

WARM UP

1. If you discovered you have three free hours all of a sudden, what would you do?
2. Describe a time when you built or assembled something. Include how you felt during assembling/building and when you finished?
3. What's an activity you can do and lose track of time easily? Why do you think you lose track of time?
4. How influential is music? Why, do you think that?

WORD

Here's another question for the group, but one for thought rather than sharing: Are you where you want to be spiritually? Reworded: how important is your inner life to you? Our internal world is more than just physical organs and blood pumping around; it includes our soul and spirit which are greatly affected and effected by our thoughts.

There's a proverb that states: *For as a person thinks within him- or her-self, so is he or she.* (Proverbs 23:7 TLV adapted). This was stated in the context of managing our human hunger for recognition, a good reputation, wealth, food, and possessions. The proverb is part of an encouragement to manage well our inner desires and thoughts.

It is often easier said than done to keep our appetites, thoughts, and inner world in good balance. Today we will explore what the Bible says about rebuilding our inner life and building faith.

1: God's Promise

The Bible is full of promises from God to his children and those who will seek after him. If someone is a believer in Jesus, then they are adopted into God's family, and have become part of God's children. This also means, because of Jesus, we can receive promises God made to his children long before we were born. One such promise is found in the book of Isaiah, chapter 54. Verse 11 reads: *"O storm-battered city, troubled and desolate! I will rebuild you with precious jewels and make your foundations from lapis lazuli."*

God promises to Rebuild the city of Jerusalem which was battered by literal storms and foreign invaders. Today our lives are battered on the outside by literal storms, too; those outer circumstances can wreak havoc on our internal world, causing uncertainty, trauma in some cases, anxiety—all types of inner turmoil and storms. God's promise is still the same; he will rebuild our lives, just like he promised to rebuild the city.

Question: Why was the city of Jerusalem destroyed in the first place? It was because the children of God fed their appetites and thoughts with things that were not holy in God's eyes. This is described as idolatry. If they did not literally worship an idol statue, they worshipped the god of their belly or their purse (money). Their thought life was consumed with getting more of the things that defiled themselves, which made them unacceptable to be in God's presence.

After God confirms he will rebuild His people's lives, He gave another promise, through the Prophet Jeremiah to those who had been sent away from God's city because of the same kind of idolatry, which states:

*Then, you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me **when you search for Me with all your heart** (Jeremiah 29:12-13).*

Today, if we call upon God, come to Him, and pray to Him, He will listen. If we seek Him, we will find him IF we genuinely search for Him with all our heart. If our heart (or our inner person) is craving after things other than knowing and being with God, then part of our heart as well as our mind is not searching for Him. What can be done about this conundrum?

2: Dealing with our obstacle

The first step is recognising our divided inner world, and asking God for help to deal with it. God has already given us access to Himself 24/7 through His Holy Spirit who is omnipresent, so He is able to turn toward us when we turn toward him admitting how we've let other things crowd our inner life and thoughts. In Christianity, this is called repentance—we **turn away from** whatever is over-occupying our thoughts and life and leading us away from God; simultaneously, **we turn towards** God.

God, through the Apostle Paul, describes what happens in our inner-world and emotions when we begin to recognise our thoughts are totally different to God's thoughts: *For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There's no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death.* (2 Corinthians 7:10)

Worldly sorrow is sorry we got caught, and seeking to avoid punishment. Godly sorrow results in a change of heart and mind which produces a change of desires and lifestyle. How do we know God and His thoughts?

3: Read God's thoughts to know Him, clean our thoughts, and build our faith

Jesus replied, "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?" Mark 12:24

Even though Jesus spoke this to people who thought they were super spiritual nearly 2000 years ago, the truth rings loudly today: We still error as humans because we do not know God's Word or His power. Perhaps we previously had an experience, but the memory and excitement has faded. We can rekindle the flame and interest. Or start the journey for the first time! Our faith muscles (inner strength) can grow and shrink, just like our physical muscles (outer strength). How do our faith muscles grow?

"Faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ." Romans 10:17

Other English translations of the verse render the end: "hearing by the word of God." Both are true. Hearing the Good News about Jesus reveals the character of God to us, and gives us hope that the power that raised Jesus from the dead also can live inside of us (Romans 8:11) and change us to imitate God (Ephesians 5:1).

*"Just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow down into him, and **let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught**, and you will overflow with thankfulness. Don't let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense **that come from human thinking** and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ."*
(Colossians 2:6-8).

Learning and hearing God's word helps us know who God is, His plan for His Creation, how He thinks, how He battles for us, and how He equips His children to battle, too. It enables us to distinguish between human thinking and God's thinking (as Colossians above states). Paul encourages readers how to handle the inner thought life when we recognise our thoughts do not align with God's:

*"We are human, but we don't wage war as humans do. We use God's mighty weapons, (not worldly weapons), to knock down **the strongholds of human reasoning** and to **destroy false arguments**. We destroy **every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God**. **We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ**. (2 Corinthians 10:1, 3-5)*

How do we teach our thoughts to obey Christ? We learn about (thinking to increase knowledge) and believe in (choosing to uphold what we've learned is true) Jesus's life, death, resurrection, and ascension, and how that is pivotal to God's grander story of creation and His wanting to live among His people. With so many audio Bibles available through apps and the internet, literally playing scripture and hearing it is as easy as listening to our favourite song.

In closing, the apostle Paul encourages us to

Fix our thoughts on what is true, and honourable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. (Philippians 4:8)

If the way we think is transformed by God's Word (Rom 12:2), our Faith will grow. If the way we live is rooted in Jesus, by knowing and believing what God's Word says about him, then our faith will grow (Col 2:7). As our Faith grows, God promises to rebuild our life. It may not be what we initially thought or expected, but that's okay, because it's what God thinks, and He is eternal (Is 26:4; 1 Tim 1:17), good (1 Chr 16:34), holy (Ps. 99:9; 1 Pet 1:15), love (1 John 4:16), and faithful (Is 30:18; 2 Thes 3:3)!

APPLICATION

1. Share in 2's or 3's (or with the group) what is over-occupying your mind and inner-world presently, and why. Do you think it is "keeping you from knowing God" (2 Cor 10:5)? Discuss what you think God may want you to do about it.
2. What do you think about the Bible? Do you agree or disagree with what today's lesson presented, and why?
3. Which adjectives from Paul's list of what is good to think about jumped out to you most and why?

Prayer

- Father, we pray that you would show each one of us where our inner life is out of sync with you. Grant us your gift of godly sorrow and repentance, so we can return that part of our heart and mind to you. *(Feel free to take a moment to pause and let God speak to hearts.)*
- Lord, thank you for the preservation of your word down through the centuries so we today can know you and your story. Reignite or start for the first time a passion and excitement to know you through your Scriptures. Grant us each ideas about how to hear your word to grow our faith. Prompt us in the middle of our days to interact with you and your word.
- Holy Spirit, guide our thoughts to what is true, honourable, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praise-worthy. Remind us of the things you've taught us in Scripture as we go about our daily lives.
- Everything we do, Lord, is in a response to what you've already done for us because of your great love. You first loved. Teach us how to love like you so it impacts our inner thought life and outer lifestyle, to live and think like you, as we trust you to rebuild our lives.