

BREAKING FREE FROM CONTROLLING THOUGHTS

How to replace the noisy thoughts of my soul with the peaceful presence of God.

By Matthew Black

How do we break free from controlling thoughts and start practicing the presence of God? Let's set a clear goal. My goal is to please God first and foremost.

2 Corinthians 5:9 / We make it our aim to please him.

On the way to that goal, I want to replace the noisy thoughts of my soul with the peaceful presence of God. Instead of trying to protect myself with a false security, I want to barricade myself in with God's sufficient Word.

Repent

Identify and confess all obsessive thoughts that control you because they sinfully presume your ability to live by rigid rules of thoughts and behaviors, supposedly filling you

with peace and joy. Realize those rigid rules cannot satisfy you. They only enslave you.

Proverbs 27:20, NLT / Just as Death and Destruction are never satisfied, so human desire is never satisfied.

Stop trusting in your own ability to control everything. Surrender your desire for control and invite God to control your life and thoughts.

2 Corinthians 10:2 / We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

1 John 1:9-10 / If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Put Jesus back on the throne. Put back on your God-pleasing eyeglasses.

Re-label

These recurring thoughts and behaviors are anxious and fearful. They are the source of your sinful fear. It's atheistic rebellion against God. It's a refusal to see God as your precious and all-powerful Shepherd (Psa 23) Choose to fear God only. Slow down. Don't let your thoughts race. Feel God near.

Psalms 46:10 / Be still and know that I am God.

Proverbs 9:10 / The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

When you are willing to sin to get what you want or react sinfully when you don't get what you want you need to relabel your desire as "sin" and "rebellion" against the one who loves your soul.

The thoughts are controlling you because you've allowed a master not named Jesus Christ to control you. It could be earthly comfort, relational nurture, money, possessions. You cannot trust in any of those things, because once you do, you will be harassed with the possibility of losing those things.

Replace

Substitute those anxious, rebellious, panicky thoughts with thinking that fully trusts a good and loving God. Anxiety calls God's goodness into question, like the serpent did in the garden. Is God really good? Yes! He is! Worry is evil because it indicts the character of God and slanders him. Instead of allowing yourself to be counseled with noisy, rebellious thoughts (like, I must have this for anxiety to leave and I could be happy), let the Holy Spirit counsel you with his Word and comfort you with his presence.

Romans 14:17 / For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Isaiah 43:2 / When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

Psalms 18:2 / The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

1 John 4:18 / There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

Knowing God's perfect love and presence is key to casting out all noisy thoughts. Put away the lies and replace them with truth. "Whatever is true... think about these things" (Phil 4:8).

Re-focus

You have to refocus on what actually can give you lasting, not temporary joy. That's Jesus alone. You can't have two masters. You have to give up whatever you are looking to as a false savior.

Practice walking in the Word. Don't be controlled by your compulsions and emotions. Choose to be intentional with your thoughts and direct your thoughts to be patterned after God's Word. Devote yourself to loving God and loving others. Do not remain self-focused, but instead, focus on God's love. Get the support you need. Support is not just you getting help, but you helping others. Meditate on God's Word until you have the peace and joy that comes from faith (truly trusting God). God must get bigger and gentler and more loving in your mind. Then your fears will disappear.

Romans 12:2 / Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Ephesians 4:22-24 / Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Magnify the Lord instead of your fearful thoughts. He is much greater than anything you could ever fear.

Remember

There's nothing wrong with healthy care for your responsibilities. You are a compassionate person who loves God and your loved ones. But don't let your God-given responsibility turn into a control issue. Obsessing to the point of unhappiness is sinful. That is a fruit of sinful fear, trying to create peace and joy for yourself apart from God. The key is to fear the Lord. That means to practice the loving presence of God in all you do.

Having controlling thoughts is a horrible lot. This is true. Ever since the Fall (Gen 3), our brains have been compromised. And the good news is God can restore our fallen minds through his sufficient Word.

Homework

Do this homework over the next several weeks and months.

Fellowship. Make sure you have the support of a local church where you are a member. You can't do this alone. You are not alone. Find some people who will listen and help you with applying God's Word to your life.

Pray. Pray through your temptations that are obsessive or worrisome. Trust God to control what you can't. Pray for people you can share your burdens. Pray for ministry opportunities so that you can tell others what you are learning. Get your mind off self and on to others.

Worship. Listen to worship songs. Be intentional about putting on worship music. Shane and Shane. CityAlight. The Gettys. Sovereign Grace, and so many of the ancient hymns of the faith. Listen while you are getting ready for the day, driving, etc.

Read or listen to the Bible. Get used to reading devotionals in a Bible program like YouVersion or other Bible programs.

Start reading the book *Gentle and Lowly* by Dane Ortlund, to get a right understanding of how the triune God looks at you as his dear and precious child. Try to read a chapter at least every other day.

Read through Psalm 139:1-18 letting your heart fill up with God's love for you. Try to do this several times each week.

Give this pamphlet to someone you are close with and tell them what you are learning.

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