

What to Do With Your Pesky, Wayward Thoughts

“We are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5, NASB).

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer” (Ps. 19:14, MEV).

The thought that flitted through my brain that night scares me to this day.

It had rained heavily the previous day, the kind of West Texas downpour they write books about. Next morning, very early—maybe about .—I was leaving the Alto Frio Baptist Campground for a very long drive home (to central Mississippi). Anyone familiar with that remote retreat facility knows that the main route calls for you to drive down a highway and then cross over to the primary highway. Oddly, that crossover is a humble, one-lane road of perhaps half a mile. The thing to bear in mind is that it crosses a small creek, and the bridge also curves as it passes over the creek. I made this drive several times during my few days at the camp speaking to senior adults, mostly to drive into the town of Leakey, Texas.

So, it was now pitch-black out there, and as I was about to turn off the first highway and drive the small trail over to the main highway, I noticed the entire area was flooded. The whole area around the little road was completely submerged. Assuming the bridge was still there, it would have been flooded also.

Can you believe that I pulled off the highway and started to drive that way? The thought actually hit me: *I can do this; I know where the road is.* Suddenly my senses returned. *What are*

you doing? You can't see the road, it's all under water, the water is rushing downstream, and the bridge isn't even straight! This would be pure suicide.

I backed out, took the longer route and drove home with no problem.

A number of times since, I've thought back to that moment when I began driving toward the flooded creek, and I break out in a cold sweat.

Never mind that I didn't do it. Just the thought of having entertained the notion is frightening.

I even feel guilty about it, as though having the thought occur indicates some misalignment of my brain. In reality, the hour was extremely early, and I was tired and sleepy. But that's no excuse.

I say to myself that I'm not responsible for that completely dumb thought. After all, I did reject it. I would never knowingly drive through a flooded street, much less an unfamiliar unpaved area like that.

But it occurred to me. As though that means I wanted to do it.

I'm rejecting that guilt.

And the point of this is ...

Everyone has these errant thoughts from time to time. If we handle them well and send them on their way, in no way should we feel shame or guilt.

Martin Luther said, "You cannot keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building nests in your hair." You thought that line was original with your grandma? I have a hunch Luther didn't make it up either but was quoting something he had heard all his life. No telling where it originated. But it's the solid truth.

Thoughts of all kinds flit through our minds. We reject the bad ones and go forward. But we should not feel guilty that they appeared, if only momentarily. Only had we welcomed them inside and let them entertain us with their juicy (scary) scenarios should we feel that we have done wrong.

No one should ever rationalize that “Well, it was just a thought, and thoughts are harmless.”

They are not harmless. The thought is the preparation for the act.

Every wrong deed begins with a wrong thought. And seriously wrong deeds are almost always preceded by a full-scale onslaught of impure thinking, planning and daydreaming.

A famous crimefighter once said, “No criminal ever commits a crime without first justifying it in his mind.”

As serious disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, we fill our minds with thoughts proper and healthy, godly and edifying. “Whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, 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 any praise, think on these things” (Phil. 4:8).

This is not a new idea, but consistently taught throughout Scripture: “His delight is in the Law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night” (Ps. 1:2).

“Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (Ps. 119:11).

“But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19).

Never mind the television commercial that asks, “What’s in your wallet?” Better to ask, “What’s on your mind” What are you thinking about? What are you dwelling upon? Where does

your mind go to rest and when it settles down? What is it feasting upon?

“A man may not be what he thinks he is, but what he thinks, he is.” –Anonymous and true.

“Blessed are the pure in heart” (Matt. 5:8a). {eoa}

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