

4 Clear Keys to More Christlike Thoughts and Feelings

GI-GO. Any old-time computer person will recognize that acronym: Garbage In, Garbage Out. If you want better output, change the input! And it's not just for your computer. It's also the key to healthier thoughts and feelings.

As a high school senior, I learned computer programming using the old 80-column paper punch cards. (I'm dating myself now!) If the printer started spitting out gibberish, it was clear some card was out of place. Even a missing or extra hole in one card (hanging chads, anyone?) could mean havoc for the output.

So let me ask you: How satisfied are you with your mind's output?

Are you able to focus on the tasks that are most important? Can you acknowledge feelings such as anger, fear or frustration while still making intentional choices about how to respond? Do you embrace new information while still maintaining your values and purpose? Are you continuing to learn and grow? Are you able to look at circumstances realistically and still choose what to do next? Is listening for God's voice part of your regular *modus operandi*?

All those things are executive functions of your mind. God has given you executive authority over your mind, to choose how you use your mind to think, feel, respond and do.

If your mind is not giving you the output of positive, resilient, godly thoughts, feelings and responses, one of the first things to do is change the input.

These are a few of the important types of input your mind is taking in, whether you are aware of it or not.

Physical Fuel

The hardware of your mind—your brain—needs healthy fuel to function. It's a type of input easily overlooked when people struggle with anxiety, depression, or other negative or troubling thoughts and feelings.

Physical fuel for your mind includes healthy nutrition, regular physical activity and rhythms of rest.

A regular pattern of aerobic exercise has been demonstrated to be as effective as antidepressants for many people. What looks dark and impossible when you're tired may seem very manageable after a good night's sleep. An eating pattern of unprocessed foods containing balanced protein and healthy fats, and that maintains stable blood sugar, can dramatically change mood, focus and productivity.

What kind of physical fuel are you providing your mind?

Mental Message Input

Our world is media-saturated. You have endless choices about what you read, watch or listen to. Books, podcasts, music, social media, TV, movies, YouTube, internet sites, magazines—they all add input to your mind. This is perhaps the most direct input that your mind uses in producing the output of thoughts and emotions.

Superficial, sex-saturated, violent, negative, sensational or otherwise questionable media cannot help but lead to thoughts and feelings that may be entitled, angry, depressing, anxious, lustful or overwhelming. Comparatively "harmless" media such as sensational cable news or social media can increase anxiety, impact sleep and lessen your effectiveness.

Imagine being a consultant to yourself, walking around with

you for 24 hours, and noting the media input your mind receives. Only based on the media you consume, what kind of output would you predict your mind would produce? What kinds of thoughts and feelings would come from that input?

If you're struggling with troubling thoughts and feelings, clean up the messages your mind receives.

People Fuel

God designed us to grow in community. It's scientifically documented that you will become like the people you spend the most time with. Your physical health, diet, media habits, attitudes, work habits, political views, financial standing, marriage or parenting success and spiritual growth will largely mirror those of the people you hang around with.

Dr John Townsend's recent book *People Fuel* describes in detail how powerful people are when it comes to how your mind functions and responds.

"Show me your friends, and I'll show you your future." It's unclear who said that first, but it's true. And it's a biblical principle as well.

Ask yourself, who are the five people you spend the most time with? Imagine their future. Is that a future you would want for yourself?

If you don't like what your mind is doing or where your life is heading, it might be time to get some different friends.

Spiritual Nourishment

Your spirit, the part of you that impacts your mind from the inside, needs nourishment. If this part of you becomes dry and shriveled, or toxically infected, your thoughts and emotions will become negative, dark, self-centered and generally miserable.

What kind of spiritual nourishment are you taking in? Are you expecting one sip or one bite (five minutes with God in the morning) to keep you nourished all day? Is the spiritual nourishment you take in contaminated with legalism, cheap grace or human manipulation? Are you hoping God will “zap” nourishment into you without intentionally seeking out what you need and what He offers?

Do you consume only second-hand nourishment served up by those who have gone to the source themselves? Taking in what others have said, written and so forth is super helpful. But at some point, you will need to go to the source yourself for the best spiritual nourishment.

God makes an infinite supply and variety of spiritual nourishment available. If your mind’s output could be improved, pay attention to feeding your soul.

Better Input, Better Output

Our world supplies an endless barrage of junk, more than enough negative input to lead to the output of negative thoughts and feelings from your mind.

It will become increasingly important to pay attention to what input you take into your mind. Don’t mindlessly allow culture to “feed” you. Take charge of what your mind takes in.

And that’s nothing more than God asks of you and me (Phili.4:8, 2 -5).

Your Turn: *How happy or unhappy are you with the output your mind is producing? Do you need to make any changes in the input your mind takes in? Leave a comment below. {eo}*

Dr. Carol Peters-Tanksley is both a board-certified OB-GYN physician and an ordained doctor of ministry. As an author and speaker, she loves helping people discover the **Fully Alive** kind of life Jesus came to bring us. Visit her website at .

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