

How can I take control of my thoughts?

Answer from Gotquestions.org: Many Christians struggle with this issue, especially in our highly technological world, but taking control of our thoughts is essential. Proverbs 4:23 states, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." The "heart" includes the mind and all that proceeds from it. Someone said that every sin we commit, we commit twice, once in our thoughts and again when we act upon those thoughts. It is easiest to rid our lives of sin if we attack it at this fundamental thought level rather than waiting for it to become rooted in our lives by our actions and then try to pull it out.

There is also a difference between being tempted (a thought entering into the mind) and sinning (dwelling upon an evil thought and wallowing in it). It is important to understand that when a thought enters our mind, we examine it based upon God's Word and determine if we should continue down that path or reject the thought and replace it with another thought. If we have already allowed a habit to form in our thought lives, it becomes more difficult to change the path of our thoughts, even as it is hard to get a car out of a deep rut and onto a new track. Here are some biblical suggestions for taking control of our thoughts and getting rid of wrong thoughts:

1. **Be in God's Word** so that when a sinful thought enters our mind (a temptation), we will be able to recognize it for what it is and know what course to take. Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4) responded to each of Satan's temptations with Scripture that applied to the direction He knew His mind should take instead of beginning down the path of the sinful thought. When tempted to meet His physical need (turn stone into bread), He recited the passage about the importance of relying upon God. When tempted to serve Satan in order to obtain the glory of the world, He brought up the passage that says we are to serve and worship God alone and speak of the glory that belongs to Him and those who are His.

When tempted to test God (to see if God was really there and would keep His promises), Jesus responded with passages that stress the importance of believing God without having to see Him demonstrate His presence. Quoting Scripture in a time of temptation is not a talisman, but rather serves the purpose of getting our minds onto a biblical track, but we need to know the Word of God AHEAD of time in order to accomplish this. Thus, a daily habit of being in the Word in a meaningful way is essential. If we are aware of a certain area of constant temptation (worry, lust, anger, etc.), we need to study and memorize key passages that deal with those issues. Looking for both what we are to avoid (negative) and how we are to properly respond (positive) to tempting thoughts and situations "before they are upon us" will go a long way to giving us victory over them.

2. **Live in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, chiefly through seeking His strength through prayer** (Matthew 26:41). If we rely upon our own strength, we will fail (Proverbs 28:26; Jeremiah 17:9; Matthew 26:33).

3. **We are not to feed our minds with that which will promote sinful thoughts.** This is the idea of Proverbs 4:23. We are to guard our hearts" what we allow into them and what

we allow them to dwell on. Job 31:1 states, "I have made a covenant with my eyes; Why then should I look upon a young woman" (NKJV). Romans 13:14 states, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts." Thus, we are to avoid periodicals, videos, websites, conversations and situations that will set us up for a fall. We should also avoid spending time with those who would encourage us down these wrong paths.

4. We are to pursue hard after God, substituting godly pursuits and mindsets for sinful thoughts. This is the principle of replacement. When tempted to hate someone, we replace those hateful thoughts with godly actions: we do good to them, speak well of them, and pray for them (Matthew 5:44). Instead of stealing, we should work hard to earn money so we can look for opportunities to give to others in need (Ephesians 4:28). When tempted to lust after a woman, we turn our gaze, praise God for the way He has made us "male and female" and pray for the woman (for example: "Lord, help this young woman to come to know you if she does not, and to know the joy of walking with you"), then think of her as a sister (1 Timothy 5:2). The Bible often speaks of "putting off" wrong actions and thoughts but then "putting on" godly actions and thoughts (Ephesians 4:22-32). Merely seeking to put off sinful thoughts without replacing those thoughts with godly ones leaves an empty field for Satan to come along and sow his weeds (Matthew 12:43-45).

5. We can use fellowship with other Christians the way God intended. Hebrews 10:24-25 states, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another" and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Fellow Christians who will encourage us in the changes we desire (best if of the same gender), who will pray for and with us, who will ask us in love how we are doing, and who will hold us accountable in avoiding the old ways, are valuable friends indeed.

Last and most important, these methods will be of no value unless we have placed our faith in Christ as Savior from our sin. This is where we absolutely must start! Without this, there can be no victory over sinful thoughts and temptations, and God's promises for His children are not for us, nor is the Holy Spirit's power available to us!

If there is any doubt in this area, the area of our website dealing with this all-important issue is: <http://www.gotquestions.org/eternal-life.html>.

God will bless those who seek to honor Him with what matters most to Him: who we are inside and not just what we appear to be to others. May God make Jesus' description of Nathanael true also of us "a man [or woman] in whom there is no guile (John 1:47).