around on the walls. And there stood before them seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel, and in their midst stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan. Each man had a censer in his hand, and a thick cloud of incense went up. Then He said to me, Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the room of his idols? For they say, 'The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken*

the land.’ ” (Emphasis added)

- b. Sinful behavior is generated in the dark recesses of the human heart and mind.
- c. Pastor Gary said: “You know, the people were into idolatry, but they were into idolatry because they believed things and thought things and considered things and entertained things in their mind. Most of our sinful behavior is premeditated. We think about it first. We fantasize about it first. In the dark recesses of our mind, where we think no one else can see [and] no one else knows [and] no one else hears, we entertain impure things, detestable things, vile things, that if [anyone] knew, we would be embarrassed. If anyone knew the kind of thoughts that all of us entertain, we would be embarrassed. God knows! Why should we allow our minds to go unchecked? Some Christians are of the opinion that as long as [they] don’t act on something it’s okay for [them] to think it. Wrong! Even our minds should be sanctuaries to God. Even our thought life should be reined in to a place where it’s honorable to God. What we think and what we imagine and what we entertain in our minds will either be pleasing to God or displeasing to him. It will either be honorable to God or dishonorable to God. We need to make sure that we understand the necessity and the importance that not only is action something that God looks at and considers, but also our thoughts. We must harness our thought life.”
- d. God sees everything, and he also hears everything!
 - i. Jaazaniah, the son of Shaphan, was the only one of the seventy elders mentioned by name.
 - ii. His name literally means “the Lord hears,” and it also means to “broaden the hand,” which would be like someone who cupped his/her hand to the ear to be able to listen more intently.
- e. **Psalm 139:1-2** - *“O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off.”*

God Knows Our Thoughts

- 5. **Psalm 94:11** - *“The LORD knows the thoughts of man, That they are futile.”*
- 6. Jesus was aware of the thought life of people he encountered.
 - a. **Matthew 9:4** - *“But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, ‘Why do you think evil in your hearts.’ ”*
 - b. **Matthew 12:25** - *“But Jesus knew their thoughts...”*
 - c. **Luke 9:47** - *“And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart...”*
 - d. **Luke 11:17** - *“But He, knowing their thoughts...”*

God Tests Our Minds

7. **Psalm 7:9** - *“Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, But establish the just; For the righteous God tests the hearts and minds.”*

God Examines Our Minds

8. **Jeremiah 17:10** - *“I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind...”*

Renew Your Mind With The Word

9. Pastor Gary said: “We need the Bible to be constantly washing over our thought life. ... Living in our culture we are inundated with information, and some of that information is [terrible, depressing, impure, and untrue]. ... [We have wicked, lustful, impure, anxious, fearful, jealous, resentful, and critical thoughts]. ... The mind is a battleground. We can’t get lazy about this. We have to realize that in the dark recesses of our minds we can’t just entertain stuff, and think ‘it’s no big deal as long as I don’t act on it, [it’s just in my head, and I can think on it and dwell on it and fantasize about it.’ No! Not if it’s impure, [unholy, unrighteous, or dishonoring to God]. We have to renew our minds
10. **Ephesians 4:22-24** - *“... put off... the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and **be renewed in the spirit of your mind**, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.”* (Emphasis added)
11. **Romans 12:2** - *“And do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind**, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”* (Emphasis added)
- The Greek word for renew means to renovate.
 - We renovate our minds by getting into the Word of God and allowing the Word of God to get into us.
12. **Hebrews 4:12** - *“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”*

Take Captive Every Thought And Make Them Obedient To Christ

13. **2 Corinthians 10:5** - *“... casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, **bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ...**”* (Emphasis added)

14. [Psalm 13:2](#) - *“How long must I wrestle with my thoughts...”* (1984 NIV)
15. Pastor Gary said: “Some of you have critical thoughts. All you ever think about somebody is critical, unloving, resentful, bitter, and jealous. ... We can’t allow it. We have to take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ.”

Set Your Mind On Spiritual Things

16. [Romans 8:5-6](#) - *“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.”*
17. [1 Peter 1:13](#) - *“Therefore **gird up the loins of your mind**, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ...”* (Emphasis added)
 - a. Peter was saying, “Pull up your thoughts or they’ll cause you to stumble.”
18. [Philippians 4:8](#) - *“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things.”*

Discussion Questions

1. Read [Ezekiel 8:1-18](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Read and discuss [Ezekiel 8:3, 14](#), and [Exodus 20:4-5](#).
3. How has the Holy Spirit helped you leave behind the idols in your life?
4. Read and discuss [Ezekiel 8:15-16](#) concerning the 25 priests and their worship of the sun. (See #3 above)
5. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary’s remarks concerning worship of the heart and mind. (See #4c above)
6. Read and discuss the Scriptures regarding the fact that God knows our thoughts and he see and hears everything. (See #4d, #4e, #5 through #8 above)
7. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary’s comments and the Scriptures he shared, concerning the way the Scriptures can help us renew our mind. (See #9 through

#12 above)

8. Read and discuss [2 Corinthians 10:5](#) and [Psalm 13:2](#). (See #13 through #15 above)
9. How is the Holy Spirit helping you with your thought life?
10. What are some of the challenges and temptations you are dealing with?
11. Read and discuss [Romans 8:5-6](#), [1 Peter 1:13](#), [Philippians 4:8](#). (See #16 through #18 above)
12. What are some of the ways your life is different because you have allowed the truth of the Bible to reshape and renew your mind, because you've focused your mind on the things the apostle Paul listed in [Philippians 4:8](#)?
13. Close your time in prayer and allow the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)